

BATHING CULTURE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN SPACE CASE STUDY POMPEII

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Fig. 1: Excavation Team, March 2023; ©FUB

The sixth excavation campaign in the Stabian Baths took place from February 27 to March 24, 2023, 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 five excavation campaigns carried out in the Stabian Baths between 2016 and 2022 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 and 2022 campaigns 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 sixth excavation campaign in the Stabian Baths aimed to clarify the following remaining open questions: a) whether the land in prime urban location was used before the construction of the baths after 125 BC; b) whether there were any structures (vestibule, service installation) to the north of the large laconicum discovered in the palaestra in 2021; c) whether the plan and chronology of the house to the west of the baths, built around the mid-1st c BC and destroyed after the earthquake of AD 62, can be finalized.

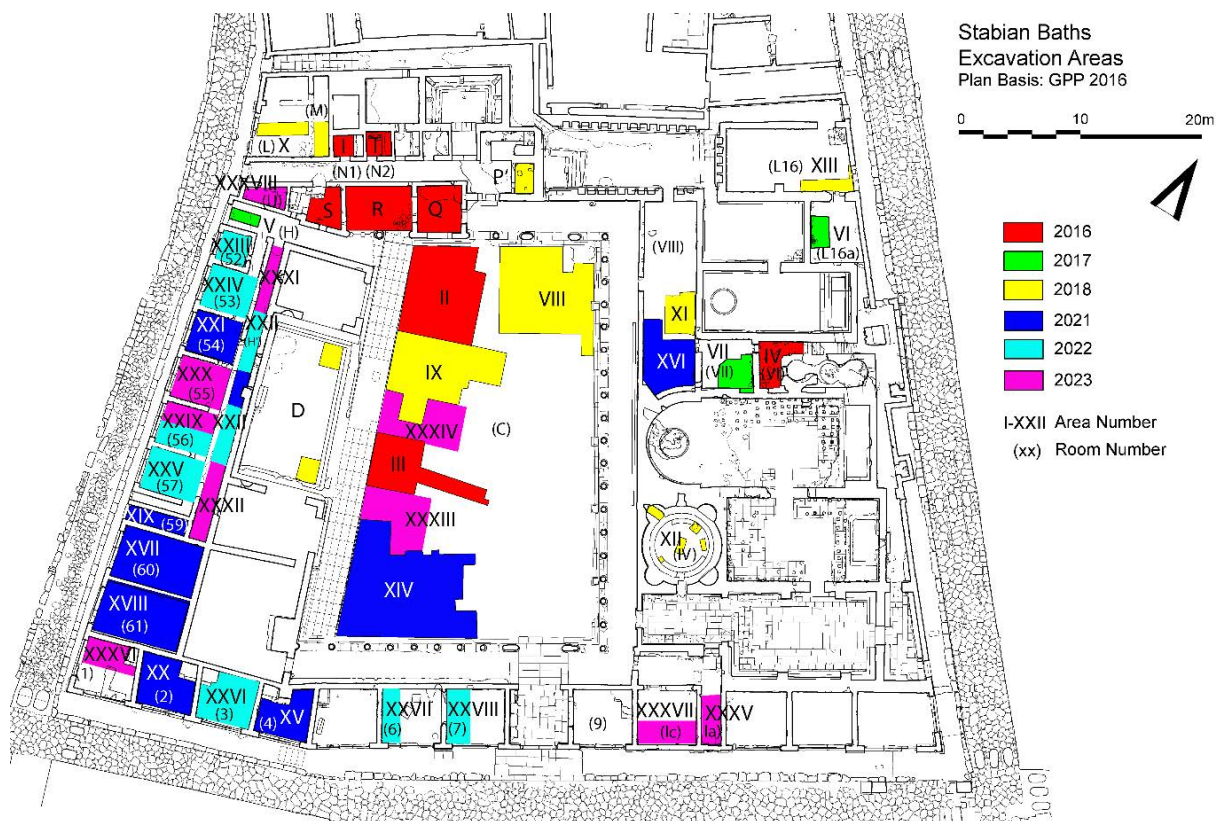


Fig. 2: Stabian Baths: Trenches 2016–2023; ©FUB

Excavations were carried out in 10 areas, both reopening areas investigated by earlier researchers and opening new areas (fig. 2): tabernae 1, Ic, 55, 56; corridors Ia, H' (2 trenches); palaestra (2 trenches); room U. These trenches provided answers to all questions mentioned above.

