Staging Bathing in *Cena Trimalchionis*

(Pet. Sat. 72 – 73)

Kristian Reinfjord

The present article seeks a broader understanding of Roman domestic baths, as found in the Pompeian domus through an interpretation of written and archaeological sources. A wide range of sources is preserved from the Mediterranean world, and Classical archaeology has a long tradition in taking advantage of both written and material sources. The Cena Trimalchionis written by Petronius Arbiter in the first century AD describes a dinner ritual staged in the private home of a Roman new rich aristocrat. As part of the dinner ritual a bath scene is taking place. Several Roman houses from Pompeii shows such domestic baths. A study of the bathing and placements of the baths, as described by Petronius according to the preserved archaeological remains of the domus, give a broader insight into the social roles of Roman domestic bathing in general, and shows how both written and material sources can be used in harmony.

Introduction

The scope with this article is to present how identifiable harmony between historical and written sources facilitates a fuller interpretation of Roman private bath suites in the late republic (Hodder 1982, pp. 139-147; Morris 2000, pp. 7-8). I believe that a good solution is to use the written source of The Cena Trimalchionis (Trimalchio's Dinner), written by Petronius Arbiter, as a cultural frame or background that will help to determine a set of rules that regulated the actions of bathing Romans as we see them in a selection of baths recorded in material evidence of the Pompeian domus. I will attempt to reconstruct the ritual of bathing in the private sphere and the social function of these baths based on the written and archaeological sources in harmony. Interpretations of Roman bathing should involve both written and material sources, especially when written descriptions of social roles of bathing and the actual bath suites are preserved. A main challenge in historical archaeology is to define the analogical

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value of historical information in the interpretation of archaeological remains (Andrén 1998, p. 156). Written source are valuable when presenting sets of values, beliefs and attitudes in past societies. When taking into account that we deal with literary versions of past, a use of such texts would be to acknowledge their author's respect of experiences and tradition for texts to have functioned as active ideological tools in the past. These versions of past reality can provide insights into cognitive processes of peoples from the past and are priceless sources for our understanding of archaeological records and the historical contexts that facilitated them.

Social bathing in the Roman republic

Bathing in the Roman world was a cultural aspect which integrated all layers of society; however, bathing for the Romans went far beyond the functional and hygienic necessities of washing (Brödner 1983; DeLaine et.al. 1999; Fagan 1999; Heinz 1983; Nielsen 1990; Pasquinucci 1993; Yegül 1992; 2010). It was a personal regeneration and a deeply rooted cultural and social habit. The fact that bathing was seen as such an important cultural activity in Rome and her colonies, make the baths a potential source of information on Roman social life and structures. The impressive development of baths and bathing in the Roman Empire was, however, not so much the result of the utilitarian services offered, as the social pleasures that could be obtained. The baths created an arena for social interactions, which were stimulated by architectonical devises, creating different experiences. The balnea are more common, but private houses also had their own bath suites, being the topic of the present paper. Roman private bathing should be seen as a ritual and could be compared to the Finish sauna tradition (Fagan 1999, p. 2; Yegül 2010, p. 1). The sauna ritual is complex and involves perspiration, sponging and whisking with birch leaves. Often drinks and food is consumed between bathing and bouts in the sauna. The ritual is preferred done with family members or friends, and the whole experience is based on bathing in company with others, even if the bath is taken within a private setting. Business conferences and even government meetings can convene within the sauna (Bremer & Raevuori 1986, pp. 153-161; Fagan 1999, p. 2; Yegül 2010, p. 1). Other ethnographic parallels to Roman private bathing are found in the Japanese sento and the Islamic hammam (Fagan 1999, p. 1; Yegül 2010, p. 1).

