CHAPTER XXVII

THE BATHS AT POMPEII.—THE STABIAN BATHS

In comparison with the great bathing establishments of Rome, the baths at Pompeii are of moderate size. They have, however, a special interest, due in part to their excellent preservation, in part to the certainty with which the purpose of the various rooms can be determined; and their remains enable us to trace the development of the public bath in a single city during a period of almost two hundred years. From this source, moreover, most of our knowledge of the arrangements of the ancient bath is derived, without which the imposing but barren remains of Rome itself would be for the most part unintelligible. It is not easy for one living under present conditions to understand how important a place the baths occupied in the life of antiquity, particularly of the Romans under the Empire; they offered, within a single enclosure, opportunities for physical care and comfort and leisurely intercourse with others, not unlike those afforded in the cities of modern Europe by the club, the café, and the promenade.

Though the Roman baths differed greatly in size and in details of arrangement, the essential parts were everywhere the same. First there was a court, palaestra, surrounded by a colonnade. This was devoted to gymnastic exercises, and connected with it in most cases was an open-air swimming tank. The dressing room, apodyterium, was usually entered from the court through a passageway or anteroom. A basin for cold baths was sometimes placed in the dressing room; in large establishments a separate apartment was set aside for this purpose, the frigidarium. To avoid too sudden a change of temperature for the bathers, a room moderately heated, tepidarium, was placed between the dressing room and the caldarium, in which hot baths were given. At one end of the caldarium was a bath basin of masonry, alveus; at the other was ordinarily a semicircular niche, schola, in which stood the labrum, a large, shallow, circular vessel resting upon a support of masonry, and supplied with lukewarm water by a pipe leading from a tank back of the furnace. The more extensive establishments, as the Central Baths at Pompeii, contained also a round room, called Laconicum from its Spartan origin, for sweating baths in dry air. In describing baths it is more convenient to use the ancient names.

In earlier times the rooms were heated by means of braziers, and in one of the Pompeian baths the tepidarium was warmed in this way to the last. A more satisfactory method was devised near the beginning of the first century a.c. by Serglius Orata, a famous epicure, whose surname is said to have been given to him because of his fondness for golden trout (anuratae). He was the first to plant artificial oyster beds in the Lucrine Lake, and the experiment was so successful that he derived a large income from them; we may assume that he turned an honest penny also by his invention of the ‘hanging baths,’ balnea penistles, with which his name has ever since been associated. These were built with a hollow space under the floor, the space being secured by making the floor of tiles, two feet square, supported at the corners by small brick pillars (Fig. 88); into this space hot air was introduced from the furnace, and as the floor became warm, the temperature of the room above was evenly modified.

This improved method of heating was not long restricted to the floors. As early as the Republican period, the hollow space was extended to the walls by means of small quadrangular flues and by the use of nipple tiles, tegulae mammatae, large rectangular tiles with conical projections, about two inches high, at each corner; these were laid on their edges, with the projections pressed against the wall, thus leaving an air space on the inside.

In bathing establishments designed for both men and women, the two caldaria were placed near together. There was a single furnace, hypocaust, where the water for the baths was warmed; from this also hot air was conveyed through broad
flues under the floors of both caldariums, thence circulating through the walls. Through similar flues underneath, the warm air, already considerably cooled, was conveyed from the hollow spaces of the caldariums into those of the tepidariums. In order to maintain a draft strong enough to draw the hot air from the furnace under the floors, the air spaces of the walls had vents above, remains of which may still be seen in some baths. These vents were no doubt sufficient to keep up the draft after the rooms had once been heated; but in order to warm them at the outset a draft fire was needed,—that is, a small fire under the floor at some point a considerable distance from the furnace and near the vents, through which it would cause the escape of warm air, and so start a hot current from the furnace. The place of the draft fire has been found under two rooms of the Pompeian baths; and a similar arrangement has been noted in the case of Roman baths excavated in Germany.

The use of the baths varied according to individual taste and medical advice. In general, however, bathers availed themselves of one of three methods.

The most common form of the bath was that taken after exercise in the palaestra,—ball playing was a favorite means of exercise,—use being made of all the rooms. The bather undressed in the apodyterium, or perhaps in the tepidarium, where he was rubbed with unguents; then he took a sweat in the caldarium, following it with a warm bath. Returning to the apodyterium, he gave himself a cold bath either in this room or in the frigidarium; he then passed into the Laconicum, or, if there was no Laconicum, went back into the caldarium for a second sweat; lastly, before going out, he was thoroughly rubbed with unguents, as a safeguard against taking cold.

