



Summary :

The complex of the Great Baths of Aspendus is situated outside the town's walls. It is quite small and does not include an exercise court (palaestra). It comprises of five rooms, parallel or vertical to each other. The visitors can wander through the rooms, moving in a continuous circular direction within the building. The peculiarity of the rooms lies in the existence of a basilica, a room of social character. The baths have not been excavated.

Date

2nd - 3rd centuries AD

Geographical Location

Pamphylia, Aspendus

1. Location

The Great Baths are located outside the Acropolis of [Aspendus](#), in an area covered with public buildings of unknown use, from which only the Small Baths in the northwest and the [theatre](#) in the north of the Great Baths are traceable. Both complexes were built along the road that led to the southern gate of the acropolis. The Great Baths have never been excavated.

2. Architectural description

The [baths](#) complex is relatively small and does not include a [palaestra](#).¹ It comprises of five rooms, arranged in such a way as to create the shape of a rectangular and solid building. The first two rooms that one encounters right at the entrance (F, B) are adjacent to the other three on their shorter sides. The two out of the other three rooms (S, T) are vertical to room B, while the third one, room C, is parallel to room F.

The main entrance was most likely found in the northern side of the building and led to the rectangular, oblong room of the [frigidarium](#) F (cold bathing room), which had three rectangular niches in its north side and five in its south. The western part of the room was occupied by a *piscis* (pool) with a rectangular [niche](#) on its north and south wall respectively. The eastern side of the room provided free access to room B, namely the *basilica thermarum*. The basilica was also an oblong room with an opening in its southern wall, which led to the vertical room of the [tepidarium](#) (medium-heated bathing room). Its floor embodied the earthen pillars (pilae) of the [hypocaust](#) and its eastern wall had two rectangular niches. The southern side included a hot-water bath (alveus)² with three rectangular niches in its eastern side, which was separated with a railing from the rest of the tepidarium. In the western wall two openings led to the [sudatorium](#) S (sweat-bath; humid room). The sudatorium also included an hypocaust and communicated with the next room, the [caldarium](#) C (hot bathing room), with two openings. This room, also with an hypocaust, included three baths of warm water (alvei), out of which the two smaller ones were located in its northern and southern sides, while the bigger one extended in its entire western side, forming three consecutive rectangular niches. In its northern side, apart from the one font, there was an inter-space of small dimensions, which separated it from the frigidarium. This space is only met in bigger-size baths or thermae.³ On the western wall of this intermediary room there was an opening that led to an antechamber, which included the exit door to the west.

3. Materials and methods of construction

As far as construction materials are concerned, the foundations and the walls are made of local carved conglomerates on their outer side, and of dispersed material (unprocessed rocks and mud) that fills the wall-interstice, so that the stonework is thick enough but without excessive use of material at the same time. The arches and the semi-circular vaults (arcades) that cover the rooms present a final coating of bricks.⁴

The construction techniques that were used were widely popular and representative of their time, during which the building was



erected. Nowadays, only certain parts of the stonework between the rooms survive, and some clay water pipes, which stretched in-between the double layers of the walls and served in the supply of warm and cold water in the bathing rooms.

4. Interpretation



Nielsen,⁵ who studies Roman baths, believes that a group of baths of western Anatolia and western Pamphylia, to which the complex of the Great Baths of Aspendus belongs, present local peculiarities and similarities among them; large rooms, similar arrangement of the different rooms, large caldaria with rectangular niches, an oblong frigidarium with a pool, as well as thermae basilicae.

At the same time, Nielsen also observed their differences. The baths are usually small and do not include a [gymnasium](#), but they also fall into the same category as certain great baths –with or without a palaestra. This group of baths includes the Great Baths of Aspendus.

Yegül,⁶ another scholar, mentions the above baths as an example where an asymmetrical ground plan applies. The Great Baths of this type involve arrayed rectangular rooms, parallel or vertical to each other, which form a solid entity. The basic way to get about them is the ‘ring’, meaning that the bather follows a specific continuous route from the *apodyterium* (changing room) to the basilica or the frigidarium, and then the tepidarium, in order to end up in the caldarium, which is located next to the first room that he encounters upon entering into the building. Thus, a circular route is followed. As far as the use of different rooms is concerned, the thermae basilica, a spacious, oblong room, mainly functioned as a social room in the building of the thermae, just like a public [basilica](#) in the Roman agora. If the basilica was spacious enough, it could also be used as an internal exercise court and, more rarely, as an apodyterium.

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1. Nielsen, I., *Thermae et Balnea. The architecture and cultural history of Roman public baths* (Aarhus 1993), p. 111. The average size of the baths that did not include a palaestra is approximately 1 200 m².
 2. For the word's use see Δημητράκος, Δ., *Μέγα Λεξικόν της Ελληνικής Γλώσσας* 5 (Athens 1951), p. 4013.
 3. The particular space was named *heat lock* or *heat trap* in English and there is no equivalent terminology neither in Latin nor in Greek. The term *heat trap* was indicative of the military baths. It was usually a small room with a rectangular shape and it was placed between the frigidarium and the caldarium. It was normally heated through hypocausta. Later on, it was directly heated and served as a sudatorium, a tepidarium or a heated apodyterium.
 4. Ozgur, M.E., *Aspendos. A travel guide* (Istanbul 1988-1990), pp. 46-47.
 5. Nielsen, I., *Thermae et Balnea. The architecture and cultural history of Roman public baths* (Aarhus 1993), p. 109.
 6. Yegül, F., *Baths and bathing in classical antiquity* (New York 1992), p. 291.

Bibliography :

	Nielsen I., <i>Thermae et Balnea. The Architecture and Cultural History of Roman Public Baths</i> , Aarhus 1990
	Özgür M.E., <i>Aspendos. A Travel Guide</i> , Antalya 1988



Lanckoroński N.P., *Les Villes de la Pamphylie et de la Pisidie I*, Paris 1890

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Glossary :

basilica

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

hypocaust, the

the main system for the heating of ancient baths. The word means literally a "furnace that burns underneath". With this system the room's floor was supported by small poles and the space underneath the floor was heated by the circulation of hot air, while the heat was transferred through the walls by conductors.

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 "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 (1st- 2nd 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.