THE PRIVATE BATHS OF LA VERNA

WATER, FIRE AND LEISURE

FIVE INTERCONNECTED SPACES

The *balneum* at La Verna is a complex of 5 interconnected spaces belonging to the villa's private baths. For the most part, only the foundations and underground structures have survived, but they have provided enough information to understand how the baths functioned.

SOCIAL DIMENSION

Leisure and power

The *balneum* was an exclusive space reserved for members of the family who owned the villa, and it served many purposes at the same time.

Some were essential, such as hygiene and health, while others were more everyday, with the baths also providing a space for leisure. However, they were also a means of displaying prestige and ostentation to the guests who frequently visited the villa.

The size and decoration of the bathing area varied according to the wealth of the owners. In the case of La Verna, the evidence suggests that they were relatively modest.

FROM FIRE TO THE BATHING ROOMS

A radiant heating system

An external furnace (*praefurnium*) heated the air in an underground chamber (*hypocaust*). The hot air circulated between the *pilae* and *tubuli*, transferring heat to the floors and hollow walls of the rooms above. The rooms closest to the furnace became hotter, and vice versa.

WATER

Hydraulic engineering

The presence of baths required a substantial and constant water supply. Water was brought in through aqueducts and, once used, was discharged through a separate drainage system.

At La Verna, the baths include a drainage channel for wastewater, although its full course has not yet been identified.

SCHEMATIC PLAN

The bathing circuit

A total of five distinct spaces has been identified: a reservoir or tank, a *praefurnium*, two heated rooms with hypocausts, and a *frigidarium*, or cold-water pool.

The different spaces in Roman baths were arranged to create what was known as a bathing circuit, in which bathers moved through the various rooms in a gradual sequence, alternating between hot and cold environments.

RESEARCH CONTINUES

The *balneum* formed part of the residential area of the villa (*pars urbana*), which is still under investigation. The family and domestic rooms, as well as the possible courtyards or peristyles that may have organised these spaces around them, have yet to be discovered.

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