Some bathers omitted the warm bath. They passed through the tepidarium directly into the Laconicum or caldarium, where they had a sweat; they then took a cold bath, or had cold water poured over them, and were rubbed with unguents.

In the simplest form of the bath the main rooms were not used at all. The bathers heated themselves with exercise in the palaestra, then removed the dirt and oil with scrapers, _strigiles_, and bathed in the swimming tank.
Up to the present time three public baths have been excavated in Pompeii, two for both men and women, one for men only. Besides these there are two private establishments in the eighth Region (VIII. ii. 17 and 23), one perhaps for men, the other for women; and another, apparently for men, was discovered in the eighteenth century near the Amphitheatre and covered up again, being a part of the villa of Julia Felix. It is quite possible that two or three more bathing establishments yet await excavation; one at least, connected with a warm spring, is known to us from an inscription—that of M. Crassus Frugi. About a dozen houses also contain complete baths for private use.

The largest and oldest bathing establishment at Pompeii is that to which the name Stabian Baths has been given, from its location on Stabian Street. It was built in the second century B.C., but was remodelled in the early days of the Roman colony, and afterwards underwent extensive repairs. It is of irregular shape, and occupies a large part of a block, having streets on three sides; on the north side it is bounded by the house of Siricus. Opening upon two of the streets are shops, which have nothing to do with the baths and are not numbered on the plan (Fig. 86).

Entering from the south through the broad doorway at A, we find ourselves in the palaestra, C, which has a colonnade on three sides. On the west side the place of the colonnade is taken by a strip of smooth pavement with a raised margin; two heavy stone balls were found here, which were obviously used in a game resembling the modern ninepins; at the further end is the room for the players, K. Close to the bowling course, at the middle of the west side, is the swimming tank, F, with rooms (E, G) adjoining it at either end. At the corner near the further room, G, is a side entrance, L; J is the office of the director or superintendent in charge of the building.

On the east side of the court are the men's baths, rooms I–VIII; north of these are the women's baths, rooms 1–6, with the furnace room, IX, between them. In the northwest corner of the building were small rooms (e–r) intended for private baths. They had not been provided with the improved heating
arrangements, and were not in use at the time of the catastrophe. The larger room adjoining (6) was a closet.

The anteroom of the men's baths (IV), opens at one end into the dressing room or apodyterium (VI), as seen in Plate V. It has a vaulted ceiling, richly decorated. A door at the left leads into the frigidarium (V), and another at the right into a servants' waiting room (I), which is accessible from the court. This room was formerly entered also from the street, through a passage (III), which was later closed; on one side of it is a bench of masonry for the slaves in attendance upon their masters. Similar benches are found in the waiting room at the other end of the apodyterium (X).

The apodyterium also was provided with benches of the same sort, as indicated on the plan; they are shown in Plate V. Along the walls at the sides, just under the edge of the vaulted ceiling, was a row of small niches, the use of which corresponded with that of the lockers in a modern gymnasium. These niches are about 5½ feet above the floor, while those in the other dressing room (2) are a little less than five feet; from this difference in height it has been rightly inferred that the smaller and simpler division of the baths was set aside for women. The floor is paved with rectangular flags of gray marble, with blocks of basalt next to the walls. While the walls were left simply white, with a red base, the ceiling was elaborately decorated with stucco reliefs in the style prevalent shortly before the destruction of the city; there are vestiges of similar decoration in the tepidarium. In octagonal, hexagonal, and quadrangular panels are rosettes, Cupids, trophies, and bacchic figures. The lunettes are adorned with fantastic architectural designs, in which we see bacchic figures standing on pedestals, and Cupids riding on dolphins; the sides of the two arches supporting the ceiling (one of them is seen in Plate V) are decorated with female figures mounted on dolphins, which run out into arabesques. The frequent suggestion of water in these motives is in harmony with the purpose of the room.

Even more effective is the decoration of the small round frigidarium. Light is admitted, as in the Pantheon at Rome, through a round hole in the apex of the domed ceiling. At the edge of the circular bath basin, lined with white marble, was a narrow strip of marble floor, which is extended into the four semicircular niches. Wall and niches alike are painted to represent a beautiful garden, with a blue sky above (Fig. 87). The eye wanders among trees and shrubs, catching glimpses of birds overhead, of statues and vases here and there in the midst of the green foliage, and of jets of water falling into circular basins. The blue dome is studded with stars. The bather could scarcely feel the narrowness of a room, the decoration of which was so suggestive of expanse and open air. A jet of water fell into the basin from a small niche in the upper part of the wall; and the place of the overflow pipe may be easily recognized.

