Introduction

For the Romans, bathing was a social event. The abundant physical remains of public baths stand in eloquent testimony to this fact and are found in almost every type of Roman settlement, from cities, towns, and hamlets to religious sanctuaries and frontier forts. Even Roman baths dubbed "private" by modern scholars—those located in domestic settings—were hardly so by the standards of today. Except for the very earliest examples, such baths were habitually designed to accommodate more than one bather, and written testimony makes it clear that they were used for such social purposes as welcoming visitors or extending dinner parties. We are clearly in the presence of a deeply rooted communal bathing habit, where the act of getting clean has become a social process, to be shared not only with invited guests (in private baths) but with everyone (in public ones).[1]

To most modern Western sensibilities, communal bathing is an alien concept. Public bathhouses are today generally associated with licentiousness and sexual promiscuity. Due in part to the thorough dissemination of efficient hydraulic and heating systems and also to a long-standing Christian heritage of abhorrence of bodily functions and public nudity, most Westerners bathe privately in their own homes. The same is not true the world over, however, and perhaps it will be useful to preface our examination of the now defunct Roman bathing culture by briefly surveying communal bathing habits that survive to this day, albeit often under siege from Western-influenced, private alternatives.

In western Europe, only the Finns still practice a truly public bathing habit. Their saunas are found all over the country, in private homes, attached

1. Some houses have two sets of "private" baths, one large and one small (an example is the Casa del Criptoportico at Pompeii [located at 1.6.2/4]). The best explanation for this arrangement is that the grander suite was for the use of the host and guests, while the smaller one was for everyday purposes. Roman private baths are in need of greater study. For preliminary work on the subject, see N. de Haan, "Privatbäder in Pompeji und Herkulaneum und die städtische Wasserleitung," *Mitteilungen des Leichtweiss-instituts für Wasserbau der Technischen Universität Braunschweig* 117 (1992): 423–45; id., "Dekoration und Funktion in den Privatbädern von Pompeji und Herculaneum," in E. M. Moormann, ed., *Functional and Spatial Analysis of Wall Painting*, (Leiden, 1993), 34–37; id., "Roman Private Baths," *Balnearia* 2, no. 2 (1994): 8–9. See also Pasquinucci, 77–78 (by M. Cerri).

to commercial premises, or as community services. As recently as 1970, 85 percent of the country's households were without a fixed bath or shower facility, despite piped water in 47 percent of households.[2] Nonetheless, most saunas today are of the domestic kind, and public facilities are in rapid decline as more and more people are able to afford their own installations. (It is important to note that public saunas are being replaced by private ones, not by showers or bathtubs.) In earlier times, when Finns built a homestead, the sauna was often the first structure erected; in fact, some families lived in the sauna rather than construct a separate dwelling.[3] The sauna ritual is complex and involves perspiration, sponging, and mild whisking with birch leaves dipped in hot water. Often beer, soft drinks, and snacks are consumed during breaks between bouts in the sauna chamber. Throughout, the company of other bathers is a vital component of the whole experience, even if the sauna is in a domestic setting. Finns prefer to take their saunas in the company of family members and friends rather than alone. Business conferences and even government cabinet meetings can convene there.[4] Finally, it is widely believed that the sauna has healing qualities. At one time, births used to take place in the sauna, and the ill would be treated there. In fact, research into the curative value of the sauna is still ongoing.[5]

Among the Japanese, bathing is so central an activity that it features in the opening scenes of their creation legend. Urban public baths were introduced to Japan only in the Edo period (1603–1868), but antecedents are known to have operated in association with Buddhist temples. More recently, under Western influence, public baths have declined sharply in popularity, and the spread of piped water and heating systems has enabled many people to enjoy a bath at home.[6] Nevertheless, the bathing customs of the temple, public,

