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Architecture and pleasures in private baths in Imperial Rome. A perception of spa luxury according to ancient Latin authors

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Abstract

The paper analyzes Latin literary references to the architecture of private baths in the Roman Empire. These sumptuous buildings in cities provoked a new type of reflection in a wide range of literary genres, both in the Imperial period and in Late Antiquity. The ekphrasis of both monumental and private baths took on a new character and were embedded in the central part of poetic and prose works of ancient authors. Mentions and descriptions of luxurious private baths celebrated not only the architecture itself, but also the builders and investors. The study argues that the Latin literary references demonstrate high emotional expectations of aesthetics and luxury in the architectural standards of private baths among wealthy aristocrats. Both public and private baths in imperial Rome became benchmarks of luxury architecture designed for enjoyment and entertainment. The article defines the main literary topoi, which, in connection with the description of private baths, appeared in both the poetry and prose of the imperial period. It is about light and its effects, marble and its beauty, water, and its pleasures.

Keywords

baths; ekphrasis; Roman architecture; interior design; marble; poetry

The tradition of building baths in the Roman civilization context has been present throughout Roman history, first as part of folk medicine, later as a symbol of the dominance of Roman culture over the barbarian element (Tac. *Agr.* 21). Both private and public Roman baths only acquired a monumental and luxurious dimension during the reign of Emperor Augustus, specifically with the construction of the Baths of Agrippa on the Mart's field.¹ From the point of view of public architecture, these and all subsequent imperial baths in Rome belonged to the "interspace" between noble monuments such as temples, basilicas, triumphal gates, and utilitarian structures such as bridges, walls, aqueducts. It meant that the architects had a freer hand when designing the baths, which resulted in the use of new concepts in public construction. The arrangement of the magnificent space to achieve maximum benefit and enjoyment when visiting the spa required the application of large-scale concrete domes, a well-thought-out and sophisticated system of floor and wall heating, and an emphasis on the functional connection of the exterior with the interior. New technological processes in the production of window glass enabled the play with light and heat in rooms intended for year-round use.²

The innovative approach of the architects, as well as the new concept of luxurious and monumental baths in the public and private spaces of imperial Rome was also imitated in literary reflection. In several genres of literature, new, previously unseen, elements or even new concepts were applied when mentioning and describing luxury baths. In the Greek literary tradition, as in the literature of the republican period, the descriptions of the baths were set in a secondary storyline. Mentions of the form and importance of the baths occurred quite often in the pre-imperial period, but concentrated ekphrases are very rare.³ It includes descriptions of baths by six authors from the early to late empire, in various literary genres. These descriptions are considered architectural ekphrases, mostly rhetorical figures, which were intended to describe a visual object in words within the framework of a thematic discourse. In the imperial period, it was popular and often used in the context of celebrating emperors or wealthy aristocrats who invested in public architecture (Newlands 2013: pp. 55–78). It occasionally happened that private monuments were also glorified by literary reports during the imperial period. This is also the case with the architectural ekphrases of luxurious private baths. In the selected texts, the baths and their owners were the central theme. The authors described their appearance, layout and the purpose of the rooms, their decoration. They evaluated the taste or distaste of investors and often judged the purpose of the baths in a moral, political, or religious context.⁴

A general literary account of the baths can be found in the work of Vitruvius. The specific and exceptional treatise on architecture includes chapter 10 in Book 5, which is devoted to the arrangement of rooms in the baths, their heating, orientation to the

1 They were first opened on June 9, r. 19 BC. Fagan (2002: p. 107); Kontokosta (2019: pp. 45–77). In the previous period, the baths belonged to the private sphere and mostly occupied part of the dwellings of wealthier aristocrats. In Latin, they were referred to as *balnea*. Yëgul (2010: p. 101).

2 Sen. *epist.* 90, 25; Vitruvius 5, 10, 1. Lancaster (2005: p. 147).

3 List of literary mentions of the spa: Fagan (2002: pp. 413–425).

4 Sen. *epist.* 86, 4–13; Plin. *epist.* 2, 17; 5, 6; Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2; Mart. 6, 42; State. *silv.* 1, 5; Vitruvius 5, 10.

cardinal points, and suitable materials for the interior. As in the entire work, he does not think of a specific case when describing the spa, rather he outlines the principles that should be applied when building a spa, whether private or public.⁵

Specific baths are portrayed in detail in the letters of wealthy aristocrats who owned luxurious residences outside of Rome, where they sought *otium*. Each luxurious villa had to include a spa, which on the one hand testified to the extraordinary wealth of the owner, and on the other hand provided the standard comfort required for the given social group. The political and economic leaders of the society sporadically boasted about the exhibitiveness of their real estate. At the same time, some owners nostalgically praised the modesty of their predecessors, as Seneca did, others did not hesitate to present luxury and opulence in real estate, which was mostly manifested in private baths. Such descriptions can be found in the letters of Pliny the Younger and the late antique aristocrat Sidonius Apollinaris.⁶