The tepidarium (VII) and caldarium (VIII) were heated by means of hollow floors and walls. The former is much the smaller, as we should have expected from its use as an intermediate room, in which the bathers would ordinarily not tarry so
The large bath basin at the east end (indicated on the plan) is unusual; it was seemingly a later addition, and was probably made to accommodate those who in the winter shrank from using the frigidarium, but wished nevertheless to take a moderately cold bath. Near the bottom of the wall back of this basin, a hole had been made so that underneath a fire could be kindled from the outside (in X), not in order to heat the basin, which could be supplied with warm water by means of a pipe, but to start the circulation of hot air from the furnace; at the top of the wall above were two vents opening from the warm air chamber. There was a place for another draft fire under the women's caldarium.

One of the fragments of stucco relief still remaining in the tepidarium presents the figure of a man reading from a roll of manuscript. It suggests the standing complaint of the ancients in regard to the trials of bathers, who could not escape the ever-present poet declaiming his latest production.

At one end of the caldarium we find the bath basin, alveus; at the other is the support of the labrum, which has disappeared. In the niche above the latter are two vents for the draft, and above the niche was a round window. This room, as most of the others, was dimly lighted. The little round window of the ante-room is shown in our plate. There were two similar windows in the lunette of the apodyterium, above the roof of the ante-room; they are not seen in our plate, having at one time been entirely covered up by the construction of a wall to support the roof. A similar window was very likely placed at the end of the tepidarium, over the roof of the frigidarium; and perhaps these were supplemented by holes in the crown of the arched ceilings, as in the women's apodyterium.

The women's baths are entered from the court through a long anteroom (6); the dressing room is connected also with the two side streets by means of corridors (1, 5). Originally there was no communication between the women's baths and the palaestra.

The apodyterium (2) is the best preserved room of the entire building, and also the most ancient. It shows almost no traces of the catastrophe. The vaulted ceiling is intact. The smooth, white stucco on the walls and the simple cornice at the base of the lunettes date from the time of the first builders. Now, as then, light is admitted only through two small openings in the crown of the vault and a window in the west lunette. To a modern visitor the interior seems gloomy. The pavement, of lozenge-shaped, reddish glazed tiles, belongs to the same early period. There is a strip of basaltic flags connecting the door of one of the corridors (1) with that of the tepidarium. This much travelled path seems to indicate that many ladies—particularly, we may assume, in the winter—went at once into the more comfortable tepidarium without stopping in the dressing room. Along the walls were benches, and above them niches, as in the men's apodyterium. In the time of the Empire the fronts of the niches, finely carved in tufa, were overlaid with a thick coating of stucco, the upper part being ornamented with designs in relief.

The women had no frigidarium. A large basin for cold baths was built at the west end of the dressing room, but this also is a later addition; before it was made, those who wished for cold baths must have contented themselves with portable bath tubs.

The tepidarium (3) and caldarium (4) are in a better state of preservation than those of the men's baths, which they so closely resemble in all their arrangements that a detailed description is unnecessary. In their present form they are not so ancient as the apodyterium, and the decoration is less elaborate than that of the corresponding rooms on the other side.

The labrum is intact, a round, shallow basin of white marble resting on a support of masonry; it has here no separate niche. The bath basin in the caldarium also retains its veneering of white marble, with an overflow pipe of bronze at the upper edge; it is about two feet deep. In such basins the bathers leaned against the sloping back, which for this reason was called a cushion (pulvinus) by Vitruvius. This alveus would accommodate eight bathers, that in the men's caldarium perhaps ten. Places were probably assigned in numerical order, each bather awaiting his turn. Those who did not wish to wait, or preferred to bathe by themselves, might use individual bath tubs of bronze. Remains of such a tub, as well as of bronze benches, were found in this room. Near the bottom
of the alveus in front is an opening, through which the water could be let out; when it was emptied, the water ran over the white mosaic floor, which was thus cleaned.

In the time of the Early Empire it became the fashion to bathe with very warm water. 'People want to be parboiled,' Seneca exclaims. The construction of the alveus, however, was not well adapted to conserve the heat, and an ingenious contrivance was devised to remedy the difficulty, which may best be explained with the help of our illustration, showing the arrangement of the bath basin in room 4 (Fig. 88). A large hot air flue, D, led directly from the furnace to the hollow space, C, under the alveus, A. Above this flue was a long bronze heater, B, in the form of a half cylinder, with one end opening into the end of the alveus. As the bottom of the heater was six inches lower than that of the alveus, the cooler water from the basin would flow down into it and be heated again, a circulation being thus maintained.