2. See C.M. Sutyla, *The Finnish Sauna in Manitoba* (Ottawa, 1977), 25.

3. See C. Bremer and A. Raevuori, *The World of the Sauna* (Helsinki, 1986), 153–61 (public saunas), 9 (homestead).

4. Various groups—be they families, coworkers, schoolchildren, or friends—habitually take saunas together: see, e.g., Bremer and Raevuori, *World of the Sauna,* 23–33, 85–93 (families); 15–21, 115–29 (coworkers); 35–45 (schoolchildren); 73–83 (musicians in an orchestra); 131–37, 173–84 (friends). See also Sutyla, *Finnish Sauna,* 40 (cabinet meetings). Most companies and banks have "representation saunas" in which important negotiations with representatives from other companies take place. In fact, businesses compete with each other to boast the best-appointed "representation sauna"; see A. Paasilinna and T. Ovaska, *A Businessman's Guide to the Finnish Sauna* (Helsinki, 1984).

5. See Bremer and Raevuori, *World of the Sauna,* 12. The Finnish Sauna Society sponsors research into the medical aspects of sauna culture.

6. See P. Grilli and D. Levy, *Furo: The Japanese Bath* (Tokyo, 1985), esp. 22–26, 44–57 (religious associations); 73–83, 87–107 (public baths); 87–90, 165–66 (modern decline). The medieval Japanese association of baths with monasteries and charity is analogous to the situation in Europe in the early Middle Ages; see Yegül, 319.

and domestic bath have remained largely unchanged over the centuries and bear resemblance, in some respects, to documented ancient Roman practice. Like the Romans, the Japanese bathe communally in hot water; nudity is an accepted facet of the public bathing process; and the bath, despite its deep religious roots and associations, has evolved into a sensual, rather than a spiritual, experience. In their heyday, the public baths of Kyoto, Edo, and Osaka were social centers, where lovers met, philosophers debated, and commoners gossiped. In fact, some modern commentators are of the opinion that the decline of the *sento,* the neighborhood public bath, has led to a concomitant decline in community spirit, so that despite baths at home, some Japanese still take an occasional trip to the local public bathhouse. The Japanese, like the Finns, are also convinced that bathing, especially in hot springs, is medically beneficial in both a preventive and a remedial capacity.[7]

The Islamic bath *(hammam)* offers the closest parallels to ancient Roman practice. Unlike the Finnish sauna or the Japanese *sento,* it is a direct descendant of the once ubiquitous Roman *balneum.*[8] The public baths of modern countries like Tunisia or Turkey are also in decline as Western bathing habits spread through the urban areas, but there are still sixty-seven registered public baths in Istanbul, and it is unlikely that they will disappear altogether. In Tunisia, *hammams* are still a thriving enterprise and are found all over the country. While medieval Westerners were espousing the principle of "going unwashed" *(alousia)* to prove the dominance of the soul over corporeal weakness, Islamic civilization was adhering to the public bathing habits of the ancients and preserving them for the modern age.[9] The similarities between Roman baths and the *hammam* are marked. Both feature a series of rooms through which one progresses, and specific procedures are restricted to the appropriate rooms. Both processes involve sweating, washing, and massage, all undertaken in a specified order. (Breach of this order at the *hammam* garners reprimands from other bathers, as I discovered from expe-

7. See Grilli and Levy, *Furo,* 90 (public bath and the community); 55–56, 132–41 (medicinal value).

8. For the links between ancient Roman and modern Islamic baths, see Pasquinucci, 110–11 (by P. Spinesi); Yegül, 339–49. The handbook for a Turkish bath in Montreal is entitled *The Modern Turkish or Roman Bath, St. Monique Street* (Ottawa, 1984). The public baths of the Arab world, of course, partly owe their continued existence to the purificatory requirements of Islam. However, the intensity of religious feeling varies from place to place, so that in a place like Tunisia the religious aspect of the process is less pronounced than in it would be in Iran, for instance.