Roman baths should be seen as sociological structures of Roman society, and the rituals performed within them could be connected with the material remains of the baths. Both rituals of bathing and empirical sources of the baths are seen to-

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gether as they form a duality, each a product of the other. The sociologist Anthony Giddens (1984, p. 25) argues that social structures and individual lives should not be seen as a dichotomy. Human actions and structural restraints have a relationship of mutual dependency: social structures constitute the framework for social agents and their actions, providing a range of appropriate behaviours in their daily activities (Giddens 1984, p. 60). These encounters depend upon the spatiality of the body: its positioning, gestures, dress and relationship to others. The awareness and the experience of the body lie at the centre of human consciousness, and the familiarity surrounding these encounters leads to a sense of ontological security (Giddens 1984, pp. 64-68).

It is argued that this performance intentionally or unintentionally incorporates the spatial setting and associated material, drawing upon not only their function, but also any symbolic meaning (Goffman 1959, pp. 34-36). In this way, the architectural remains of the past are part of human action and human experience. Through architecture we understand both our own and other people's place within a community. The buildings which form the archaeological material are implicated in the maintenance of identity as the settings within which these performances are enacted (Goffman 1959, pp. 32-34). Buildings are within these frames seen as being bound up in the ongoing maintenance of distinctions and connection between private and public spaces. These social theories provide a powerful way of understanding the transformation of human action and interaction materialized in the archaeological record, and how these feed into the reproduction of societies.

Bathing was carried out as a part of the Roman day routine, an occupied a significant part of the afternoon. As bathing where carried out as social act more than just getting clean, both eating, exercise and meals could take place in the bath. Such activities required larger spaces and several rooms. Therefore, the Roman domestic baths should not be mixed with our bath rooms, used for shower, washing and make up. Essential to the bath ritual was, according to Pliny the Younger as we can read in one of his Letters: "I'm oiled, I take my exercise, I have my bath" (Pliny, Letters, 9.36). Bathing was also done in a distinct order, requiring movement from cold to hot, through intercommunicating sections of rooms with varying temperatures (Yegül 2010, p. 17).

The Roman domestic bath most often consisted of three different rooms to maintain the varying temperatures: frigidarium, tepidarium, and caldarium, but could also include other rooms as dressing rooms and sweat baths. Rooms are labeled according to the heat which

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could be achieved within them. The two bath rooms found in every Pompeian bath facility are the tepidarium and the caldarium. These rooms are, in most houses, small vaulted cabinets, connected with each other through low and narrow entrances, where the caldarium is the inner room. These rooms could contain bath tubs or large bowls for washing. In the chosen examples there are no sign of doors or devices for hanging curtains dividing the rooms by closing the entrances. Neither are there doors or devices for separating the bath from other connecting rooms in the house. The caldarium seems to be the most central and important room, reflected both in heating devises, decoration, placement, and size. The caldarium is always larger than the tepidarium. Often, bath suites also contained swimming pools located in a garden area or a separate room connected to the bath suite. Inside the bath, pools, tubs, benches and other bath equipment is found.

Bathing in Trimalchio's new money

The Dinner of Trimalchio is the sixth chapter out of thirteen, forming the book Satyricon by Petronius Arbiter. It is also the best preserved part of the Satyricon (Niall 1990, p. 50). Written in the age of Nero, in the early sixties AD, the source describes a dinner ritual held by the rich freedman Trimalchio, where focus is placed on his conspicuous consumption to impress his guests. The narrative is staged in his private home, a domus, where we follow two dinner guests Encolpius and his boy-friend Giton, taking place and experiencing the dinner. Precise descriptions of the domus environment are given, such as wall paintings at the entrance, the different courses served, and the gossip around the table. The social milieu described in the book has attracted great attention for its realism, of which the classic discussion is of Erich Auerbach (1953, pp. 24-33). Both in the Vulgar Latin of the freedmen's speeches and the details of their business lives and amusements have all been carefully studied by Petronius (Niall 1990, p. 51). It is therefore reasonable to believe that the physical environments of the dinner and bath, and the actual bathing session are correct according to the actual habits of Roman bathing. Also the placements of the baths seem to match the archaeological record.

