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ROMAN, LATE ROMAN AND EARLY BYZANTINE BATHS IN THE WEST SECTION OF ATHENS*

Abstract: The present study is part of the author's postdoctoral research on the spatial and temporal development of Roman and Byzantine baths in Athens. This paper presents the urban fabric of the western sector of Athens based on the excavated bath complexes and their connection to the main roads of the city. The study of the public baths and their position in the urban fabric leads to a reconstruction of the city's lifestyle from the Roman to the Early Byzantine period. The number and size of the bath complexes and the results derived from them prove that Athens was a flourishing city throughout Late Antiquity and, despite repeated external attacks, it managed to reconstruct itself in a short period of time and to flourish anew.

Keywords: baths, Athens; Roman baths, Early Byzantine baths, urban fabric.

The attention of researchers for many years has been focused on the glorious era of Athens; the classical period. Thus, this was inevitably the best studied period in the history of Athens. In fact, for many years the prevailing view was that, after the Roman era, Athens declined and it was a small provincial town. However, studies in recent years have shown that Athens remained an important, strongly fortified, city with significant spiritual radiance.

In the city of Athens, within the Themistoclean wall, the remains of about forty-five (45) bath facilities were excavated or detected. About thirty-five (35) baths were Roman constructions and the rest were built in the Byzantine era. Nineteen (19) Roman baths continued to operate in the Early Byzantine period, during which nine (9) more were built. Thus, a total twenty-four (28) public and private baths that were active in the Early Byzantine period have been found¹.

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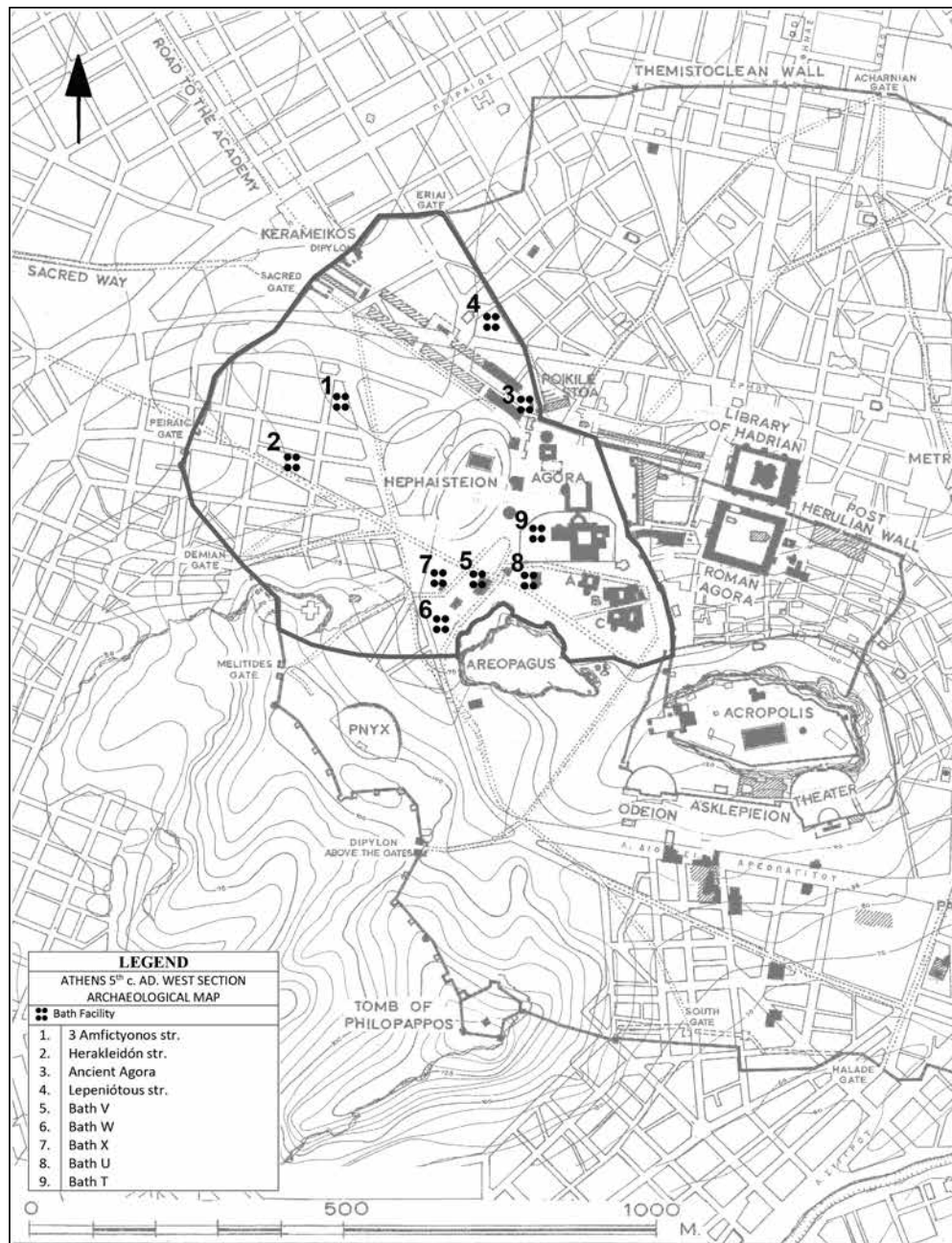