9. On *alousia,* see Yegül, 318. On Islamic baths, see M. Ecochard and C. Le Coeur, *Les bains de Damas: Monographies architecturales,* 2 vols. (Beirut, 1942–43); H. Grotzfeld, *Das Bad im arabischen-islamischen Mittelalter: Eine kulturgeschichtliche Studie* (Wiesbaden, 1970).

rience.) In addition, both feature bath attendants available for hire, as well as separate facilities, sections, and/or bathing hours for men and women. The main differences are the replacement of communal immersion in the Roman bath with individual washing in buckets or at basins in the *hammam;* the nonacceptance of open nudity at the latter, in which individual cubicles are provided for those desiring a complete wash; and the substitution of a rub-down with an abrasive mitten in place of the Roman practice of anointing and strigiling. Also, for the most part, the ancient medium-hot room *(tepidarium)* has been abandoned, although I was told that some facilities still employ it.

Despite these procedural similarities and differences, a trip to the *hammam* is very similar to the Roman experience in its social nature. On one visit I made, for instance, a new entrant to the hottest room was expected to shake hands with everyone else present. The *hammam* is one of the chief places where friends meet and relax, chat, laugh, and spend time together. For women especially, it is the only public space where they can congregate and socialize together away from men. A visit to the *hammam* is not quite a leap back in time to ancient Rome, but it is a step in the right direction.

Some general observations can be made that appear to apply equally to Finnish, Japanese, and Islamic bathing customs. First, it seems that bathing in public can be more than just a bodily necessity—it can be a cultural choice. Second, the corporeal pleasures of bathing, when shared, tend to promote a sociability that in turn transforms essentially pragmatic public baths into meeting places and venues for social interaction. Third, the bathing ritual is often felt to be medically beneficial, not just for generating a sense of well-being, but also for curing illnesses. Finally, regular bathing is often associated with civilized living and spiritual purity. Too much reliance should not, however, be placed on raw comparisons between existing public bathing cultures and that of ancient Rome: we cannot expect to find accurate answers to Roman questions in the Japanese *sento,* the Finnish sauna, or even the Islamic *hammam.*[10] In the pages that follow, the references to surviving or better-documented bathing habits should be seen not as hard evidence for Roman conditions but as suggestive possibilities for ill-illumined aspects of Roman practice. A good example is provided by the question of spiritual purity and bathing, a feature shared by all of the modern bathing cultures just outlined. There is little evidence that the Romans, at least in pagan times, associated their local bathhouses with spiritual purification, even if they did appreciate the relaxing effects of taking a hot bath (see,

10. See M. Golden, "The Uses of Cross-Cultural Comparison in Ancient Social History," *EchCl* 11 (1992): 309–31.

e.g., Ter. *Phorm.* 339–40; Suet. *Vesp.* 21). Certainly, baths that stood in sanctuaries served as places for ritual cleansing, as well as offering more mundane services, and baths of all kinds carried divine associations with deities, such as Venus (for pleasure) and Asclepius (for health). But these associations do not appear to have had a specifically spiritual or cultic character, and they reflect more the physical pleasures and benefits of bathing rather than a religious or metaphysical desire for purity.[11] Definitive conclusions drawn from bald comparisons between certain aspects of modern public bathing cultures and their ancient counterparts should therefore be avoided.

Setting the Parameters of the Study

It would be impossible in the space provided by a study such as this one to review every aspect of Roman public bathing culture in all areas of the empire at all periods. Nevertheless, the organization of this work is largely thematic, asking several broad sociohistorical questions pertaining to the baths' operation: What was a trip to the baths like? When and why did they become popular? Who built and maintained them? Who used them? What sort of social function(s) did they serve? Given the mass of material that could be brought to bear on these questions, a sharper focus is essential. First, the ambiguity surrounding the term *public* requires clarification.[12] In the present context, there are two—by no means mutually exclusive—connotations for this word: "publicly owned" and "publicly accessible." Throughout this book, the latter connotation is preferred, so that the phrase *public bath* denotes those establishments that were open to the public, whether publicly or privately owned. Given this preference, rather arbitrary limits need to be placed on the sorts of facilities to be considered, if we are to avoid being swamped by the primary evidence or risking major distortions. Therefore, the main focus of what follows is first and foremost on those public baths that served the urban communities of the empire. As a result, several types of bathing establishment that undoubtedly served a communal function are excluded from the main thrust of the inquiry. Baths in a domes-

11. This is the position of Patriarch Gamaliel II, who, when accused of idolatry for visiting baths adorned with a statue of Aphrodite, replied that the statue was for decoration, not worship; see *m. Abod. Zar.* 3:4. In contrast, Jews are permitted in the Mishnah to help gentiles build bathhouses but must desist when construction reaches "the vaulting on which they set up an idol"; see *m. Abod. Zar.* 1:7.