Comparisons between Petronius's text and relevant archaeological material are earlier done, for instance by Valerie M. Hope (2009) showing the author's focus on keeping the environmental context of the story close to Roman reality. Hope has shown close relationships between Roman funeral traditions, actual tombs and epitaphs of Roman freedmen and Trimalchio's tomb as described in the text. Being one of few literary Ancient accounts of Roman

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tombs, Trimalchio's tomb is a key to understanding the many tombs witnessed in the archaeological material. The written source therefore provides insights into relationships between the rational between pre-death planning of monuments and about processes of self-presentation (Hope 2009, p. 159). Even though there is a danger that few literary sources becomes too influential, here in understanding tombs, the sources is valuable in understanding thoughts and motivations behind archaeological remains. Used with precautions Trimalchio's dinner can give valuable insights, also to the role of private baths of the republican domus.

In Trimalchio's dinner the role of the domus in promoting the owner is stressed. The main characters describe Trimalchio as a fool spending so much money on luxury, but an underlying admiration is sensed. The book is satirical and should be read as a critique and parody of the luxuria and money spending in Roman aristocratic life in the republic and early empire. The author of Satyricon, Petronius Arbiter, is thought to be the same as Arbiter elegantiae being an advisor at Nero's court. Tacitus (Tac.Ann. 16.18) describes Petronius as a witty, sophisticated person, with insights into Aristocratic lifestyle of the republic and early empire. Being present at the court of Nero, Petronius had first-hand experience with lush life behaviour, making him a reliable source to actions within the Roman domus. Both source categories are dated within a short time span, where the written source dates to around 60 AD, and the private bath suites dates to BC 40 – 25.

As a part of the dinner, Trimalchio invites his guests to his private bath suite. Petronius describes the bath, here in the translation of P.G. Walsh. Quote: "the bath house was narrow, shaped like a cold water tank (…)". According to their placement, the baths are reached through a colonnade, indicating its placement next to a peristyle. The ritual takes place within the domus of Trimalchio, in the text mentioned as "a novel labyrinth" (Pet.Sat. 72). It is therefore reasonable to resemble the setting in the text with the houses and bath suites in Pompeii. As a part of Trimalchio's dinner, bathing takes place between courses to make room for more food, and dispel drunkenness. Bathing is in Trimalchio's dinner done together with the house owner, who is bragging about his possibility to, quote: "take a bath without being jostled" (Pet.Sat. 73).

The text on the actions taking place in the bath suite of Trimalchio describes a laid back atmosphere where the guests act as being in a public bath. It is not a tense atmosphere, but a sphere where gusts relax as they were in their own home. Quote: "while Trimalchio was singing, the guests were chasing round the

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bath-tub, holding hands, tickling each other, and making a tremendous din; others with their hands tied behind them were trying to pick up rings from the floor, or were on their knees bending their necks backward and touching the tips of their toes. While they were amusing themselves, we got down into the tub which was kept at the right temperature for Trimalchio" (Pet.Sat. 73, after P.G. Walsh 1996, pp. 61-62). After the bath ritual was finished the guests were conducted into a second dining-room. The dinner of Trimalchio give a glimpse into the domestic dinner ritual and seems to collide well with the archaeological sources on public spheres within the domus.

The Communicating Roman Domus

Roman domestic baths are found within the sphere of the domus, the main private architecture used by aristocrats in the Roman republic. The domus can be seen as an expression of the owner's social identity, and as such it was instrumental both in shaping and maintaining it. Bettina Bergman (1994, p. 225) sees the domus as "an extension of the self". The Roman house was partly public, and the owner would have been assessed on the basis of it. It was in the house that the paterfamilias, the house owner, received his guests, and maintained his business and his patron/client relationships. The house generated and communicated status on behalf of the owner, and discussions on the domus has proposed a public use of every room in the house (Allison 2004, pp. 6-8; Anguissola 2010; Dickmann 1999; Grahame 1998, 2000; Hales 2003, p. 133; Laurence & Wallace-Hadrill 1997; Leach 2004, pp. 1-54; Wallace-Hadrill 1994, pp. 5, 47; 2007). A central question is how much personal involvement the homeowner had in the choice of rooms/layout, and whether design and subject matter were chosen randomly, in accordance with taste and fashion, or on the basis of conscious ideological perceptions. It is assumed that the Romans took an active role in designing their houses. The general statement by Anthony Giddens shows that: "[h]uman actors are not only able to monitor their activities and those of others in the regularity of day-to-day conduct; they are also able to "monitor the monitoring"", and that they understand what they do as they do it" (Giddens 1984, p. 29). This applies to the Roman world and signifies that the house owner was able to observe his own and other's reactions to the architectural and decorative layout of the domus, and that he was able to put this observation into practice. It's also a close relationship between the architectural entity of the domus and the activity that went on within it (Wallace-Hadrill 1988, p. 45). Each room served as a part of the general use of the house as a grand reception area of guests.