Fig. 1. Athens, 5th c. AD. West Section (modified by G. Kedrou, from: Frantz, *The Athenian Agora*, pl. 4).

Сл. 1. Атина, 5 век Западни део (изменио Г. Кедроу, из: А. Frantz, *The Athenian Agora. Late Antiquity: 267-700*, Princeton 1988, пл. 4).

However, this is a normal trend, if we take into account the attacks and the demographic and urban disasters that Athens suffered from the end of the 3rd c. AD onwards².

Gradually, the city returned to its normal rhythm and from the 4th c. AD a new impetus to the city's social life was given, mainly resulting from the operation of the philosophical schools. The new beginning is reflected in the renovation or construction of new bath facilities throughout the city. Athens was a thriving city during Late Antiquity, with a vibrant commercial, intellectual and social life. The pulse of the city began to change after the abolition of the Athenian philosophical schools by Justinian (529 AD), when Christianity strongly penetrated the formerly pagan Athenian society and special attention was paid to the urban Christianization of the city.

The baths of the West Section

The conventionally defined, for the purposes of the present study, West Section is bounded to the west from the Themistoclean wall; to the east from the post-Herulian wall; to the north by the street that starts from the Eriai Gate and almost coincides with the modern Leōkoriou str. and to the south by the hill of Areopagus.

In the west section of the city, nine Roman, Late Roman and Early Byzantine bath facilities were excavated. All the buildings were roman structures; apart from Bath T - the Palace of the Giants - which dates back to the 5th c. AD and according to the latest researches was the seat of an imperial official - perhaps the governor of Athens³.

At 3 Amfiktyonos str. a part of a roman bath complex was revealed; only the cistern (9sqm) -of the five chambers- is fully excavated⁴. The bath complex is located few meters (less than 50m) from the large Melitē street, which to the north intersected with the Sacred Way and to the south with Piraeus Street and certainly it was used by travelers. However, it is too difficult to classify the bath as public or domestic - there was dense habitation in this area since the Hellenistic era⁵ - because of the very small amount of data brought to light by the excavation. In addition, the inability to date the facility in a specific century

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¹ I. P. Arvanitidou, *Byzantine Baths in the Prefecture of Illyricum*, PhD dissertation, Rome 2016, 29-30.

² For the raid of Heruli, see I. Τραυλός, *Πολεοδομική εξέλιξις των Αθηνών*, Αθήνα 2005, 125-134; for Alaric's invasion of Athens, see K. Καραπλή, *Η Αθήνα και οι βαρβαρικές επιδρομές στο Αρχιτεκτονική και πολεοδομία από την Αρχαιότητα έως σήμερα. Η περίπτωση της Αθήνας*, Πρακτικά Διεπιστημονικού Συνεδρίου. Μουσείο Βούρου-Ευταξία (της Πόλεως των Αθηνών), (Αθήνα, 15-18 Φεβρουαρίου 1996), Αθήνα 1997, 304-312.