12. On the difficulty of determining public from private in the Roman context, see A.M. Riggsby, "'Public' and 'Private' in Roman Culture: The Case of the *Cubiculum*," *JRA* 10 (1997): 36–56. (Riggsby refers amply to important prior work on the subject.)

tic setting, despite their social character, are a good example. More openly accessible baths at locations that suggest peculiarities of function or of clientele are similarly best left to one side. Two examples are military baths and those in religious sanctuaries.[13] Both types are usually typologically indistinguishable from "normal" public baths and appear not to have excluded the general public entirely—as the discovery of children's teeth and women's accoutrements at the fortress bathhouse at Caerleon proves conclusively, at least for that facility.[14] But presumably both catered chiefly to the needs of rather restricted categories of bathers, soldiers in one case and pilgrims in the other. To be sure, the operation of military and sanctuary baths raises interesting questions: Did officers and men bathe together (see HA *Pesc. Nig.* 3.10)? What proportion of military baths were open to the public? If civilians were permitted, were all comers or only members of soldiers' families welcome? Did soldiers and civilians bathe simultaneously? Did sanctuary baths serve a primarily religious or secular purpose? Regrettably, such questions cannot be meaningfully addressed here without diverting the inquiry considerably. Another type of facility it seems advisable to pass over is the Greek gymnasium of Roman date or the hybrid bath-gymnasium found so plentifully in the Greek East.[15] Gymnasia played a particular role in the Greek tradition, and it remains unclear to what extent that role continued into Roman times; in any case, their social function appears to have been quite different from that of the urban public baths that interest us, even if there were significant overlaps.[16] However, should any of these excluded catego-

13. *Mansio* baths, facilities attached to imperial road-stations, are a related type. They seem to have been open to the local population, while also serving traveling imperial officials; see the examples at Chelmsford in Britain (N. Wickenden, *Caesaromagus: A History and Description of Roman Chelmsford* [Chelmsford, 1991], 10–13), Valesio in Italy (J. Boersma, "Le terme tardoromane di Valesio (Salento)," in *Thermes,* 161–73; id., Mutatio Valentia: *The Late Roman Baths at Valesio, Salento* [Amsterdam, 1995]), and Ad Quintum in Macedonia (Nielsen, 2.43 [C.352]). Many such *mansiones* may have formed the core of the small towns of Roman Britain, with the baths perhaps serving as a stimulus for the rise of a community spirit; see B.C. Burnham and J. Wacher, *The "Small Towns" of Roman Britain* (Berkeley, 1990), 4–5, 12–14.

14. See J.D. Zienkiewicz, *The Legionary Fortress Baths at Caerleon,* vol. 2, *The Finds* (Cardiff, 1986), 223 (teeth), 146–55 (R.J. Brewer on beads from necklaces), 196–202 (S.J. Greep on pins and needles).

15. On these structures, see A. Farrington, "Imperial Bath Buildings in South-West Asia Minor," in S. Macready and F.H. Thompson, eds., *Roman Architecture in the Greek World,* (London, 1987), 50–59; Nielsen, 1.104–11; Yegül, 250–313, and id., *The Bath-Gymnasium Complex at Sardis* (Cambridge, MA, 1986).

16. On gymnasia, see J. Delorme, *Gymnasion: Étude sur les monuments consacrés à l'éducation en Grèce* (Paris, 1960). On the continuance of their traditional role, see Farrington, "Imperial Bath Buildings."

ries of building offer evidence relevant to conditions at the Roman urban public bath, it will be mentioned, albeit suitably qualified.