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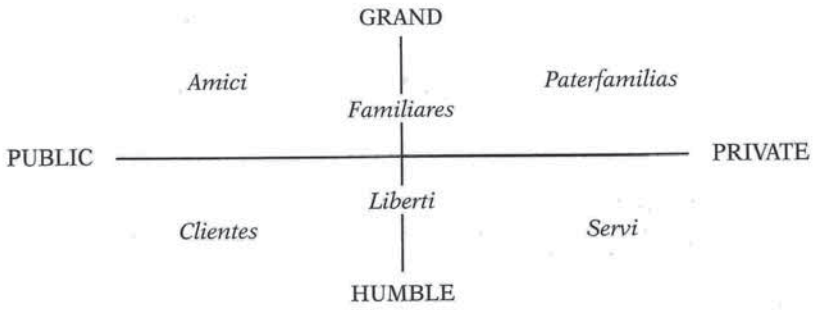

Figure 1. Wallace-Hadrill's cross-axis diagram shows the levels of social encounters established by separating the public spaces in the house from the private ones. The diagram also shows which people who frequent the different spheres (After Wallace-Hadrill 1994, p. 38).

In the domus, private areas are those into which there is no possible entrance except by invitation, for instance like cubicula (bed rooms) or triclinia (dinner rooms). Public areas are those where uninvited members of the public may enter by right, that is, vestibules, some gardens or peristyles, and any rooms that may perform this sort of function. The architect Vitruvius (De.Arch. 6.5.1) writes in the age of Augustus that people of moderate income do not need magnificent rooms such as vestibules, atria or triclinia. Because they perform their duties by visiting others, rather than making their duties having others making rounds visiting them. Vitruvius explains how the domus was divided between public and private areas in Antiquity, making a starting point for modern scholars investigating distinctions of private had public in Roman society. With Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (1988; 1994) the division between private/public in the domus was put into a theoretical framework.

The framework of Wallace-Hadrill is based on a cross-axis diagram (fig. 1) in which the levels of social encounters could be established by separating the public spaces in the house from the private ones, and grandly decorated rooms from the humble ones. Wallace-Hadrill's (1994, p. 38) figure illustrates the division of the house into two main spheres in accordance with grandeur and accessibility. The diagram also shows what kind of people who engaged with the different spheres, and has shown a useful approach in understanding the social use of the Roman domus (e g. Brandt 2004). It is therefore interesting to sort out the placements of the bath suites within the houses. It is important to which type of rooms they are connected, and in which sphere of the house the baths are placed. In the Vesuvian city of Pompeii several houses are preserved showing wall paintings and mosaics actively used by each house owner to provoke

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certain functions and reactions to each room. Each room of the domus was decorated and furnished to evoke certain feelings (Wallace-Hadrill 1994). Therefore, a study of decoration will also provide clues of private and public and contribute to a humble or grand placement in the cross-axis diagram