³ Jr. T. I. Shear, *The American excavation in the Athenian Agora. 7th report. The campaign of 1934*, *Hesperia* 4.3 (1935), 340-370; I. Travlos, *A pictorial dictionary of Ancient Athens*, New York 1971, 181; A. Frantz, *The Athenian Agora. Late Antiquity: 267-700*, Princeton 1988, 30, 95, 107-108; I. Nielsen, *Thermae et balnea. The architecture and Cultural History of Roman Public Baths*, vol. II, Denmark 1990, C. 260.

⁴ ΑΔ 40 (1985), Β1, 23-25.

⁵ ΑΔ 21 (1966), Β1, 72-73; ΑΔ 22 (1967), Β1, 49-54; ΑΔ 23 (1968), Β1, 39.

does not allow a hypothetical categorization. In the Roman Period, it could be a domestic bath with five chambers, but it could hardly belong to a house in the center of the Late Roman Athens because of its size.

The exact opposite applies for the Roman bath found at two excavations on Herakleidōn str., with a distance of about 100m between the two sites. The two cases could be independent, but according to the excavators of the first investigation - at 9 Herakleidōn str. - the complex extended to the adjacent plots, while many conduits were found at different levels⁶. In the second survey - at 40 Herakleidōn str. - very few remains of hypocaust were found⁷, which could indicate that nearby there was the western boundary of the bath.

Assuming that this was one large public facility at that focal point of the city, it runs parallel to Piraeus Street - which was active in the Roman period⁸ - and less than 100m from it. Also, the westernmost end of the bath is less than 100m from the Piraeus Gate⁹. Therefore, the claim of the existence of a large public bath near one of the most important entrances/exits of the Roman Athens would be - at least - reasonable.

In the area of the Ancient Agora a part of a bath complex was found, west of the main street (northwest-southeast oriented) and almost following the axis of the modern Leōkoriou str. Two building phases were identified during the excavations; from the first phase only the *latrine* of the bath, which was destroyed in the middle of the 3rd c. AD, survived¹⁰. The Late Roman facility - extensively repaired and enlarged - was constructed in the 3rd c. AD and went out of use in the late 4th c. AD when it was destroyed during Alaric's invasion in Athens¹¹. The boundaries of the complex were not defined during the excavation, as it continues under the unexplored field to the west. According to Shear, it is related to findings in three adjacent sites (5 Hadrian str.¹², 11 Astingos str.¹³, 7-9 Thēseion str.¹⁴), where remains of baths were found following the same orientation.

The bath complex is located just before the point where the two main roads of the western city meet; the Panathenaic Way and the street that starts

⁶ ΑΔ 29 (1973-74), B1, 37.

⁷ ΑΔ 56-59 (2001-2004), B1, 214-217.

⁸ R.S. Young, *An Industrial district of ancient Athens*, *Hesperia* 20 (1951), 149-160.

⁹ ΑΔ 37 (1982), B1, 23-24.

¹⁰ Jr. Shear, *The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1989-1993*, *Hesperia* 66 (1997), 509-512; ΑΔ 46 (1991), B1, 28-29; ΑΔ 52 (1997), B1, 43-44; ΑΔ 60 (2005), 72; ΑΔ 63 (2008), B1, 96; J. McK II Camp, *Excavations in the Athenian Agora: 2002-2007*, *Hesperia* 76 (2007), 638; T.L.R. Di Cesare, *Le terme romane*, *Topografia di Atene. Sviluppo urbano e monumenti dalle origini al III secolo d.C.*, Tomo 1, Acropoli – Areopago – Tra Acropoli e Pnice, ed. E. Greco, (Paestum 2010) 973-974.

¹¹ ΑΔ 56-59 (2001-2004), B1, 196.

¹² Υβ. Νικολοπούλου, *Τοπογραφικά Αθηνών*, *ΑΑΑ* 4 (1971), 7-8; ΑΔ 31 (1976), B1, 24-26; ΑΔ 27 (1972), B1, 23-27.

¹³ Jr. Shear, *The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1989-1993*, *Hesperia* 66 (1997), 509, footnote 21.