A similar arrangement (called testudo alvei by Vitruvius) probably existed for the alveus in the caldarium on the other side; but that part of the men's baths has been destroyed. Only one other heater of this kind has been found,—and that much smaller,—in a villa near Boscoreale, recently excavated; but the semicircular opening made for the heater above the hot air flue may be seen in the Central Baths, in a private establishment at Pompeii, and generally in the remains of Roman baths.

In the furnace room (praefurnium, IX) between the two caldaria, stood three large cylindrical tanks. They have disap-
the baths, we have found no separate chamber to which the term Laconicum could properly be applied. In order to arrive at a solution of the difficulty, we must note the successive steps by which, as shown by an examination of the remains of the masonry, the heating arrangements were extended and improved.

At first, in the Baths as originally constructed, there were neither hollow walls nor hollow floors. The heating was done by means of braziers; and there were niches or lockers in the walls of the caldariums and tepidariums similar to those now found in the dressing rooms, but in double rows, the upper niches being larger, the lower smaller.

Later, a hollow floor was built in the men's caldarium. Later still, this room was provided with hollow walls, which were extended to the crown of the ceilings and the lunettes, the tepidarium being still heated with braziers.

Finally, a hollow floor and hollow walls were constructed at the same time in the men's tepidarium, but the hot air chamber was not carried up into the ceiling or the lunettes.

A similar transformation was gradually accomplished in the women's apartments; but owing, it would seem, to a desire for greater warmth in the tepidarium, the hot air chamber here, as in the caldarium, was extended to the lunettes and the ceiling.

Since the method of heating by means of hollow floors only came into vogue about 100 B.C., and since the duumvirate of Ulpius and Annius must have occurred soon after 80 B.C., we are probably safe in supposing that they built the hollow floors of the two caldariums, and that the new heating arrangement was loosely called a Laconicum. At least a partial warrant for this interpretation is found in a passage of Dion Cassius (L.III., xxvii.1), in which he says that Agrippa built the 'Spartan sweating bath,' ῥα δὲ ἄνθρωπον τὸ Λακονικόν. Agrippa, however, built, not a Laconicum in the narrow sense, but a complete bathing establishment, and Dion, doubtless following some earlier writer, uses the word as generally applicable to a system of warm baths. In default of a better explanation, we must accept a meaning equally loose for our inscription.

It is not possible to date, even approximately, the other changes by which the baths were conformed to the increasing desire for warmth and comfort; but the decoration of the greater part of the building, with its complicated designs and stucco reliefs, was clearly applied to the walls not many decades before the destruction of the city.

The unroofed swimming tank, F, was separated from the court by a barrier of masonry about two feet high, which was extended also in front of the rooms at the ends, E and G. On either side was a step, both the steps and the barrier being venced with white marble. The tank was supplied by a pipe entering from the northeast; the overflow pipe, at the southeast corner, is indicated on the plan.

The rooms E and G, opening both on the swimming tank and on the court with high arched doorways, were roofed shallow basins where the athletes could give themselves a preliminary cleaning before going into the tank. The walls are venced with marble to a height of 6 1/2 feet; above are painted plants, birds, statues, and nympha, one of whom holds a shell to catch a jet of water; over these the blue sky. Here, as in the frigidarium, the artist strove to convey the impression of being in the open air, in a beautiful garden, adorned with sculptures. A jet of water spurted from the rear wall just above the marble dado; above it is a large oblong niche, apparently for a statue.

After a time the basin in G was filled up, and covered with a mosaic floor of the same height as the threshold; when one cleaning room was found to be adequate, that was retained which had a separate dressing room, D. On the white walls of the dressing room are traces of the wooden wardrobes that once stood against them. In this room, the dextrictarium, the athletes disrobed, and rubbed themselves with oil before engaging in gymnastic exercises, and to it they returned from the palaestra, in order to scrape themselves (se dextra); then they washed themselves in the next room, E, and finally plunged into the tank.

The room of the official in charge of the baths, J, had windows opening on the court and into the bowlers' room, K. A large bronze brazier was found here, presented, according to an inscription on it, by Marcus Nigidius Vacciola, who, as a
symbol of his name, had the figure of a cow (vacca) stamped in relief on the brazier. We find a similar brazier, together with benches, in the tepidarium of the baths near the Forum, which had no other means of heating; we naturally infer that the furniture here was intended for one of the tepidaria, and used there before the improved method of heating was introduced. A Nasennius Nigidius Vacula, who died before 54 A.D., is known to us from the receipts of Caelius Jucundus. If he was the donor, and made the gift when he was a young man, the change of the system of heating in the tepidarium may have been made as early as 20 A.D.