Placement of Domestic bath suites in Pompeii

16 private baths are found in private houses throughout the city of Pompeii: Casa del Criptoportico (I, 6, 2), Casa di Paquius Proculus (I, 7, 1), Casa dell' Efebo (I, 7, 10), Casa del Menandro (I 10, 4), Casa di Trebius Valens (III, 2, 1), Casa del Torello (V, 1, 7), Casa delle Nozze d' Argento (V, 2, 1), Casa del Laberinto (VI, 11, 8-10), Casa del Fauno (VI, 12, 2), Casa del Bracciale d'Oro (VI, 17, 42-44), Casa di Caesius Blandus (VII, 1, 40), Casa di Cinque Scheletri (VII, 14, 9), Casa di Marinaio (VII, 15, 1.2.15), Casa di Fabius Rufus (VII, 16, 17.20-22), Casa del Centenario (IX, 8, 3-7), Casa di M. Obellius Firmus (IX, 14, 2-4), Casa di Guiseppe II (VIII, 2, 39). Also, two villas outside the city walls, the Villa dei Misteri and the Villa di Diomedes, are equipped with domestic baths. This article focuses on a sample of four of the larger bath suites found in the domus of Pompeii, here understood as resembling public baths. It is proposed that they also serve some of the same social functions as the public baths. These private bath suites are mainly dated to the Late Republic, but were later often redecorated and changed. Dating is often seen in the wall decorations, in Pompeii differentiated into the four styles, where the second style dates to the Late Republic (40 – 25 BC). The third style is introduced in the age of Augustus. My empirical evidence is chosen from a selection of baths located in the Pompeian domus. This is a less studied corpus of evidence. Even though domestic baths are briefly mentioned in the general literature of Roman baths and bathing, few in depth studies are done on the private baths of Pompeii (De Haan 1993, 1994, 1996, 2010; Fabricotti 1976; Mygind 1918, 1924; Parslow 1989). I here intend to show a representative selection of five houses and their placement within the domus, chosen due to state of preservation and different placement within the houses.

The first house in my sample, the Casa delle Nozze d' Argento (5, ii, 1) is one of the larger and wealthier houses in Pompeii, and the bath rooms correspond with the house in that matter (Beyen 1960, pp. 43-71; De Haan 2010, pp. 189-96; De Vos/De Vos 1988, pp. 211-12; Di Capua 1940, p. 127; Ehrhardt 2004; Fabbricotti 1976, pp. 80-81; Mau 1893, pp. 51-55; 1908, p. 322; Mygind 1924; Pernice 1938, p. 51; Pesano/Guidobaldi 2006, pp. 155-158; Richardson

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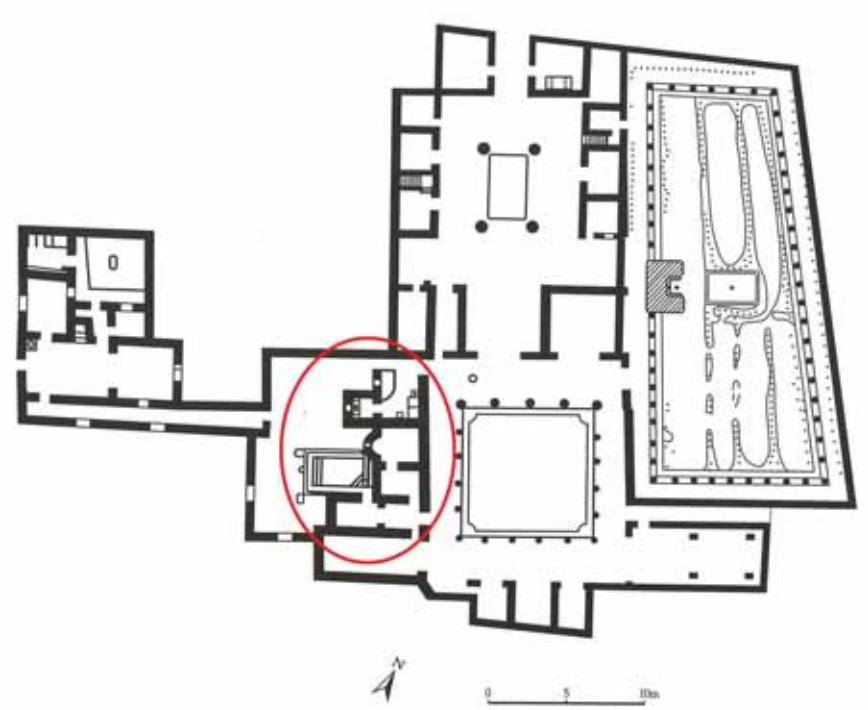

Figure 2. In the Casa delle Nozze d'Argento, the bath is placed on the western side of the peristyle (after Allison 2004, p. 217).