Next, there is the issue of geographic and chronological parameters. Certain chapters, by their content, set their own limits. The inquiry into the growth and spread of the bathing habit focuses perforce on Rome and Italy in the late Republic and early Empire. For the more thematic chapters, the establishment of limits is more difficult. Over its thousand-year history, Roman bathing culture must have displayed regional variations and undergone change over time.[17] But certain conditions (such as the prevalent social atmosphere or the taking of snacks) must have been all but universal. Since the evidence derives from all parts of the empire and from all times, it seems unnecessarily restrictive to exclude a particularly illuminating item by setting strict geographic and chronological limits for the thematic chapters. Throughout this study, the main focus is on the western empire in the era sometimes termed the "central period" (ca. 200 B.C. to A.D. 200), but instructive material from the East and from the late Empire will not be passed over in silence.[18]

The Sources

> I may as well insert, as I might at almost every point in this essay, my sense of frustration in describing matters taken for granted among the contemporaries of the Empire and therefore little reported—matters which (as the ancients would have said) were undignified, contributed nothing to their sense of what counted, and therefore were seldom mentioned in their proper works of literature. We catch only random hints. At best they are suggestive.[19]

The student of Roman bathing culture can fully identify with Ramsay MacMullen's frustration: no ancient writer provides a detailed account of life at

17. Certain features of some Roman baths in the Greek East, for instance, suggest regional variations in the procedures of bathing. Some establishments have central galleries that allow the bather to pick and choose between rooms, rather than being channeled purposefully from one to the other; examples are Bath II 7A at Anemurium in Cilicia, Baths I 2A at Antiochea-ad-Cragum in Cilicia, and the Baths of Trajan and Hadrian at Cyrene (for all of these examples, see the appropriate plans in A. Farrington, *The Roman Baths of Lycia: An Architectural Study* [Ankara, 1995], esp. 7–15).

18. For the "central period," see K.R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge, 1994), 6.

19. R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven, 1974), 41.

the baths, and most refer to it allusively, providing the modern investigator with mere glimmers and glimpses. Despite their volume, therefore, deploying and interpreting the sources in pursuit of answers to specific sociohistorical questions proves challenging and, on occasion, fruitless. As a result, the nature of the evidence and strategies for approaching it deserve consideration.[20]

Prodigious quantities of material—archaeological, epigraphic, and literary—pertain to Roman baths. It would take several lifetimes to sift through and master it all, so I make no claim here to comprehensiveness in citing it. Of the urban public bathhouse alone, the remains of more than one thousand examples must be known from the empire, most not fully published. Hundreds of inscriptions attest the existence of baths and record the actions of their benefactors. In addition, scores of literary references mention baths and bathing in a wide variety of contexts. As if this were not enough, new material is constantly coming to light. I have been as thorough as possible in presenting the available evidence, while at the same time not wishing to overburden the notes with an unnecessary proliferation of repetitive supporting citations. The notes, therefore, present a representative sample of evidence and should not be viewed as offering the final word on the matters they address. It is hoped that new evidence will illuminate, rather than undermine, the thrust of my presentation.

In general, two chief problems exist in assessing the ancient sources for bathing culture. The first is the difficulty of tying the varying types of evidence together. Archaeology has revealed scores of bath buildings in varying states of preservation. These remains allow detailed study of their architecture and technology but reveal little about the actual experience of the bathers. For this experience, the written evidence is crucial. There is also an abundance of this material, but it too is of varying quality. Inscriptions, for instance, tend to be highly formulaic, recording constructional activity or bath-related benefactions, such as gifts of free bathing and/or oil; far less frequently do they throw light on the bathers themselves. The literary material is the most useful for reconstructing the bathing experience, since it helps to illuminate attitudes toward baths and frequently offers vignettes of Roman bathers in action. But rarely do any of these classes of evidence interconnect directly. The continued widespread confusion over ancient bath-related terminology serves as an illustration. Since so few inscriptions and even