An exceptional case of a detailed poetic depiction of private baths are the poems of Publius Papinius Statius and Marcus Valerius Martialis. In a poetic way, they praised the baths of Claudius Etruscus, which were built during the reign of Emperor Domitian. These were probably located on Mart's field, in region VII or IX (Harris 1995: p. 373). The owner was a wealthy man, a member of the equestrian state under Emperor Vespasian (*PIR*² C 860). The poems of Statius and Martial, which praise the architecture and decoration of the private baths, have no parallel in Greek literature. In this, they are a bold literary effort by poets who have entered entirely new ground, and this at a time of strong literary conventions.⁷ Both poets were contemporaries, they probably met together, and it cannot be ruled out that they composed or recited poems praising the Etruscus' baths at the same dinner organized by the owner (Zeiner 2005: p. 152).

In both cases, the listener or reader cannot be expected to receive a systematic description of the Etruscus' baths. It was not standard either in prose literature or in epistolography. More important elements than a precise technical description was their influence on feelings, highlighting the luxurious decoration, the possibilities of sensual pleasures, the taste of the investor and his generosity in relation to guests.

In the following passage, the descriptions of the baths will be arranged and analyzed according to common themes, *topoi*, that occurred in Latin epistolography and poetry. In summary, it will be a list of priorities and benefits in the perception of the architecture of luxury baths, as they were presented by Latin authors in the imperial period.

5 Vitruvius, 5, 10.

6 Pliny, *epist.* 5, 6; Sidonius, *epist.* 2, 2.

7 In this case, the creativity of Roman literature was shown, which was not afraid to break free from the bondage of Greek patterns. Hardie (1983: p. 132).

1 Shine. Playing with Light

Interior light plays a key role in the architecture of monumental buildings (Rasmussen 1964: pp. 186–215). The first author to address the function of light in baths was Vitruvius. His mention is strictly functionalist, in relation to the orientation of the *caldarium* to the cardinal directions. The light was supposed to cooperate in heating the hot rooms in the baths (Vitr. 5, 10).

In Latin literature, the light in the bath was clearly associated with the idea of luxury, sometimes even whimsy (Rimmel 2013: pp. 1–20). This is evidenced by the words of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, who in his letter 86 describes the home baths of Scipio Africanus. While he considers the republican baths to be commendably modest in the spirit of Stoic philosophy, he describes the baths of his time, that is, the imperial one, as a whim:

*Eo deliciarum pervenimus, ut nisi gemmas calcare nolimus. In hoc balneo Scipionis minimae sunt rimae magis quam fenestrae muro lapideo exsectae, ut sine iniuria munimenti lumen admitterent; at nunc blattaria vocant balnea, si qua non ita aptata sunt, ut totius diei solem fenestris amplissimis recipiant, nisi et lavantur simul et colorantur, nisi ex solio agros ac maria prospiciunt.*⁸

In poetic literature, light was placed in an emotional context. It seems that light and its effects in the interior played a significant role in creating an enthusiastic or admiring impression on the spa visitor. When praising the Etruscus' baths in the imaginative role of a guide, the poet Statius used the term *nitere* several times.⁹ At the first mention of the form of the baths, the reader of Statius's poems will encounter a description of colorful, radiant marble, glistening in the light. In Statius' poem, the light shines not only on the magnificent marble, but also on the vaulted ceiling and bathtubs (Stat. *silv.* 1, 5: 36, 43, 49). The word *nitere* is even associated with the Etruscus' genius in designing and building such beautiful baths.¹⁰ Statius wasn't the only admirer of the effects of light in the spa.

The light in the architectural arrangement of the spa was the center of attention for several authors describing the spa. Statius's contemporary and personal acquaintance, Martial, used the literary genre of epigrams for the purposes of witty commentary and praise of the individual elements of the Etruscus' baths. In principle, he did the same as Statius, that is, he celebrated the baths of his host, only through a different means of expression.¹¹ While Statius used the epideictic style, Martial used wit and irony, but

8 Sen. *epist.* 86, 7–8: *We have become so luxurious that we will have nothing but precious stones to walk upon. In this bath of Scipio's there are tiny chinks – you cannot call them windows – cut out of the stone wall in a such way as to admit light without weakening the fortifications; nowadays, however, people regard baths as fit only for moths if they have not been so arranged that they receive the sun all day long through the widest of windows, if men cannot bathe and get a coat of tan at the same time, and if they cannot look out from their bath-tubs over stretches of land and sea.*