1988, pp. 155-59; Sogliano 1896, p. 430). The house was owned by Albucius Celsus, and is found on a minor side street, the Vicolo delle Nozze Argento. The house was excavated in 1893, and dated to the late tufa period, the Late Republic, some years after 80 BC. But later, the house was rebuilt and repainted to fit the demanding need of the Republican patron. It's suggested that the bath was built during the second period of the house based on the 2nd style decorations (40 – 25 BC) (Beyen 1960, p. 47). Mau (1893, 53) earlier suggested an older date, when he thought that the bath was already built in the first period of the house and redecorated in the 2nd style. The bath suite showed a strong presence and use by the Late Republican aristocrat owning the house. The bath is placed on the western side of the peristyle, and contains four rooms laying in a row: apodyterium, frigidarium, tepidarium, and caldarium. It also has a pool (piscina) found in a separate room. The apodyterium is connected with the luxurious triclinium where the pater familias of the house dined his guests. A mosaic floor leads the guests to the bath suite (De Haan 2010, p. 190). The baths of the Casa delle Nozze d'Argento are reached through the peristyle's

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south eastern corner, where the first room is the apodyterium fig. 2). On the northern wall are two doors, one leading into the tepidarium, the other leads to an outdoor garden room with the pool. The rooms are decorated in the 2nd and the 3rd style, where the second style is found closest to the entrance, and the third style with marble decorations is found further into the bath.

The Casa di Caestius Blandus (8, i, 40) descends from the early periods of Pompeii, and the house is placed on the corner of Strada degli Augustali and Vico del Lupanare. The building date of the house is debated, but is either built in the late third century BC, or in the eighties BC after the Roman annexation of the city. Mau (1882, p. 269) and Pernice (1938, p. 53) argue for dating the building to the tufa period. Beyen (1960, p. 235) suggests an earlier date. More interesting here is the rebuilding of the house dated to the 2nd style (40 – 25 BC) when the private bath suite was built, together with the peristyle (Beyen 1960, p. 238). The bath contains two rooms: an apodyterium-tepidarium and a caldarium, placed to the east of the tablinum (Beyen 1960, pp. 234-238 and 247-249; Clarke 1979, p. 61; De Haan 2010, pp. 206-11; De Vos/De Vos 1988, p. 206; Di Capua, 1940, p. 128; Fabbricotti 1976, pp. 52-53; Fiorelli 1875, p. 174; Mygind 1924, pp. 34-38; Overbeck/Mau 1884, p. 282; Pernice 1938, p. 54; Pesando/Guidobaldi 2006). The bath is placed next to the tablinum in front of the peristyle's outermost part, and looks like a little house within the house with its own little stair leading into the bath. The bath is reached from a room between the atrium and peristyle, which binds these two together. In the south-eastern corner of this room a masonry stair, supported by the peristyle wall, leads up into the vaulted entrance to the tepidarium. The room is decorated in the 2nd style, showing figures and different animals (Fiorelli 1875, p. 175; Overbeck and Mau 1884, p. 284).

The large Casa di Centenario (9, vii, 1) is found on the south side of Strada di Nola is one of the largest houses in Pompeii (Blake 1936, p. 61; De Haan 2010, pp. 223-28; De Vos/De Vos 1988, p. 213; Dickmann 1999, p. 258; Fabbricotti 1976, pp. 73-74; Mau 1879, pp. 150-51; 1881, pp. 229-33; 1882, pp. 112-113; Mygind 1924, pp. 47-55; Overbeck/Mau 1884, p. 258; Pernice 1938, p. 44; Richardson 1988, pp. 126-27; Riemenschneider 1986, pp. 198-99 and 298-99; Santoro 2007, pp. 153-56 Santoro et.al 2005, pp. 237-38; Schfold 1957, pp. 277-78; Pesano/Guidobaldi 2006, pp. 237-40). It was excavated in 1879-1881 and bear witness of Republican splendor and greatness with its double atrium and a very large peristyle. It is suggested that the bath suite was built in the last century BC, making it a Republican