¹⁴ E. Vanderpool, I. Θρεψιάδης, *Προς τους Ερμαίς. Investigations at Nos 7-9 Theseion Street*, Athens, ΑΔ 18 (1963), A, 99-103.

from the Eriai Gate and almost coincides with the modern Leōkoriou str.¹⁵. The key position of the bath along with the dozens of *tegulae mammatae*¹⁶ found in the excavation, lead to the reasonable assumption that this was a public structure. The two roads served crowds of people every day. The bath facility in question was there to serve the inhabitants of the surrounding areas, but its main function should be associated with the travelers who entered or exited from Dipylon and Eriai Gate.

In Lepeniōtou str. - at numbers 3 and 5 to 8 - few remains of a bath facility were found. In four different excavations, part of a hypocaust, conduits, cisterns and walls dating back to the Late Roman period were found¹⁷. The scarce findings, as well as the vague dating in the Late Roman years by the excavators, do not allow for any conclusions, apart from the observation that the remains were found less than 20m from the street that connected the city center with the Eriai Gate. The existing data prevent speculation on the bath's lifetime.

The four roman bath facilities, which were active in the Early Byzantine period, were situated in the so-called Industrial District; in the space between the two major roads of the west Athens; the Panathenaic Way and Melitē str. with a horizontal distance between them of less than a kilometer¹⁸.

The Southwest Bath of the Agora (Bath V¹⁹) was a large bath complex with an area of 825sq.m. The construction of the bath is dated in the 1st c. AD and until the end of its life the outline of the building did not change. The bath was rebuilt/ renovated in the 2nd c. AD and it was completely destroyed during the Herulian invasion. The facility was reopened in the mid-4th c. AD and it was active until its final destruction in the late 6th c. AD. The bath was classified as public building by the excavators and its size, along with its position in the urban fabric, leave no room for doubt²⁰.

The facility was located at the corner created by the intersecting streets of Areopagus and Piraeus, which were in use when the Roman building was constructed²¹. In fact, until the 2nd c. AD the entrance to the bath was on the street

¹⁵ The Panathenaic Way was in use until the 7th c. AD, see Τραυλός, *op.cit.*, 150. The ancient street on the axis of the modern Leōkoriou Street was active until the 6th c. AD, see Λ. Χιώτη, *Η επιδρομή των Ερούλων στην Αθήνα (267μ.Χ.). Συμβολή στη μελέτη των επιπτώσεων της επιδρομής και της ανασυγκρότησης της πόλης έως τα τέλη του 4ου αιώνα*, διδακτορική διατριβή, Αθήνα 2018, 279.

¹⁶ ΑΔ 56-59 (2001-2004), Β1, 196.

¹⁷ ΑΔ 23 (1968), Β1, 71; ΑΔ 30 (1975), Β1, 24-25; ΑΔ 56-59 (2001-2004), Β1, 269; ΑΔ 61 (2006), Β1, 91.

¹⁸ In the same area the Bath in the Palace of Giants (Bath T) was also found, see footnote 3.

¹⁹ The classification of John Travlos is followed, see Travlos, *op.cit.*, 181.

²⁰ Jr.T.I. Shear, *The Athenian Agora. Excavation of 1968*, Hesperia 38.3 (1969), 382-417; Frantz, *op.cit.*, 32-33, 120; H. Manderscheid, *Bibliographie zum romischen Badewesen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der öffentlichen Thermen*, München 1988, 67; Nielsen, *op.cit.*, C. 254.

²¹ Young, *op.cit.*, 284. The latest road level of Piraeus str. dates back to the Roman era, see *ibid.*, 149-160. The latest road level found in Areopagus str. dates back to the 4th c. BC, however, the orientation of the Roman houses found next to the road and the absence of any vertical wall leads to the conclusion that it was in use in Roman times, see *ibid.*, 145-149.

leading to the Piraeus Gate²². Additionally, the eastern rooms are aligned with Areopagus Street, which means that the road was still in use when the bath was built. The two roads ceased to function in Roman times and perhaps that is why, when the bath was rebuilt in the 2nd c. AD, the entrance was moved to the south.

