

Krzysztof Jarzęcki

<https://doi.org/10.26485/AAL/2020/66/14>

***LE TERME PUBBLICHE NELL'ITALIA ROMANA  
(II SECOLO A.C - FINE IV D.C.): ARCHITETTURA, TECNOLOGIA E SOCIETÀ  
REVIEW***

Le terme pubbliche nell'Italia romana (II secolo a.C - fine IV d.C.): architettura, tecnologia e società. Seminario internazionale di Studio, Roma, 4-5 ottobre 2018, a cura di Maura Madri e Antonio Pizzo. Roma 2019, 555 p.

One of the most characteristic manifestations of Roman culture is, from an archeological point of view, buildings for bathing purposes – *thermae* and *balnea*. They existed in every major population center, and their remains almost exactly coincide with the greatest reach of the Roman Empire. Their presence is even considered a manifestation of Romanization. Although the function of these objects, which have been recognized by the hundred so far, was similar, the differences could be significant. Their sizes, water supply methods, room layout, technologies used, etc. were different. Education in the field of archeology or art history based on reading the work of Vitruvius and studying selected examples from Rome, Pompeii, Leptis Magna, or Bath gives some basic idea about these issues. The rich literature on thermalism, especially over recent years, significantly supplements this picture and even leads to the conclusion that it is already largely worked out. That is why we need studies devoted to less known objects, whose research is still being continued, and of which many of issues remain unresolved. Such a work is the book „Le terme pubbliche...”. Both the concept and its implementation seem to perfectly meet the needs of people interested in this issue. It is a valuable work of substance, reasonable in its conclusions, and above all inspiring.

The book under review is a collection of articles devoted to 35 public facilities from Italy, mainly from Tuscany, Lazio, and Campania. The work intentionally does not cover well-known subjects from Rome, Ostia, Pompeii, and Herculaneum, but focuses on less-known facilities, whose research is often undergoing, and the final monographs dedicated to them will have to wait for the next several years for publication. At the same time, they form

a very well composed whole that complements the image of our knowledge of Roman thermalism in both a regional and substantive sense. The texts are written according to a similar scheme with clearly separated parts about the topographic context, history of research, description of the objects examined, an indication of outstanding issues, summary, and list of cited literature. Each description has an abstract in Italian and English. The book also contains 4 cross-sectional articles (including one in French) and a summary (in English). The work contains many well-selected illustrations – plans, mosaics photographed from drones, and three-dimensional reconstructions.

This overview of lesser-known, but diverse, thermal facilities shows clearly how much can be made of the results of archaeological research. An example of such a problem is the water supply. As written, the statement that they were replenished from an aqueduct is only a partial answer („è quindi soltanto una risposta parziale”). The book describes *thermae* supplied with water from aqueducts, but also from rivers, water drawn from a well, or from a nearby spring, in conjunction with aqueduct water and rainwater, and even rainwater alone. It has been a good idea to present the entire archeologically recognized past of the thermal complexes published in this book. Their early medieval history, their adaptation into baptismal fonts, churches, and cemeteries, is, after all, is no less important than the period of their greatest ancient prosperity. This is all the more important if we recall that many known thermal objects come from old excavations, methodically very different from modern ones. We can take as a notable example not dealt with in the book under review the Piccole Terme in Baia with its unique geothermal

heating system, the cognitive value of which was partially lost during hasty and poorly documented excavations conducted after World War II.

The *thermae* described in the book are “little known” for various reasons. The *thermae* in Pisa, the only visible ancient ruins in this city, which were the subject of research as early as the 16th century, were classified as such due to their poor condition and very limited possibilities for study due to the later urban buildings that surround them. The *thermae* at Castrocielo (Aquinum) in southern Lazio were discovered in 2009. They are still little known, but it can be expected that the description of this object will someday enter

the standard textbooks. The reason is their monumentality (so far over 80 rooms have been identified in an area of almost 1 hectare), their good condition, technological solutions (e.g. water supply from aqueduct and rainwater), and a system with a clear division into male and female sections. I wonder if, as is the case in the Hadrianic Baths at Leptis Magna, the seats in the male *latrinae* were wider than in the female part (which helped in their interpretation).

The book currently under review could serve as a model for publication of *thermae* resulted in the present publication under review, is continued further.

*Krzysztof Jarzeński*  
ORCID 0000-0002-4137-9729  
Independent researcher  
*krzysztof.jarzecki@gmail.com*