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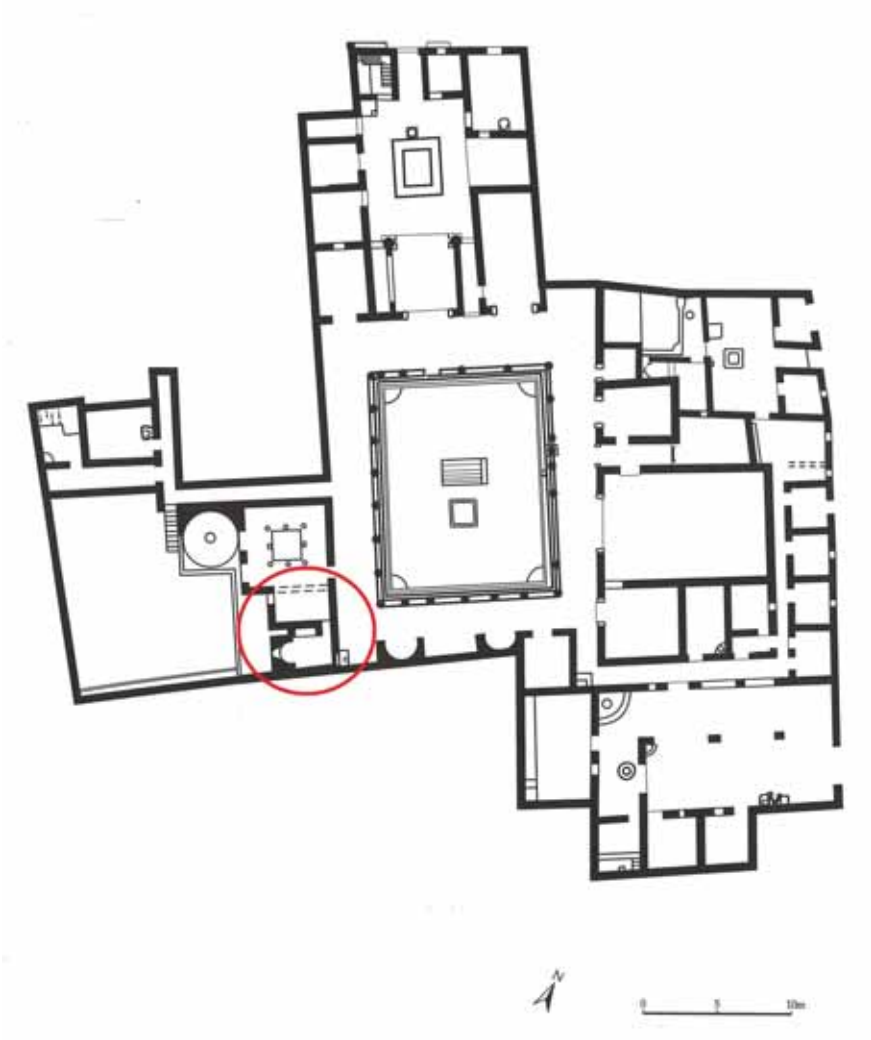

Figure 3.The baths of the Casa del Menandro is connected to the service and living part of the house, and is reached from the peristyle (after Allison 2004, p. 205).

bath, later being redecorated in the 3rd style (De Vos/De Vos 1988, p. 127). The bath suite contains four rooms: frigidarium, apodyterium, tepidarium and caldarium. The bath is placed east of the peristyle in the middle of a series of servant rooms and is reached through a long and narrow corridor stretching from the peristyle with a westward slanted roof, stretching above the eastern wall of a large open court yard covering parts of the room. The floor of the bath is raised above the previous room, and must have been reached by a wooden stair. In the southern part of the large open court a large masonry pool is placed, decorated

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with the 4th style. The tepidarium is reached through a vaulted entrance. The other rooms are also decorated in the 4th style showing a polyp, fish, dolphins, and leaves.

