



Summary :

The Varius baths in Ephesus are located in the center of the city. The rooms of the Baths were arranged asymmetrically, possibly due to the town - planning to which the bath complex had to be adjusted. The first building phase dates to the 2nd century AD, while the second to the 4th century AD , when it was renovated by Scholastica, a Christian woman.

Date

2nd-4th cent. AD

Geographical Location

Ephesus, Ionia

1. Location

The Varius baths (P. Quintilius Valens Varius) (map. no. 41) in [Ephesus](#) are located on the north side of the [Curetes Street](#) (map no. 36), behind the [temple of Hadrian](#) (map no. 40). The eastern end of the complex was defined by the so-called Bath Street (map no. 39), while to the west ran the covered (via tecta) Academy Street (map. no. 42). The Baths were oriented according to the hippodamian system. The main entrance of the establishment was located at the beginning of the Bath Street while access was also possible from the Curetes Street via a stairway to the east of the temple of [Hadrian](#) and an oblong corridor (V).¹

2. Architectural description

The Varius Baths present an irregular ground plan, as they had to adjust to the trapezoidal lot of the city block. This asymmetrical building establishment can not be classified into one of the main building types of the bath/gymnasia complexes. The Varius Baths did not have a **palaestra**, which was a common facility in these complexes, while the arrangement of the hot and cold washing rooms was as follows:

The corridor (1) led to the apsidal hall (2), whose ground plan resembles the **basilica** type. Five rectangular **niches** were carved on the eastern wall, while three niches were carved on the western. To the west this hall communicated via an arched opening supported by three columns on either side, with another oblong room, measuring 35 x 8.5 m. It has been assumed that the apsidal basilical hall with the room, served multiple purposes, as they functioned as an antechamber to the bath facilities and a meeting place, but also as an area for sports, i.e. a gymnasium and a changing room (apodyterium).²

An opening in the north side of the apsidal basilical hall (2) led to the **frigidarium** (3), rectangular in shape, containing an elliptical pool (natatio frigida). The frigidarium was located in a central position within the complex and communicated with all the other rooms of the baths: to the northeast with the warm room (5), to the northwest with the warm room (7), to the west with the **caldarium** (8), to the southwest with an intermediate hall (10) which led to the **sudatorium** and to the south with the apsidal basilical hall (2).

The warm room (5), rectangular in shape, had rectangular niches on its three sides: to the west, to the east and the north. In the north, a doorway led to a second warm room (6), square in shape, with a rectangular niche in its western



side, which to the southwest communicated with a third warm room (7), which had immediate access to the caldarium (8). The caldarium had three semicircular pools on its western side: the central pool which was larger and the two side ones were smaller, while a fourth pool, rectangular in shape lay on the north side. In the southeastern side of the caldarium a narrow passageway led to an intermediate hall (10) which on the west gave access to the sudatorium, a rectangular sweating room. The heating system was operated from the praefurnium, from where the hot air was channeled under the floors of the heated halls.³

3. General remarks and chronology

Daily visits to the baths were a typical custom for the citizens of the eastern provinces during the Roman era. The lack of bathing facilities in private houses gave to the bathing establishments a public character, while they also functioned as meeting places. This is testified by the arrangement of the rooms: next to the hot and cold washing rooms (caldarium and frigidarium respectively) there was the basilical hall, a space designed as a meeting place. With the pax romana secured by the emperor [Augustus](#) (312 BC-14 AD), the Roman lifestyle was extended throughout the Empire. Thus, the erection of [bath/gymnasias](#) observed in Asia Minor mainly during the 1st and 2nd centuries AD.⁴

The bath complex dates from the first half of the 2nd century AD and was identified by inscriptions as the Varius Baths.⁵ It was renovated, however, approximately at the end of the 4th century AD by a rich Christian woman, Scholastica, as it had serious damages due to earthquakes. The statue of Scholastica was set up in one of the niches of the apsidal basilical hall during the Late Roman period, where it was discovered together with its inscribed base.⁶ Moreover, the apsidal basilical hall (A/B) gradually ceased being used as an exercise space and functioned exclusively as a meeting place.⁷

The donation of the Christian Scholastica indicates that Christianity was not always negative towards the institution and function of baths. It seems that this was contradictory because on the one hand the church could not reconcile itself with the pagan origin of the baths, but on the other it advocated the therapeutic virtues of water and encouraged sponsorship for the establishment of public hygiene facilities for citizens.

