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Review

F. YEGÜL, *BATHING IN THE ROMAN WORLD*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xiii + 256, illus. ISBN 9780521840323 (bound); 9780521549622 (paper). £64.00 (bound); £18.99 (paper).

In his preface Fikret Yegül describes his book as a general, yet generous, review of bathing in the Roman world. His finished product, however, exceeds all such stated parameters in terms of breadth of material, chronological span and sophistication of analysis. From the outset Y. launches into an energetic, informative, and clearly indulgent, social exploration of the habit of Roman bathing; a ritual which was, by nature, integrally harnessed to the architectural framework of the bathhouse.

The framework of the book follows a geographic, thematic and chronological progress, building to an informative appraisal of legacy and influence beyond Roman parameters. The book's twelve chapters can be grouped into three loose thematic categories: chs 1–4 constitute social reviews of the bathing practice; chs 5–7 address the development of the Roman bath in terms of architecture and technology; while chs 10–12 explore the legacy of the Roman bath and its survival beyond the cultural circumstances governing its conception.

In chs 1–4 bathing is presented as a daily ritual practised by all classes, thereby prompting an investigation into social behaviour in a range of facilities, from imperial and opulent to small urban institutions. In ch. 3 Y. dispenses with the traditionally strictly-ordered sequence of bathing in keeping with its loose adherence in antiquity. Instead, a more convivial atmosphere is conveyed through abundant reference to Martial, inscriptions in Asia Minor and graffiti at Herculaneum, while the negative aspects associated with this social engagement are highlighted by the famous complaints of Seneca and Horace and curse tablets targeting thieves. These voices resonate (alongside those of Martial and Pliny) in ch. 4 which constitutes an excursus into the historic condemnation of the bathing practice. These negative impressions are off-set through an acknowledgement of the moralizing attitudes, Christian zealotry and rhetorical purpose of some authors while further challenged by the archaeological remains. The concept of bathhouses as social levellers is given prominence at the end of ch. 4 where Y. offers a sensible approach to the inclusiveness of the baths, allowing for fluidity and pragmatism across a vast empire.

In ch. 5 Y. tackles the difficulty in tracing the development of the Roman bath system, in acknowledging both the Greek legacy inherent in its design and also proffering an interesting influence emanating from rural habitation design in the Italian countryside. The reference to the impressive establishment at Allianoi adds vibrancy to this well-trodden path, while Y.'s sensible assessment of the interpretation of labels such as *balneae* and *thermae* constitutes a refreshing exercise in common sense.

The exploration of the Roman hypocaust in ch. 6 is a *tour de force* which encompasses a range of regional types and a variety of buildings. Y.'s mention of the modern tradition of wearing clogs in Turkish baths serves as an effective parallel and sits comfortably alongside Pliny's observations, Vitruvius' studies and Orata's business empire. His explanation of the archaeologically elusive *testudines alveolorum* is also a welcome addition while his plans showing boiler cavities will prove helpful to many active in the field. He condenses the copious topic of water-supply systems into an almost unfeasibly concise three pages, which, while covering the bare essentials, leaves us hankering for more.

In ch. 7 Y. reviews the elaborate imperial establishments of Rome following their chronological appearance, while their inflationary scale, and blatant architectural trumping, is graphically conveyed through the etchings of Paulin and Piranesi. Y. shares his reflections on a trip to Vegas in order to recreate the potential canopy of sensual experiences within the Roman imperial bathhouse. This modern comparison is both clever and unpretentious in that it succinctly encapsulates the sensory assault and seduction that such architectural interiors might have imposed on the visitor.

In chs 8 and 9 Y. embarks on a series of regional studies in which he highlights architectural responses to localized stimuli prompting innovative engineering involving adaptations of, and variations on, architectural themes. The first study addresses the provincial baths of North Africa. The beauty of this regional survey lies in the choice of baths presented, and their contextualized appraisal within their broader urban infrastructure, thereby exposing modifications reliant on both site aspect and landscaping. The inclusion of the Hunting Baths at Lepcis promotes a holistic appreciation of Roman architecture, whereby its design embodies contrasting aesthetics in both its striking exterior lines which belie the transportative atmosphere of the interior. Unfortunately, however, there is a distinctive lack of attention to interior décor throughout the book and, curiously, the first reference to mosaics crops up rather late in the volume and, even then, the Megalopsychia Mosaic is not referred to by name, and its identity is only confirmed through reference to the Baths of Ardaburius next to the Olympic stadium in Antioch.

The introduction to Asia Minor as a cultural crucible in ch. 9 is an exercise in the art of efficacious brevity. The great geographical expanse embraces a range of complexes reflecting merging traditions and inherited legacies resulting in particular bathing establishments which are difficult to categorize coherently. Y., however, does not shy away from blueprints which defy classification; as attested in his appreciation of the Baths of Faustina at Miletus as an expression of architectural receptivity to difficult terrain. In chs 10–12 Y. addresses the legacy of the Roman bath and traces its survival in the Christian world. He attributes the noted decrease in construction of large-scale baths in the post-Justinian period to problems in maintaining the vast water-supply systems and identifies the more resilient *balnea* as the main vehicle of cultural transmission as attested by their resurrection in the East. In his studies of bathing in Post-Classical Europe (ch. 12), Y. explains that the rejection of the baths in the mid-sixteenth century was sparked by the belief that water was a harmful element and cleanliness only a matter of appearance. Their re-emergence is glimpsed through a keyhole into eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Paris and the rise of Orientalism, as romanticized on the imaginative canvases of Gérôme Ingres, Charmet and Alma-Tadema.

Y.'s book is wonderfully vibrant and wholly accessible. The edifices are all exquisitely presented through a gallery of choice illustrations while the later establishments are also vividly populated in vignettes from illuminated manuscripts. While the ancient sources are cited regularly and in full throughout (with occasional reference to epigraphy), modern scholarship generally features at a lower frequency to allow for a more digestible style. The few scholars cited, however, are notable and include stalwarts such as Ward-Perkins, Toynbee and Reynolds, while reference to Delaine's study of the Baths of Caracalla adds currency to the broader synthesis. In terms of editing, errors are few (appearing on pp. 182, 192, 203, 214, 231, 232, 242) while a helpful glossary is provided alongside a rather extensive 'selected' bibliography.

The book is informative on a range of levels, and while it will appeal to any student of Roman architecture, it also serves as a reference book and research tool for the advanced specialist. Y.'s wide-ranging synthesis and broad approach (aspects which can only be offered from an expert in this field) establishes his book as a valuable guide for the novice and expert alike.

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