

F. Yegül, *Bathing in the Roman World*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 256 + xiii, 103 plans, maps, and B&W photographs. ISBN 978-0-521-54962-2.

Fikret Yegül is one of the world's leading experts on Roman baths. His 1992 study, *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*, remains fundamental, and his numerous articles and chapters on the subject brim with erudition and insight. This new book offers a look at the “big picture” of the Roman bath as a social and cultural institution, as an architectural form and a technological wonder, and as an ancient tradition that has enjoyed a prolonged *Nachleben* in Europe and the Middle East stretching down to the present. The book is expressly aimed at undergraduate and graduate students, so that, as a work of synthesis, there is less of interest for the specialist.

The book falls into three parts: the four opening chapters introduce the reader to the bath and its place in Roman culture, five chapters (5–9) cover the technology and architecture of the baths, and three closing (10–12) chapters chart the post-Classical history of bathing in European and Islamic culture. The opening chapters are infused with Y.'s enthusiasm for the subject and set the stage for what comes next. He discusses the bathing ritual, accounts for the popularity of bathing among the Romans, investigates who got to use the facilities (everyone, it seems), and surveys the curmudgeonly complaints of moralizing critics of Roman bathing culture. All this is well done and clearly presented.

My main disagreement with Y. here is over the allegedly “democratic” nature of the bathing environment, a view Y. (and others) has voiced in his prior work, and which remains widely held. My own take on the matter is that the baths were not at all “democratic” or “levelling,” since the evidence is very clear that privileged bathers sought to reinforce their status in a wide variety of ways as they bathed, to the extent that *arrivisti* strove to establish their newfound status precisely by extravagant display in the bathhouse (see G. Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World* [Ann Arbor, 1999], 206–19). Here Y. acknowledges the culture of social display within the bathhouse but redefines “democratic” to mean the mere *mixing* of people of different classes that lends an *illusion* of levelling, no matter how unequal the social reality may be. I find it telling that we do not read in the ancient sources clear enunciations of a principle of egalitarianism for bathing (with the exception of the peculiar Clement of Alexandria at *Paid.* 3.47.3) in the same we do for, say, dining (on which, see, e.g., Cic. *Fam.* 9.24.3 or Pliny *Ep.* 2.6). That is to say, there is little solid evidence that the baths were seen or portrayed as “democratic” places by the very people who used them.

The central five chapters on technology and architecture occupy the bulk of the text (140 of the book's 256 pages). This material is Y.'s home turf, and readers will notice a significant overlap with the material covered in more detail in his *Baths and Bathing in Classical Antiquity*. The same topics are covered — the origins and development of the bath, heating and hydraulics, and the architectural forms of baths in North Africa and Asia Minor — and are elucidated with much the same analysis, suite of sites (often

treated in the same order), and even illustrations from that prior work. Y.'s discussion of the origins of Roman baths is balanced and sensible, though his maintenance of the commonly repeated view that *thermae* were distinguished from *balneae* by scale (*thermae* were larger) and ownership (public rather than private) rests on shaky evidentiary ground (see the ancient sources discussed in my *Bathing in Public*, 14–19).

The most interesting section of the book, in this reviewer's mind, was the closing three chapters on Byzantine, Islamic, and post-Classical bathing culture. This is a matter in need of fuller investigation, and Y. shows the way forward. The decline of Roman baths in the West in the sixth century is paralleled by their continuance and transformation in the eastern empire. Y. identifies new elements — non-palaestral, porticoed courtyards and large multipurpose central halls serving social and ceremonial functions; the tripartite neighborhood conglomerate of church/mansion/bath in Constantinople; or the blurring of distinctions between public and private use — and charts their seamless transference to classic Islamic culture. This stands in depressing contrast to the decline of Western European standards of cleanliness that culminated in a sharp aversion to bathing in water in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century, at least among the genteel classes. The book concludes with a brief consideration of the rediscovery of the pleasures of bathing in the nineteenth century, both in public swimming pools and “Oriental” Turkish baths.

The book is handsomely produced and lavishly illustrated (in black and white). There are some typos and errors, e.g., missing prepositions, punctuation errors, in-text references to images of the wrong baths (such as figs. 17 and 19), an untraceable parenthetical reference on p. 190, or an unfortunate typo that expands the area of the Baths of Caracalla tenfold on p. 110 (i.e., read “30 acres “ for “300 acres”). More unfortunate still is the lack of specific citation. The omission is particularly regrettable in those passages where Y. presents very recent and important material, such as the discovery of the spa-city of Allianoi in Asia Minor or the very early public baths at Fregellae (pp. 50–55). To find the relevant studies, the reader has to trawl through the thirteen-page select bibliography, which just lists further readings without any guidance. Surely the target undergraduate could do with more help than this — if not notes and citations, then at least some annotation by Y. in the bibliography or the grouping of entries under subject headings. I noted a couple of surprising lacunae in the bibliography: Y. Thébert's monumental study of North African baths (*Thermae romaines d'Afrique du Nord et leur contexte méditerranéen: études d'histoire et d'archéologie* [Rome, 2003]) or Y. Hirschfeld's full publication of the baths at Hammat Gader in Israel (*The Roman Baths of Hammat Gader: Final Report* [Jerusalem, 1997]), rather than the preliminary report from 1981, cited here. Some odd editorial choices were made in the book's production: *balneae* is italicized throughout, but not *thermae*, and Y.'s insightful discussion of Lucian's (possibly fictive) Baths of Hippias (pp. 74–79) makes no use of the room key in the attendant plan. There are also some slips in the Latin here and there (*follies* for *follis* on p. 15, *scriptora* for *scriptores* on p. 25, or *aquuis* for *aquis* on p. 99).

These criticisms aside, Y. is to be heartily congratulated for producing a very clear and useful introduction to Roman baths for the target student audience, who will benefit greatly from reading it.

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