4. History of research and preservation

Excavational research took place in the area of the complex between 1954-1958 by the Austrian Archaeological Institute and the archaeologist F. Miltner.⁸ Today, some restoration works have taken place, offering a fragmented view of the complex mainly regarding the division of the various rooms.

1. Scherrer, P., *Ephesus. The New Guide* (2000), p. 120; Wiplinger, G. – Wlach, G., *Ephesus. 100 Years of Austrian Research* (Vienna 1996), p. 62.

2. Yegul, F., *Baths and bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1992), p. 291; Wiplinger, G. – Wlach, G., *Ephesos. 100 Jahre Österreichische Forschungen* (Wien 1995), p. 61-62. Scherrer, P., *Ephesus. The New Guide* (2000), p. 120.

3. The presentation of the functional character of the rooms of the Varius Baths follows Yegul, F., *Baths and bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1992), fig. 371, p. 290. A different interpretation of the baths' facilities is presented in the publications of the excavations, see Miltner, F., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *OJh* XLIII (1956-1958), p. 17-25; Miltner, F., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *OJh* XLIV (1959), p. 251-255, mainly Miltner, F., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *OJh* 1960, p. 2-9, where room I is noted as room VII and is thought to have been one of the heated halls of the facility. Also the square hall 2, noted as room VI, was identified as a sudatorium.



4. Nielsen, I., *Thermae et Balnea* (Aarhus 1990), p. 98.

5. The Varius Bath are mentioned on two inscriptions found in Ephesus. Researchers' assumption that the Baths of Scholastica were initially called Varius Bath was confirmed by inscriptions. On fragments of the building's architrave was inscribed the name of Varius (P. Quintilius Valens, Varius). Another inscription in honour of Quintilia Varilla, priestess of Artemis and Varius' daughter was also found in the area of the baths. See Knibbe, D. – Merkelbach, R., «Ephesische Bauinschriften 3. Das Variusbad», *ZPE* 31 (1978), p. 99; Börker, C. – Merkelbach, R. (ed.), *Die Inschriften von Ephesos 2* (Nr. 101-599) (Bonn 1979), no. 455, p. 171.

6. Specifically, the statue of Scholastica was found in front of the southern niche of the eastern wall. It is a statue of a seated female figure on a base, which bears the following inscription: τύπον γυναικός εὐ σεβούς λίαν / σοφῆς Σχολαστικίας μοι τοῦ το(ν) / ὧ ξένε, βλέπεις ἦ καί κλιθέν / τος ἐ νθαδί τινος μέρους χρυ/σοῦ παρέσχε πλῆθος ἐς καινουργίαν. The fact that she was a Christian occurs from her name as well as from the presence of a cross at the beginning of the inscription. See Miltner, F., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *OJh* XLII (1955), p. 22-23; Börker, C. – Merkelbach, R., *Die Inschriften von Ephesos 2* (Nr. 101-599) (Bonn 1979), no. 453, p. 169.

7. Mango, C., "Daily Life in Byzantium", *JÖB* 31/1 (1981), p. 337-341.

8. On the results of the excavations of the Scholastica Baths see Miltner, F., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *OJh* XLIII (1956-1958), p. 17-25; Miltner, F., "Vorläufiger Bericht über die Ausgrabungen in Ephesos", *OJh* XLIV (1959), p. 251-255.

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Glossary :

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| | basilica |
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In ancient Roman architecture a large oblong type building used as hall of justice and public meeting place. The roman basilica served as a model for early Christian churches.

 [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.

 [sudatorium](#)

It is the architectural term, deriving from the latin verb "suda" (=sweat), for the sweating room of the roman baths. It is usually a vaulted room of rectangular form between the caldarium and the tepidarium. In the Early Roman times (1st- 2nd c. B.C.) sudatoria used to be of circular form.