20. For a fuller discussion of the nature of the sources and problems of interpretation, see G.G. Fagan, "Interpreting the Evidence," in D.E. Johnston and J. DeLaine, eds., *Roman Baths and Bathing,* (Portsmouth, RI, forthcoming).

fewer literary allusions can be securely associated with surviving remains, putting written and archaeological sources together proves difficult, if not impossible in many cases. Ball courts *(sphaeristeria)* are an apt example. Despite the huge volume of physical remains of baths and numerous written references to them, few ball courts can be securely identified in the archaeological record. In fact, it remains unclear if such courts were covered rooms, open areas, or both. The same uncertainty surrounds the nature of many other rooms alluded to in the written sources, such as entrance halls (*atria* or *basilica thermarum*) or scraping-off rooms *(destrictaria)*.[21] Indeed, the function of many nonheated rooms in surviving ruins, especially in the larger facilities, stands open to question.[22] One aim of this book is to try to take into account all the available types of evidence in pursuing certain questions, but we must avoid forcing the often incompatible material into offering answers that it is not equipped to yield.

The second major difficulty with the sources is that of typicality. It is highly unlikely that Roman bathing habits were constant and unchanging over their thousand-year history and throughout the length and breadth of the empire. So how can we be sure that any piece of data—which is, after all, the product of a specific time and place—illustrates a general norm rather than a local variation? There is no secure way out of this quandary, but perhaps the best way forward is to look for instances where data from a variety of times and places point in the same direction. Such a coincidence cannot offer complete peace of mind, but it does mollify concern to some degree. Uncertainty over typicality also requires that the ancient evidence be treated with critical respect. At the same time, it would be tedious and repetitious to lay out all of the options every time uncertainty exists. Therefore, where the problem is acute, detailed discussion can be found in the footnotes; otherwise, the issue of typicality is to be borne in mind by the reader at all times when assessing the evidence. It limits our conclusions but hopefully does not obviate them.

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21. A list of parts of baths mentioned in the epigraphic sample is provided in appendix 3. For *sphaeristeria,* see nos. 54 and 55; Pliny *Ep.* 2.17.11, 5.6.27; *Dig.* 17.1.16. A part of the palaestra in the Stabian Baths has been proposed as a *sphaeristerium;* see H. Eschebach, *Die Stabianer Thermen in Pompeji* (Berlin, 1979), 17, 61, 70. For the uncertainty over *atria* and *basilica thermarum* and *destrictaria,* see Nielsen, 1.162 (s.v. "basilica thermarum") and 165 (s.v. "destrictarium"). For a recent attempt (not entirely conclusive) to make sense of some of these terms, see R. Rebuffat, "Vocabulaire thermal: Documents sur le bain romain," in *Thermes,* 1–34.

22. This was brought home to me on a visit to the Thermae of Diocletian in 1989, when Dott.ssa D. Candilio of the Museo Nazionale in Rome could offer no explanation for the function(s) of several huge vaulted chambers adjacent to the Basilica Santa Maria degli Angeli.

The Bathing Ritual

The Roman bathing ritual was complicated, combining what in modern terms would be considered a visit to the gymnasium, bathroom, and massage parlor.[23] The bather entered the establishment, disrobed, was anointed with oils, and then exercised, usually by playing ball games of one sort or another (see, e.g., Mart. 7.32). Once a good sweat had been worked up, the bathing process proper was embarked on. A series of variously heated rooms confronted the customer, and it was largely a matter of choice which rooms were visited and in what order. The most basic bath required a visit to the medium-heated room, then the hottest room, and then back through the medium-heated room to the cold room. Depending on the size and luxury of the establishment, all of these rooms could have pools, heated to the appropriate degree. Optional amenities could also be on offer, such as very hot sweat chambers or open-air swimming pools. Despite the volume of ancient evidence pertaining to the baths, it is not clear at what stage the main wash took place—a vivid illustration of the limitations of our sources. At some point along the route, often in the medium-heated room, the bather enjoyed a strigiling—scraping with specially designed instruments called *strigiles*—to remove the oil and sweat and dirt that had accumulated while exercising. Finally, the bather dried off and, for those who could afford it, was anointed with perfumes; the bather then changed into fresh clothes and went home.

