

AT THE BATHS

Very few Roman houses had a bathroom, so most people made a daily trip to the public bath-house. But a visit to the baths involved much more than just a good wash. The largest bath-houses were vast leisure complexes where people could exercise, meet friends, discuss business and politics, or simply relax.

POOLS OR PALACES?

By AD300, the city of Rome had 11 public baths - or *thermae* - and about 1,000 privately owned bath-houses where people could bathe in greater privacy. Some emperors built spectacular public baths, gleaming with gold and marble, to show off their wealth and power. The most impressive baths were those built by the Emperor Caracalla, which could hold up to 1,600 people at a time.

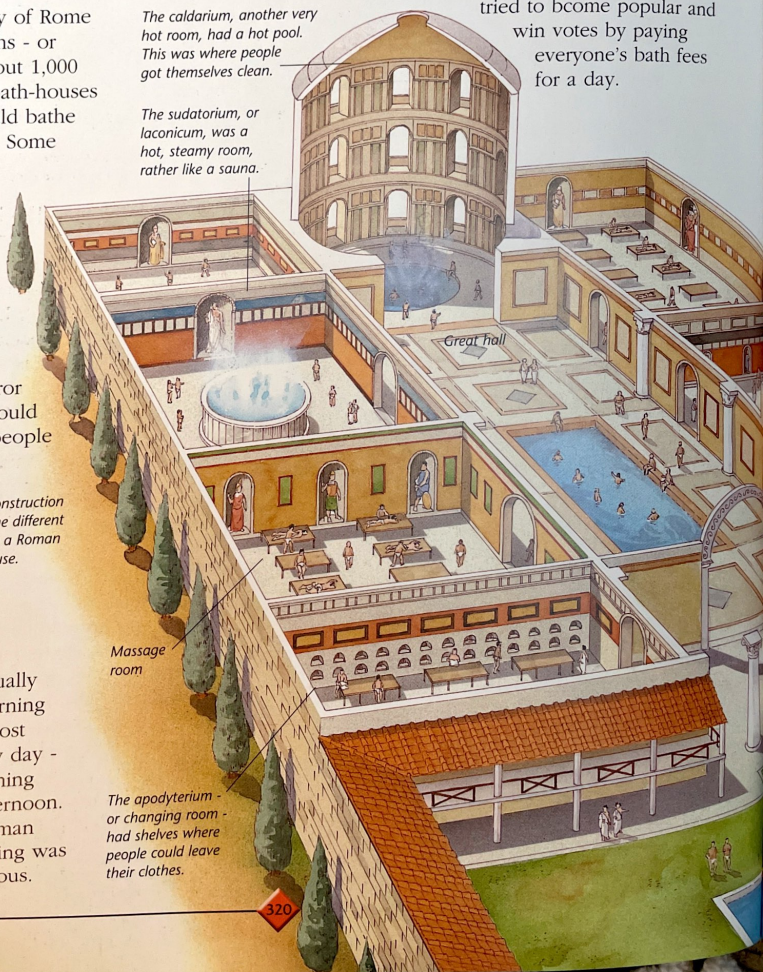
This reconstruction shows the different rooms in a Roman bath-house.

BATH TIME

The baths were usually open from mid-morning until sunset, and most Romans went every day - women in the morning and men in the afternoon. For most of the Roman period, mixed bathing was considered scandalous.

PAYING YOUR WAY

Entrance to the baths was extremely cheap, especially for men, who were only charged a *quadrans* - the smallest Roman coin. Women had to pay four times that amount for entry, but children got in free. Wealthy politicians sometimes tried to become popular and win votes by paying everyone's bath fees for a day.



The caldarium, another very hot room, had a hot pool. This was where people got themselves clean.

The sudatorium, or laconicum, was a hot, steamy room, rather like a sauna.

Massage room

The apodyterium - or changing room - had shelves where people could leave their clothes.

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