

Call for papers

Roman Baths and Agency

The human factor in designing, building, using, experiencing, and maintaining bath buildings in the Roman territories

International conference and round table on Roman baths, Rome, October 18-20, 2023

Organized by Konogan Beaufay and Sadi Maréchal

The important place of baths in the history of Roman architecture and in Roman society no longer needs demonstration. If traditional research on Roman baths has mainly focussed on the monumental architecture, the typologies of buildings, the heating systems or the decoration, more recently, new (digital) research tools, more original approaches, and interdisciplinary collaborations have steered research towards new directions, offering new insights into the social life within baths, the actual bathing experience (sound, smell, sight, feel), the management of resources (water, fuel) by human agents, and the different ways in which baths and bathing culture were adopted and adapted by local communities in the different provinces.

AIMS

This conference thus aims at promoting a more holistic approach to Roman bathhouses and bathing habits by focusing on the human–building interaction, and by **replacing the individual and the collective at the centre of the research on Roman baths**. Whichever the approach chosen (archaeological, architectural or textual) and whichever aspect studied (the design of the baths, the technology employed or the resources consumed therein, their urban setting or the facilities provided in the buildings, or the economic considerations surrounding their construction, management, or operation), the focus will be on the people who took part in this fundamentally Roman experience.

This conference will offer to eminent specialists and upcoming researchers the possibility to present and discuss these new approaches and to look forward together to the challenges ahead. Contributors will be selected for their ability to go **beyond mere architectural or decorative presentations of individual buildings**, and to focus their presentation on the people who took part in this fundamentally Roman experience. Particularly welcome will be presentations that revisit long-persisting dogmas, give room to variation in the use of baths on geographical and chronological grounds, and consider lesser-known areas of the empire.

A second aim of the conference is to bring together scholars working on Roman bath buildings, and to initiate the **creation of an online database of bath buildings**. By **building a network of experts** willing to collaborate on a database project that seeks to garner data on all bath buildings our aim is to enable future generations of scholars to study Roman baths (and beyond) in a more comprehensive way, to give more visibility to the bathing culture of regions less commonly visible on the archaeological scene, and eventually to detach ourselves from the dominance of a handful of well-preserved buildings (such as those of Rome, Pompeii, Ostia) in favour of more relevant comparative material on which information would be readily accessible. This project will be discussed during a round table held in the morning of Friday 20.

KEY THEMES AND QUESTIONS

Bathing and society

How did baths shape, and were shaped, by the communities they were part of—be it on a local (small settlements, villas), regional (small towns) or supraregional level (cities and provincial capitals)? In which way did baths contribute to the social life and cohesion of a village, of a city?

New technologies in bath studies

What can both established and new digital technologies tell us about the people who built and used the baths?

Experiencing baths

How did the setting of the baths, their architecture, layout and decoration, the services they provided and the facilities they were equipped with, the technology used therein... affect the bathing experience? To what extent were all those aspects planned with the users in mind?

Planning and building baths

How did the people who designed, planned, funded, and built the baths interact? By which processes did these relations eventually result in the physical buildings bathers would use?

Beyond archaeological data

What does non-archaeological data tell us about the individuals who built, funded, used, and serviced the baths? How can textual, material, archaeological and architectural evidence be better combined to provide a fuller picture of the human-building interaction?

Regional bathing

What idiosyncrasies or similarities can we notice in the way baths were conceived and used in different regions of the empire?

PRACTICALITIES

Who? Early career and established scholars alike. Confirmed keynote speakers and chairs include Monika Trümper (Freie Universität Berlin), Maura Medri (Università degli Studi Roma Tre), Lynne Lancaster (University of Cincinnati), Fikret Yegül (University of California Santa Barbara), Janet DeLaine (University of Oxford) and Nathalie de Haan (Radboud University Nijmegen).

When? 18–20 October 2023. Conference on Wednesday 18 & Thursday 19, round table on Friday 20

Where? Rome, Academia Belgica (Via Omero 8) and online (link to be announced [here](#)).

How? Please send a 300-word abstract to Baths.Rome2023@ugent.be by **30 June 2023**, also indicating your affiliation and whether you would like to participate to the round table on Friday. We expect speakers to be present in person in Rome. Contributions should last maximum 20 minutes (plus 10 minutes for discussion). Papers in English or Italian are encouraged, but we will also accept communications in French and German. We intend to publish the proceedings.

ORGANISING COMMITTEE

[Sadi Maréchal](#) (Ghent University) & [Konogan Beaufay](#) (CSCA - University of Cambridge)
In collaboration with Maura Medri (Università degli Studi Roma Tre) and with the support of the Ax:son Johnson Centre for the Study of Classical Architecture (University of Cambridge), the Academia Belgica, the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome and the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy - Ghent University.