Even when Areopagus and Piraeus Streets were suspended for wheeled traffic, the bath continued to be in a strategic position in relation to the city's road network, as it was only a few meters away from Melitē Street, which became one of the two main roads in the west side of the city, and from South Street, which led to the city center. According to the data of the time, men and women did not bath at the same time and such a large facility could have functioned as a double bath with separate chambers for men and women; however, the available data do not allow such a hypothesis. What can be safely asserted is that the bath complex served both passers-by - visitors, travelers, traders - and residents of the area, as in the 6th c. AD there was a residential insula in the area from which House C survives²³.

At the end of the 2nd or at the beginning of the 3rd c. AD, in parallel with Bath V, the East Bath (Bath W) was built on the east side of the ancient Street of the Marble Workers. The bath had a total area of 160sqm and has been classified as public by the excavation team²⁴. Also this building was completely destroyed during the Herulian invasion, but it was rebuilt in a short period of time and remained in use - with some changes over the centuries - in the 4th and in the 5th c. AD²⁵.

During the same period, at the end of the 3rd c. AD, two more bath complexes were constructed in the so-called Industrial District of Athens; one north (Bath X) of the reconstructed Bath W and one east (Bath U) of it.

The West Bath (Bath X) was built on the west side of the ancient Street of the Marble Workers. The facility, which is preserved at the foundation level, was in use in the 4th and in the 5th c. AD²⁶. The question that arises is: what has changed in the area so that there was a need for two public baths so close to one another?

The proximity between the two baths and the smaller scale of Bath X (area of 60sqm), along with the time of its construction led researchers to the interpretation that after the prevalence of Christianity it became necessary to separate the two sexes and therefore a smaller bath was constructed to serve

This conclusion is supported by the alignment of the eastern rooms of the bath with the street.

²² Χιώτη, *op.cit.*, αρ. κατ. Γ132.

²³ T. Leslie & Jr. Shear, *The Athenian Agora: Excavations of 1970*, Hesperia 40.3 (1971), 266-270; Frantz, *op.cit.*, 87-90.

²⁴ T.L. Shear, *The Campaign of 1939*, Hesperia 9 (1940), 301; H. Thompson, *The excavation of the Athenian Agora twelfth season: 1947*, Hesperia 17 (1948), 169; Young, *op.cit.*, 279-282; I. Travlos, *op.cit.*, 181; Frantz, *op.cit.*, 30-31; Nielsen, *op.cit.*, C. 257; F. Longo, *Le Terme Sud-Ovest e gli altri impianti termali dell'Areopago*, Topografia di Atene. Sviluppo urbano e monumenti dalle origini al III secolo d.C., Tomo 1, Acropoli - Areopago - Tra Acropoli e Pnice, ed. E. Greco, (Paestum 2010), 242-244.

²⁵ Young, *op.cit.*, 183.

²⁶ *ibid.*, 279-283; Thompson, *op.cit.*, 169; Travlos, *op.cit.*, 181; Frantz, *op.cit.*, 30-31; Nielsen, *op.cit.*, C. 259; Longo, *op.cit.*, 242-244.

women²⁷, who lived in the area or visited Athens and arrived in the city via Melitē Street, which in the Early Byzantine era had become one of the main roads of the city.

In the Late Roman period, the passage of wheeled vehicles on Areopagus and Marble Workers streets stopped and gradually the two roads ceased to function. The result was that all the traffic of wheeled vehicles, coming from Dipylon and Peiraic Gate heading to southwest Athens, was accumulated in Melitē Street²⁸, which became an extremely busy road. The two baths, which were located less than 200m from the street, continued to operate in the 5th c. AD, serving the users of the road and the inhabitants of the area.

The second bath - Bath U - was a compact construction with an area of 160sqm. The date of construction of the building raised controversy. Travlos claimed that it was built in the 2nd c. AD, while Frantz considered it to be a Late Roman bath of the late 3rd or early 4th c. AD. The existence of the bath in the 5th c. AD is not disputed, but Frantz considered that it was active also in the 6th c. AD as well²⁹.

Bath U was located on the south side of the South Road³⁰, which probably intersected to the east with the Panathenaic Way leading to the Roman Forum northwards and to Acropolis southwards. In addition, at a distance of less than 200m to the west passed the busy Melitē str., which was in use until the Early Byzantine period.