Earlier Structures – Areas XXIX, XXXIII–XXXV

Structures that precede the construction of the house and the baths were found in both buildings, including cisterns, wells, drainage channels, and walls. They cannot be securely dated but for typological reasons were built between the 4th and 2nd century BC. The fragmentary evidence does not allow determining the function and public or private character of the earlier buildings.

The most important wall is a north-south running wall made of large blocks of tuff and travertine and built directly on grey ash. This was revealed in trenches XXXIII and XXXIV in the palaestra, preserved to a height of 1m (figs. 3–4). It was reused when the baths were built as the west boundary of the palaestra.



Fig. 3: Palaestra, Trench XXXIV, wall made of tuff and travertine blocks; ©FUB



Fig. 4: Palaestra, Trench XXXIII, wall made of travertine and lava blocks; ©FUB

In taberna 1, a cistern with a caementitium vault was found under the cement floor of the house (figs. 5–6). In taberna 56, an east-west running wall made of travertine blocks was found under the well-preserved mosaic of the later house. While this could not be explored any further, it had the same orientation as the later house walls.



Fig. 5: Taberna 1, Trench XXXVI, cement floor of house; ©FUB



Fig. 6: Taberna 1, Trench XXXVI, caementitium vault of cistern under cement floor of house; ©FUB

Palaestra and Vestibule of the Baths – Areas XXXIII–XXXV

In the palaestra, a second laconicum with a diameter of 3.30m was found in a distance of 11m to the north of the large laconicum. While its walls had been largely destroyed the earth mortar foundation of the walls was well preserved and allowed reconstructing its plan and size (fig. 7). The entrance was most likely in the southeast, to a common space between the two laconica. A small round furnace with a long channel to the east was found in the center of the laconicum and several related pits were cut into its South and East walls (fig. 8). These features cannot have functioned together with the laconicum or the palaestra and must stem from temporary works during the first remodelling of the baths after 80 BC.

No evidence of vestibules or service installations was found between the laconica because the area was much disturbed by large pozzolana quarry pits, dug during the third large remodelling of the baths after AD 62 (fig. 9). The last palaestra floor, made of thin lime layers, was found intact in large parts of both trenches, running over all quarry pits and razed features in the palaestra (fig. 9). Originally, this must also have covered the razed partition wall between house and palaestra as well as the mosaic floors of the house, but all evidence of this had been removed by H. Sulze in the 1930s/40s.