Even with the possibility of taking a quick bath, the full process was complex and demanded a considerable amount of time to complete, so it was almost inevitable that a trip to the baths became a social event. Given what we have seen of other bathing cultures that are comparably sociable and leisurely, it is hardly surprising that Roman baths became community centers of sorts, places where a variety of people could meet, bathe, chat, snack, drink, and relax. The majority of this book is primarily concerned with these "secondary" aspects of the bathing ritual, although, given the relative apportioning of space in later baths as compared to earlier ones, one begins to wonder whether it was the bathing itself that ultimately became secondary.[24]

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23. For ancient outlines of the process, see, e.g., Pliny *HN* 28.55; Mart. 6.42; Petron. *Sat.* 28. For modern accounts, see Heinz, 142–56; Pasquinucci, 22–39, 48–60, esp. 22–24 (by D. Alessi); Weber, 54–67; Yegül, 33–40.

24. Thus the heated areas—i.e., for those "practical" bathing purposes—account for 33 percent of the total area of early baths (e.g., the Forum Baths, Pompeii) but much less (between 21 and 29 percent) of later baths of comparable size (e.g., North Baths, Cemelenum; Silchester; Weissenburg). In the large "imperial" establishments at Rome, the functional area was even smaller, comprising only 18 percent of the total area of the Baths of Trajan, for instance; see J. DeLaine, "New Models, Old Modes: Continuity and Change in the Design of Public Baths," in

Throughout this book, the focus is on the people who used the baths and those who provided and maintained them, rather than on the buildings themselves. Surveys of apparently well-worn subjects aim not to recap the work of others but to put that work into a broader sociohistorical perspective. Thus, when we look at the baths of Rome, we are interested not in the physical remains and the myriad interpretative difficulties they present but in who was responsible for this construction, under what circumstances they acted, and why. This investigation starts with an assessment of what a visit to the baths was like, as can be reconstructed primarily from the *Epigrams* of Martial, one of our most informative sources on the everyday workings of Roman bathing culture. The inquiry then adopts a quasi-diachronic form, as it turns to the issue of when and why the baths became popular at Rome and in Italy. An attempt to account for that popularity follows. This attempt leads to consideration of the connection between baths and medicine and, more particularly, to the possibility that the eminent doctor Asclepiades of Bithynia played a role in promoting regular bathing among the Romans in the late second and early first centuries B.C.

The focus of this study then shifts to the issue of responsibility for bath construction, which is investigated in two parts, the first covering Rome, the second covering Italy and the provinces. For the latter, inscriptional evidence proves vital. The epigraphic sample included in this book presents pertinent Latin inscriptions that record not only acts of constructional benefaction (i.e., the erection, repair, extension, and adornment of baths) but also nonconstructional activities (e.g., offers of free bathing and provisions of oil); there are also nonbenefactory texts (e.g., advertisements for baths and bathroom-wall graffiti) and a sample of Greek texts for purposes of comparison.[25] (Throughout the book, entries in the epigraphic sample are referred to by number alone, in the form "no. 1" or "nos. 1, 2, 3," etc.) As a preface to the topic of the baths as social centers, a brief consideration of the physical environment at the baths follows the study of benefactors. Finally, the bathers themselves are examined in detail, to learn their social identities and the degree of their social mixing and interaction at the baths, and thereby to discern something of the broad social function of the urban bathhouse in Roman civilization.

H.-J. Schalles, H. von Hesberg, and P. Zanker, eds., *Die römische Stadt im 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr.: Der Funktionswandel des öffentlichen Raumes* (Bonn, 1992), 257–75.

25. For a fuller explanation of the criteria employed in selecting the inscriptions and of the organizational principles behind the epigraphic sample, see the introduction to the sample.