Although the excavators did not classify the bath as public, such a classification could be justified considering that on the one hand it is located near a residential zone, in which no domestic baths were found, and on the other hand it is located on vitally important roads of the Early Byzantine period. The size of the bath could also contribute to the above classification, as during the Byzantine period the size of public bath complexes in the Illyricum Province varied from 45sq.m to 500sqm³¹.

Conclusions

In early Roman times there were four public baths in the west part of the city, two between Piraeus and Melitē streets (bath in Amfiktyonos str; bath in Herakleidōn str.); one in the so-called Industrial District of Athens (Bath V) and one in the Ancient Agora of Athens. The last two of them continued to operate in the 3rd c. AD, along with the newly established Bath W, while all of them were out of service by 267 AD.

After the invasion of the Heruli, at the end of the 3rd or at the beginning of 4th c. AD, the western section of Athens was served by the Bath in the Ancient Agora, the Bath W and the newly established Bath X and Bath U in the so-

²⁷ Young, *op.cit.*, 279.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 167-168.

²⁹ Travlos, *op.cit.*, 181; Frantz, *op.cit.*, 31-32; W. Dörpfeld, *Funde*, AM 22 (1897), 478; Nielsen, *op.cit.*, C258; F. Longo, *Le Terme*, Topografia di Atene. Sviluppo urbano e monumenti dalle origini al III secolo d.C., Tomo 1, Acropoli – Areopago – Tra Acropoli e Piraeus, ed. E. Greco, (Paestum 2010), 232.

³⁰ Young, *op.cit.*, 146, pl. 6, fig. 3; Τραυλός, *op.cit.*, 95, fig. 51 & pl. 8.

³¹ Arvanitidou, *op.cit.*, 23.

called Industrial District, while in the middle of the century Bath V was rebuilt. Thus, in the middle of the 4th c. AD, the west section was served by five bath complexes, serving different needs of the city and different groups of people.

In the 5th c. AD, the four baths found between Melitē Street and the Panathinaic Way continued to operate with certainty, serving the users of the adjacent streets and the inhabitants of the area. Christianity was already established in Athenian society and therefore the corresponding moral principles were applied, which gradually influenced the way the baths were used. The idea of the naked body changed and people turned to private bathing procedure and of course the separation of men and women during bathing. Thus, the two sexes were served by different bathing complexes or, when this option was not available, they were served at different times. This case can be detected, but cannot be proven, in the case of Bath W and Bath X.

The prevalence of Christianity and its moral values is clearly reflected in the number of active bath complexes. In the 6th c. AD, the west section of Athens was served by two public bath complexes in the Industrial District; Bath V and Bath U. The two bath complexes were located on the horizontal road - the South Road and its extension - leading to the city center, serving the users of the roads, but also the inhabitants of the residential *insula* that existed in the area during 6th c. AD.

According to the above, it seems that Athens, despite the difficulties it faced after the external attacks, remained a strong city, which attracted many people. The main attraction was the Philosophical Schools, which seem to have been strong until the 5th c. AD. The Late Roman and Early Byzantine baths were located near main streets that served the entrances and exits of the city. The existence of so many public baths - which exceeded the needs of the inhabitants of the area - proves the large flow of people into the city on a daily basis.

The Late Roman Athens was a lively and active city with a vibrant commercial and social life. The city continued to function unhindered during 5th c. AD, at the beginning of which it seems that at least four of the five baths of the previous period continued to operate. However, the prevalence of Christianity began to have an impact on the social life of the city. The flow of people seems to have slowly stopped as the society became Christianized. Christianity brought new customs and new moral rules. However, the city would in any case have to provide public baths to serve the needs of the residents who could not financially support the construction of a private bath³². The two remaining baths in the west section served this purpose.

³² The same applies to other large cities of the Empire, such as Thessaloniki, see I.P. Arvanitidou, *Public Baths in the Early Byzantine Thessaloniki*, Lepetymnos. Studies in Archaeology and Art in memory of Georgios Gounaris. Late Roman, Byzantine, Postbyzantine period, eds. Ath. Semoglou, I.P. Arvanitidou, Em.G. Gounari, (Thessaloniki 2018), 25-39.

