



Summary :

The bath-gymnasium complex of the Theater in Ephesus is one of the city's five bath facilities. It is situated at the eastern end of the Arcadiane street and dates from the first half of the 2nd century AD.

Date

2nd century AD

Geographical Location

Ephesus

1. Baths – Gymnasia

The [baths – gymnasia](#) of Asia Minor are some of the most monumental examples (establishments) of this building type in the East and can be compared in size and opulence to the imperial baths in Rome. The architectural type of the bath-gymnasium developed in Asia Minor, is not a simple emulation of Roman originals but combines the architectural ground plan of Roman baths with the local architectural tradition of the Greek [gymnasium](#). Moreover, the dual character of this type of complexes is evident from both a functional and an architectural point of view. The architecture of Roman baths is combined with the simplicity and principles of the Greek gymnasium, while at the same time the use and function of the spaces are clearly defined. This is clearly evident in the example of the Gymnasium – Baths of the Theater in [Ephesus](#), which had separate entrances. It was therefore possible for the athletic facilities and the baths to be used independently.¹

2. Location and Architectural Description

The Theater Gymnasium (map no. 79) of Ephesus is situated next to the [theater](#) (map no. 75) at the eastern end of the [Arcadiane](#) (map no. 82), a central road which led from the harbour to the city center. It dates from the second half of the 2nd century AD.

The building is of the bath-gymnasium plan type which is characterized by an oblong U-shaped hall ([ambulacrum](#)), arranged on the three sides of the rectangular complex and it surrounded the heated halls. The enveloping of the heated parts of the building by the spacious U-shaped hall served their insulation. The [caldarium](#), the [tepidarium](#) and the [frigidarium](#) in the Theater Gymnasium were on a central axis, on either side of which were smaller subsidiary facilities and changing rooms.

The rectangular [palaestra](#) was in the southern section of the complex. The courtyard of the palaestra measured 70x30 m. and was surrounded by [porticos](#) along the three sides, paved with mosaic floors. Along the north side of the courtyard built benches formed steps; this was the seating area for spectators and possibly for the judges which adjudicated over the conduct of athletic events. The palaestra had two entrances situated on the same axis; one was in the northeastern corner and the other in the northwestern. These entrances opened out into two long anterooms (vestibula) with projecting piers creating square [niches](#) on the inner side of the walls. The anterooms secured direct access to the rectangular U-shaped hall, while at the same time they communicated via side openings with the heated parts of the caldarium.

The heated facilities included a total of five rectangular halls: a) the central caldarium, whose walls had semi-circular and rectangular openings, like in other gymnasia-baths in Asia Minor (e.g. the baths in [Miletus](#), the Eastern baths of [Pergamon](#) and the baths of [Priene](#)), b) four halls, situated in pairs on either side of the central heated area.

From the heated halls the bathers could access the tepidarium via two auxiliary rooms. The tepidarium included two square warm bathing facilities which functioned as a transitional area from the hot to the cold baths.



The frigidarium was a U- shaped central hall, which included a large unheated pool (natatio frigida) and two large rectangular side rooms.

The large U-shaped gallery (ambulacrum), which characterized the typology of the complex, was next. It functioned possibly as a changing room or a meeting hall. It extended over the entire width of the building and framed the bathing compartments. Projecting piers formed rectangular niches in the gallery's arms.²

The northernmost sector of the baths was composed by a series of five rectangular halls. Of special interest is the central hall with aedicular décor, which was possibly designed for the Imperial cult. Rectangular niches existed in the western and eastern walls, while a large semi-circular niche existed in the center of the north wall. The interior of the imperial hall must have had lavish architectural and sculptural decoration. The other areas of the northernmost section served auxiliary functions.

An interpretation of the arrangement of the auxiliary bathing compartments shows us that the bather moved from the heated area to the warm and finally to the cold, adjusting the body gradually to the changes in temperature.

Excavations on the Theater Gymnasium took place between 1929 and 1932 by the Austrian Archaeological Institute under the direction of J. Keil.³

1. Yegül, F., *Baths and bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1992), p. 307

2. Yegül, F., *Baths and bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1992), p. 416.

3. For the architectural design of the Theatre Gymnasium and the excavations in the area, see Keil, J., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *ÖJh* 25 (1929), p. 42-45; Keil, J., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *ÖJh* 26 (1930), p. 18-29; Keil, J., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *ÖJh* 27 (1932), p. 19-25; Keil, J., *Führer durch Ephesos* (Vienna 1964), p. 84-86; Boethius, A. – Ward Perkins, J.B., *Etruscan and Roman Architecture* (1970), p. 401; Ward Perkins, J.B., *Imperial Architecture* (London – New Haven 1989), p. 294; Yegül, F., *Baths and bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1992), p. 279-282; Scherrer, P. (ed.), *Ephesus, The New Guide* (2000), p. 162.

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Keil J., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *ÖJh*, 27, 1932, 1-43

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Ephesos, Plan

http://www.ephesos.at/geschichte/index_plan.html

False Fronts: Separating the Aedicular Facade from the Imperial Cult in Roman Asia Minor

http://www.ajaonline.org/pdfs/110.3/AJA1103_Burrell.pdf

Griechische Gymnasien und Romische Thermen

<http://homepage.univie.ac.at/elisabeth.trinkl/forum/forum0605/35steskal.htm>

Glossary :

ambulacrum (-a)

A long hall or gallery associated with Roman baths and bath-gymnasia in Asia Minor. Ambulacra could have served widely varying functions as indoor athletic halls, meeting and ceremonial halls, and galleries for promenading.

caldarium

Derivative of the Latin verb caleo (= warm up). It is the strongly heated room of Roman baths. Its hot plunge pool was used to take not only a hot bath but also a steam bath due to high levels of humidity. It was also called the "inner room".

frigidarium

A large cold pool to drop into after enjoying a hot Roman bath (from frigeo). Normally frigidarium has used after a visit to warm rooms (caldarium) or after a training in palaestra. As the largest room in the thermae and often functioned as a hall for social events or communication

niche

Semi-circular recess on the surface of the wall.

palaestra

A colonnaded enclosure for athletic exercise. The palaestra functioned both independently and as a part of the Greek gymnasium. It was formed as an open court surrounded by colonnades with adjoining rooms.

portico

A porch or a structure consisting of a roof supported by columns or pillars, leading to the entrance of a building.

tepidarium

The word is derived from the verb tepeo meaning 'to be tepid'. It is the room of tepid water in the Roman thermae. It was also called middle house or tepid house and was usually situated between the caldarium and the frigidarium. Its main function was the acclimatization of the bather to the change of temperature. Being at the Tepidarium the visitor could also apply ointments on his/her body before or after the hot bath, although, there was a special room for this function called unctorium.