The Casa del Menandro (1, x, 4) was excavated in 1926-1932 and dated its origin back to the late third century BC. The house has a long and complex building history with many phases. The publication by August Maiuri (1933, p. 22-25) describes the different rooms of the house and bath, later errata by Roger Ling (1997, p. 47-144). The house was enlarged during the Late Republic and the bath suite was added during this last building period, dating the bath between 40 – 25 BC. The house went through different changes in the Age of Augustus and after the earthquake of AD 62. Restorations were done to the bath suite, which also then was decorated in the 4th style, showing that the bath was still in use in the later periods of Pompeii (De Haan 2010, p. 172). The Casa del Menandro was also inhabited in 79 AD. The bath suite consists of tepidarium, caldarium, atrium, a small apodyterium and a laconicum and is placed in the South Western corner of the house, and is connected to the service and living part of the house, and is reached from the peristyle (fig. 3) (Clarke 1979; De Haan 2010, pp. 172-183; De Vos/ De Vos 1988, pp. 90-97; Dickmann 1999, pp. 260-262; Fabricotti 1976, pp. 87-89; Kastenmeier 2007, p. 130; Ling 1997, pp. 61-67, 90-92, 132-37; 1983a; Ling 1983b; Ling/Ling 2005, pp. 56-67, 98-99, 243-53; Maiuri 1933, pp. 121-58; Mielsch 1975, pp. 19, 109-110; Pernice 1938, pp. 59-60; Pesando/Guidobaldi 2006, pp. 113-22, 115, 117-18; Richardson 1988, pp. 159-61). On the western side of the entrance is a large garden, contributing to the extravagant experience created by the bath.

Sources in harmony: Public in Domestic contexts

The placements of the chosen bath suites show an interesting pattern, corresponding to the descriptions in Trimalchio's dinner. The baths are placed on the peristyle or atrium, both rooms with public connotations. The peristyle, a colonnaded open courtyard, is thought to be a public area within the domus, but a bit more exclusive than the atrium (Dickmann 1997, p. 136; 1999, p. 313-22; Grahame 1998, p. 140; Wallace-Hadrill 1997, p. 239). The theoretical organisation of the rooms reflects sociological structures, and it's thought that the baths served a semi-public function as read in Trimalchio's dinner. In the Late republic and Early Empire the functions of rooms got more defined, when the atrium gained use as a main entrance hall, and the peristyle connects to the reception and dining areas of the house. The Peristyle functioned as reception

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areas for amici of the paterfamilias. To get into the bath suite, guests had to be invited, but it was not necessary to be family. The tablinum and triclinium, rooms used for the actual dinner, are also often placed on the peristyle. It is also worth noticing that all bath suites in the sample were built in the Late Republic when the symbolic value of the domus played the most important part promoting the Roman aristocrat.

Viewing written and material sources in harmony opens a wider perspective on understanding the social role of the Roman domestic bath. The sources should be used together in a known context and discussed, each on the premise of the other. In the Dinner of Trimalchio the analogical value is informative when reading the descriptions of bath rooms, their placements, and the actions taking place in the archaeological context of the domus as a stage. In understanding the built environments of the past, I believe, that written sources could be particularly useful when describing how spaces are used and viewed. Ancient views are confirmed in the archaeological evidence, contributing to a broader context than described in the historical evidence. At the same time built environments affected actions and social aspects. Having a scenario of Roman society as seen in Pompeii, we are allowed to zoom out and map both a material and historical context of our written sources, contributing to fuller and more reliable interpretations of the foreign country of the past.

Kristian Reinfjord is a Classical archaeologist and architectural historian from Norway, currently working as a building antiquarian at the Hedmark municipality. He has published on Roman art and architecture, the history of architecture and cultural Heritage.
E-mail: kristianreinfjord@gmail.com

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