The colonnade was originally uniform on all the three sides. The Doric columns were of tufa, coated with fine white stucco. They were of slender proportions, the height being a trifle over nine feet, with a diameter of only sixteen inches. They were edged, not fluted, and doubtless carried an entablature with triglyphs, of which no trace remains. In the time of the Empire, apparently before the earthquake of 63, the colonnade was remodelled in accordance with the prevailing taste. The columns received a thick coating of stucco, with flutings indicated by incised lines; the lower third of the shaft was painted red, the upper portion being left white. Over the capitals, moulded in stucco, was an entablature resting on thick planks, and ornamented with light-colored stucco reliefs. The general effect may be seen from our illustration (Fig. 89).

In this reconstruction the sameness of the earlier colonnade was varied with pleasing irregularities. Thus in front of the main entrance (A), and in a corresponding position on the opposite side of the court, the place of four columns was taken by two broad pillars flanked by half-columns, and carrying a roof more than five feet higher than that of the rest of the colonnade. A similar arrangement has already been noted in the colonnade of the temple of Isis (p. 174).

The wall decoration of the court has been particularly well preserved on the outer wall of D and E (Fig. 90; cf. Pl. XIII). The surface is diversified by fantastic architectural designs in two stories, made up of slender columns with their entablatures, open doorways with steps leading up to them, and glimpses of interiors. In the panels thus outlined, figures of all kinds stand out in white relief on a bright red or blue ground. Above the arched doorway Jupiter sits, resting his right hand on his sceptre; near by, on a pillar, is the eagle. Further to the left a satyr offers Hercules a drinking horn. Another relief, not so well preserved, has a motive suggestive of the purpose of the building — Hylas at the spring seized by the nymphae. With this we may associate two designs having reference to the exer-
cises of the palaestra: a boxer, at the left of the doorway of E, and at the right a man scraping himself with a strigil. On the outer wall of G is Daedalus, making wings for himself and Icarus.

Under the colonnade at the rear, a herm stands close to the wall, having the features of a youth with a garment drawn over his head and covering the upper part of the body. For the explanation of it we are indebted to Pausanias. 'In the gymnasion at Phigalia, in Arcadia,' says this writer, 'is an image of Hermes. It has the appearance of a man wrapped in a cloak, and terminates below in a square pillar in the place of feet.' This is Hermes, the god of the Palaestra, here, as in Phigalia, in a guise suggestive of his function of Psychopompus, the conductor of departed souls. We have already met with an example of the same type in the court of the temple of Apollo.

A sundial stood on the roof of the frigidarium and men's caldarium, supported by a foundation of masonry still visible. It bore an Oscan inscription, from which we learn that it was set up by the Quaestor Maras Atinius, in accordance with a decree of the council, the money for the expenditure being derived from fines. The fines were very likely collected here, by the official in charge of the building. Sundials were erected also in the other baths at Pompeii. They were a necessity, for all such establishments were conducted on a schedule of hours. Hadrian ordered that the baths in Rome should be open from the eighth hour, that is, after two o'clock in the afternoon; and a regulation in regard to the time of opening, if not of closing, was probably in force at Pompeii.

A motley and tumultuous life once filled the barren court, the rooms now ruined and deserted. The scene is well pictured by Seneca (Ep. 56): 'Quiet is by no means so necessary for study as men commonly believe,' the philosopher gravely argues. 'I am living near a bath: sounds are heard on all sides. Just imagine for yourself every conceivable kind of noise that can offend the ear. The men of more sturdy muscle go through their exercises, and swing their hands heavily weighted with lead: I hear their groans when they strain themselves, or the whistling of labored breath when they breathe out after having held in. If one is rather lazy, and merely has himself rubbed with unguents, I hear the blows of the hand slapping his shoulders, the sound varying according as the massagist strikes with flat or hollow palm. If a ballplayer begins to play and to count his throws, it's all up for the time being. Meanwhile there is a sudden brawl, or a thief is caught, or there is some one in the bath who loves to hear the sound of his own voice; and the bathers plunge into the swimming tank with loud splashing. These noises, however, are not without some semblance of excuse; but the hair plucker from time to time raises his thin, shrill voice in order to attract attention, and is only still himself when he is forcing cries of pain from some one else, from whose armpits he plucks the hairs. And above the din you hear the shouts of those who are selling cakes, sausages, and sweetmeats, besides all the hawkers of stuff from the cookshops, each with a different and characteristic cry.'

Such were the distractions of a Roman bath.