



Summary :

The Baths and the Gymnasium of Caracalla in Ankara belong to the category of the baths-gymnasiums of Asia Minor that combine the imperial type baths and the Greek gymnasium. It is one of the biggest building complexes of this architectural type of Asia Minor. They are dated to the reign of emperor Caracalla (211-217 A.D.).

Date

211-217 A.D.

Geographical Location

Ankara, Galatia

1. Introduction

The Thermae (baths) and the Palaestra of Caracalla in Ankara combine the Roman type of baths with the Greek gymnasium and belong to a new architectural type which developed in Asia Minor. The baths of Asia Minor remind the complex imperial baths of the west, united, though, with the simple linear plan of the Greek gymnasium of the 3rd or 2nd century B.C. It is noteworthy that most of the great cities of Asia Minor, during Roman times, as well as Ankara, had at least one great bath-gymnasium complex whereas smaller baths without a gymnasium would operate in the same time. In Ankara's complex the archeological investigation has not yet been completed, but its rectangular plan seems to be extending in a space of 140x180 m., rendering it one of the biggest edifices of this type in Asia Minor.

2. Architectural description

The present complex comprises of the gymnasium in the south and the baths in the north side of the monument. In the plan of Caracalla's Baths four rows of compartments are drawn, out of which the two outer ones comprise cold and warm rooms placed symmetrically, whereas the two inner rows comprise small and big rooms. The gymnasium, square in plan, is characterized by a huge courtyard of 95x95 m., surrounded by colonnades with 33 columns on each side. In the west, east and south sides separate halls are placed, which obviously served the needs of the athletes who visited the gymnasium. Amongst them the southernmost hall of the east side (M) stands out, which must have been dedicated to the cult of the emperors and had a luxurious architectural and sculptural decoration. The presence of a basilica and an imperial cult room in the complex is a basic characteristic of this specific type of gymnasium-bath of Asia Minor.

From the north side of the gymnasium one could enter the cold house (frigidarium) and the basilica of the baths. This basilica operated as a place for meetings and public gatherings. It is an elongated room which secured the communication between the frigidarium to the west and the vestries to the north, with protruding pillars on its sides. The frigidarium had a pool in its middle, with square and semicircular niches alternating on the walls of the room.¹

From the north side of the basilica two doors lead to the vestry. It is an elongated room, with two semicircular niches on east and west. Between these niches there was another square niche on the east side and a door leading to a square room of unknown use to the west. Two more openings of the vestry were on the north side and communicated with two of the three small rectangular rooms that were probably the baths' auxiliary spaces.



From these rooms one would enter the halls of the warm house (**caldarium**), which comprised of four rooms: two apsidal and two rectangular ones. The plan of the caldarium of the baths of Caracalla with its simple rectangular and apsidal rooms and the undecorated inner walls can be seen usually in small or medium sized baths, and rarely in imperial type baths.²

In the next compartment, accessible through another hall, not yet excavated, the sweating bath could be found (**sudatorium**). It is comprised by two rectangular rooms, connected to each other, which would open to the tepid house (**tepidarium**), a rectangular room with a pool.

3. Masonry and dating

The masonry of the building consists of rubble mixed with concrete and small square stones alternating with bricks. Bricks must have been also used in the construction of the drainage system and the stairs, whereas roofs were probably wooden.³ The construction of this monumental -mainly concerning its dimensions- complex, the baths and the gymnasium of Ankara, is dated during the reign of emperor Caracalla (211-217 A.D.).

4. The course of the bather

In these gymnasium-bath complexes the main entrance was most probably on the west side, where through an anteroom the bather would enter the gymnasium and, moving on, from its north side, would be directed to the baths. Usually the bather passed gradually from the tepid to the warm and finally to the cold rooms.⁴ In Ankara's baths, however, this course was not followed, since the former passed from the basilica to the vestry and from there he would continue towards the caldarium, the tepidarium and finally the frigidarium.

5. Bath-gymnasium architecture in Asia Minor

In the basilica and the frigidarium of the Baths of Ankara some architectural patterns, common in the baths of Asia Minor, can be observed. Thus, for example, the protruding pillars decorating the basilica are a characteristic seen in other bath complexes in Asia Minor, such as in [Miletus](#), [Pergamon](#), [Ephesus](#), [Magnesia](#) and [Termessus](#). Furthermore, the architectural type of the frigidarium with a central pool can also be seen in the baths of Ephesus and of [Sardis](#), where similar semicircular and square niches are opened on the inner walls.⁵

1. Gros, P., *L'architecture romaine. I Les monuments publics* (Paris 1996), p. 414.

2. Yegül, F., *Baths and bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1992), p. 419.

3. Ward-Perkins, J.B., *Roman Imperial Architecture* (London 1989), p. 280.

4. Yegül, F., *The Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis, Archaeological exploration of Sardis, Report III* (Cambridge Mass. 1986), p. 8-9.

5. Yegül, F., *Baths and bathing in Classical Antiquity* (New York 1992), p. 414-417.



Bibliography :

	Nielsen I. , <i>Thermae et Balnea. The Architecture and Cultural History of Roman Public Baths</i> , Aarhus 1990
	Gros P. , <i>L'Architecture Romaine du début du IIIe siècle av.J.-C. a la fin du Haut-Empire 1. Les Monuments Publics</i> , Paris 1996
	Ward-Perkins J.B. , <i>Roman Imperial Architecture.</i> , London – New Haven 1981

Glossary :

	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	
	gymnasium
The gymnasium was one of the most important centres of public life in Greek cities. The institution of the gymnasium, directly connected with the development of the Greek city, aimed to create virtuous citizens and gallant warriors. As educational institutions of public character, the gymnasia were intended for the physical and theoretical education of the young and consisted of separate spaces for special purposes.	
	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.	
	pillar
Pier of square or rectangular cross-section.	
	sudatorium
It is the architectural term, deriving from the latin verb "sudo" (=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 (1 st - 2 nd c. B.C.) sudatoria used to be of circular form.	
	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.	