Fig. 7: Palaestra, Trench XXXIV, small laconicum; ©FUB



Fig. 8: Palaestra, Trench XXXIV, small laconicum: furnace and pits; ©FUB

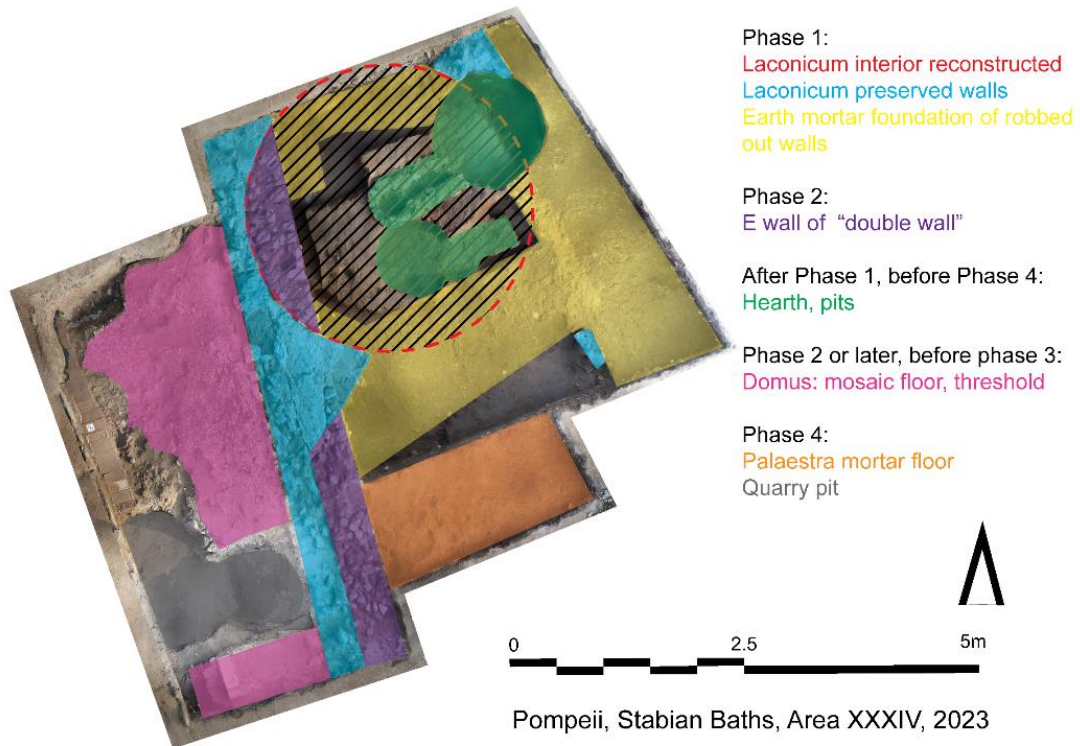


Fig. 9: Palaestra, Trench XXXIV, small laconicum: phases; ©FUB

The cleaning of vestibule Ic revealed a well-preserved cement floor. This had been cut in its southern part when an electricity cable was laid under A. Maiuri. When Maiuri's trench was emptied, two further cement floors were found 50cm below the uppermost floor. Both worked with a channel that had been made with the lowest floor and drained water from north (bathing rooms) to the Via dell'Abbondanza in the south. The lowest floor had the highest quality, the uppermost the lowest. The uppermost floor was made when the level was raised for 50cm in the Augustan period in the southern tabernae and the adjacent Via dell'Abbondanza, thus in phase 3 of the baths. The other two floors can be assigned to phases 1 and 2.



Fig. 10: Vestibule Ic, Trench XXXV: three cement floors on top of each other, the lower two with drainage channel along the W wall; ©FUB

Atrium-Peristyle-House – Areas XXIX–XXXII, XXXVI

From trenches dug between 2016 and 2023, the house can now be securely reconstructed as a symmetrically organized atrium-peristyle-house with a surface area of c. 900m² (fig. 11). In tabernae 55 and 56, the opus tessellatum floor of an oecus was excavated with a central emblema of 70x70cm (fig. 12). The latter included trompe l’oeil cubes made of white, black, and green tesserae, surrounded by a red band. A similar emblema was found in room 17 of the Casa di Marco Fabio Rufo and connected with a Second Style decoration.¹ This typological comparison confirms that the floors of the house can be dated to the mid-1st century BC. The mosaic threshold of the oecus with intricate black and white geometric patterns opened off to the South portico of the peristyle courtyard that was decorated with a mosaic made of irregularly cut red, green, white, and yellow tesserae.

Evidence of the peristyle was found in the northern trench of corridor H’: the earth foundation of the western stylobate and the preparation of the mosaic floor of the North portico (fig. 13). On top of these, remains of an impressive lead pipe were revealed that must have supplied the natatio (D) and northern nymphaeum (G) of the baths after AD 62, but was found cut off and thus did not work in AD 79 when Vesuvius erupted (fig. 14).

In the southern part of corridor H’ (Trench XXXII), the mosaic floor of the atrium was revealed that been found in previous years in tabernae 57, 58, 60, and 61 (fig. 14). H. Eschebach had reconstructed the atrium with four columns, with the northwestern column located right in the southern part of corridor H’. But no evidence of a column base was found on the fully preserved mosaic floor.²



Fig. 11: Reconstruction of Atrium-Peristyle-House; ©FUB

¹ M. Grimaldi, *La Casa di Marco Fabio Rufo* (Napoli 2014) 112 fig. 3; 114 fig. 9.

² H. Eschebach, *Die Entdeckung eines Hauses unter den Stabianer Thermen*, *Cronache Pompeiane* 1, 1975, 82–117 esp. 112 fig. 36; H. Eschebach, *Die Stabianer Thermen in Pompeji* (Berlin 1979) pl. 36a.



Fig. 12: Tabernae 55–56, Areas XXIX–XXX, mosaic floors of oecus and S portico; ©FUB



Fig. 13: Corridor H², Trench XXXI, evidence of peristyle and lead pipe of pool and nymphaea; ©FUB



Fig. 14: Corridor H', Trench XXXII, mosaic floor of atrium; ©FUB

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