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РИМСКА, КАСНОРИМСКА И РАНОВИЗАНТИЈСКА БАЊА У ЗАПАДНОМ ДЕЛУ АТИНЕ

Пажња истраживача дуги низ година била је усмерена на славно доба Атине; класичан период. Дакле, овај је био најбоље проучаван период у историји Атине. Дуги низ година је преовладало мишљење да је Атина после римске ере пропала и да је била мали провинцијски град. Међутим, студије последњих година показале су да је Атина остала важан, снажно утврђен град са значајано духовно средиште.

У граду Атине, унутар Темистоклеовог зида, откопани су или откривени остаци више од четрдесет пет купатила. Тридесет пет купатила су биле римске грађевине, а остале су изграђене у византијско доба. У рановизантијском периоду наставило је са радом деветнаест римских бања, а у истом периоду је изграђено још девет. Тако су пронађена укупно двадесет осам јавна и приватна купатила која су била активна у рановизантијском периоду. Међутим, ово је нормалан тренд, ако се узме у обзир да је после херулске инвазије, 267. године, Атина претрпела демографску и урбану катастрофу. Град се постепено враћао свом нормалном ритму и од IV века дат је нови подстицај друштвеном животу града, углавном као резултат рада филозофских школа. Нови почетак огледа се у изградњи нових купатила.

Конвенционално дефинисан, за потребе ове студије, западни део је омеђен западно од Темистоклијевског зида; на исток од постхерулијанског зида; на северу улицом која почиње од капије Ериаи и скоро се поклапа са модерном улицом Леокориоу а на југу уз брдо Ареопаг. У западном делу града ископано је девет римских, касно-римских и рановизантијских купатила. Све зграде су биле римске структуре; осим Купатило Т – палата дивова – која датира из V века и према најновијим истраживањима био је седиште царског чиновника - можда гувернера Атине.

У рано римско доба постојала су четири јавна купатила у западном делу града, два између улица Пиреј и Мелите; један у такозваном индустријском округу Атине (Купатило V) и један у античкој Агори Атине. Последње две од њих наставиле су са радом у III веку, заједно са новооснованом бањом W, док су сви били ван употребе до 267.

После инвазије Херула (267), крајем III или почетком IV века, западни део Атине је опслуживало Купатило у Древној Агори, Купатило W и новоосновано Купатило X и Купатило U у такозваном индустријском округу, док је средином века Купатило V поново изграђено. Тако је средином IV века, западни део је опслуживало пет купалишних комплекса, који су служили различитим потребама града и различитим групама људи.

У V веку, четири купатила пронађена између улице Мелите и Панатинаског пута наставила су да раде служећи житељима суседних улица и становницима тог подручја. Хришћанство је већ било успостављено у атинском друштву и стога су примењена одговарајућа морална начела, која су постепено утицала на начин коришћења купатила. Идеја о голом телу се променила и људи су се окренули приватном купању и наравно раздвајању мушкараца и жена током купања. Дакле, оба пола опслужују различити купалишни комплекси или, када ова опција није била доступна, служе у различито време. Овај случај се може открити, али се не може доказати, у случају Купатило W и Купатило X.

Распрострањеност хришћанства и његових моралних вредности јасно се огледа у броју активних купалишних комплекса. У VI веку, западни део Атине опслужују два комплекса јавних купатила у индустријском округу - Купатило V и Купатило U. Два купалишта налазила су се на хоризонталном путу - Јужном путу и његовом продужетку - који води ка центру града, опслужујући кориснике путева, али и становнике стамбене инсуре која је постојала на том подручју током VI в.

Према наведеном, чини се да је Атина, упркос тешкоћама са којима се суочила после спољних напада, остала снажан град, који је привлачио многе људе. Касноримска Атина је била живахан и активан град са живахним комерцијалним и друштвеним

животом. У V веку ток људи као да је полако стао како се друштво христијанизује. Међутим, град би у сваком случају морао да обезбеди јавна купатила за потребе становника који нису могли финансијски да подрже изградњу приватног купатила. Два преостала купатила у западном делу служила су овој сврси.