9 Statius and his play with light: Nagle (2004: pp. 10–11); Zeiner (2005: p. 160).

10 Stat. *silv.* 1, 5, 63–64: *macte, oro, nitenti / ingenio curaue puer.*

11 Fitzgerald (2007: p. 30); Livingstone and Nisbet (2010: p. 130).

not against his benefactor Etruscus. The whole message of Martial's epigrams regarding the baths could be summed up in the statement: "Come, visit the Etruscus' baths, if you do not come, then (*illotus morieris*) – you will die, without tasting the real baths" (Mart. 6:42, 2). Light played a very important, poetic game in Martial's eyes. According to him, the Etruscus' baths are a place where clear skies shine with pure brilliance like nowhere else.¹² The light stays longer in them, and the day leaves them more slowly than in other places (Mart. 6:42, 10). Martial used here an element of fantasy that has nothing to do with natural laws. At sunset, the light seems to be caught in the spa and, contrary to natural expectation, stays there longer to illuminate the magnificent marble decoration. At the end of his poetic trip to the Etruscus' baths, Martial once again illuminated the interior, this time in combination with water. He used the effect of sparkling clear water that shines as if it is not even in the pool, as if the marble pool itself is shining.¹³ Here Martial followed up on the opening of his poem where he mentions the evening sky and its calm and radiant effect. The poet plays with light like a painter, puts it at the center of attention, praises its effects, and at the same time he uses exceptional words of a technical nature. Nowhere else in Latin literature is the term *lygdon* mentioned for marble. This word proves that in addition to his poetic craft, Martial also mastered the technical side of things, in this case the little-known terminology of marble in the Latin environment.¹⁴

The last Latin author of classical Rome to describe private baths was Sidonius Apollinaris. When describing his villa Avitacium in the territory of today's central France in the second half of the 5th century. Sidonius devoted an entire passage to the effects of light in baths (Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2, 4). Sidonius emphasized not only the importance of the quantity of light, but also its effects in combination with interior decoration and arrangement. Like Statius, also in Late Antiquity we find the rendering of artistic decoration in a refined light:

*fenestras e regione conditor binas confinio camerae pendentis admovit, ut suspicientum visui fabrefactum lacunar aperiret*¹⁵

2 Marble and its Beauty

Marble, in its various forms, seems to have occupied a privileged place in the perception of spa pleasures. It is the center of attention not only for poets and novelists, but also for investors who celebrated their merits on inscriptions.¹⁶

12 Mart. 6, 42, 8: *nusquam tam nitidum vacat serenum.*

13 Mart. 6, 42, 19–21: *quae tam candida, tam serena lucet / ut nullas ibi suspicieris undas / et credas vacuam nitere lygdon.*

14 Latin authors used the adjective *parius* for this type of marble. E.g. Hor. *od.* 1, 19, 5.

15 Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2, 5: *The architect has also set a pair of windows, one opposite the other, where the vaulting joins the wall, so as to disclose to the view of guests as they look up the cunningly-wrought coffered ceiling.*

16 A systematic list of inscriptions concerning the baths, including references to the marble used, was com-

Throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, marble was always perceived as a symbol of luxury, wealth, and power (Bradley 2006: pp. 1–26). In the Roman Empire, it became a symbol of prosperity and domination over the surrounding world, the elevation of Rome above provincialism. The most famous evidence of the perception of these aspects of marble is the famous formulation in the *Res Gestae*, where Augustus boasted that he had taken over a wooden Rome and was handing it over as a marble one (Suet. *Aug.* 29).

The description of the marbles used in Statius's poem, in which the poet praised the Etruscus' baths, sounds very impressive and celebratory. It is interesting that Statius described not only the types of marble that were found in the baths, but also those that were not there. In the context of the poet extolling the Etruscus' taste, this means that he actually listed those types of marble that contradicted the taste of the time and his own aesthetic criteria. He did so in accordance with the views of his contemporary, Pliny the Elder (Plin. *nat.* 36:5–12).

*non huc admissae Thasos aut undosa Carystos;
maeret onyx longe, queriturque exclusus ophites.*¹⁷

Pliny categorized individual types of marble, defining their use in the architecture of public buildings. In his encyclopedic work, Pliny considered Thasian white marble to be too simple (Plin. *nat.* 36, 5, 44), while Carystian marble did not have sufficient luster and was not rare enough (Plin. *nat.* 36, 7, 48). Onyx, in turn, was intended for smaller and more modest objects (Plin. *nat.* 36, 12, 59–61). Ophite marble was mostly found only on smaller columns (Plin. *nat.* 36, 11, 55–56).¹⁸

Statius probably knew Pliny's categorization of marble, did not contradict it, and added to it his own taste, which he developed through his own observation of the buildings of Rome in its greatest heyday. Right after the passage where he listed the absent materials, Statius praised the colorful and radiant marble used in the Etruscus' baths.

*sola nitet flavis Nomadum decisa metallis
quaique Tyri livens flet et Sidonia rupes,
purpura, sola cavo Phrygiae quam Synnados antro
ipse cruentavit maculis lucentibus Attis.
vix locus Eurotae, viridis cum regula longo
Synnada distinctu variat.*¹⁹

piled by Fagan. Fagan (2002: p. 233f).

17 Stat. *silu.* 1, 5, 34–35: *Not Thasos or wavy Carystos are admitted here, alabaster sulks afar, serpentine grumbles in exclusion.*

18 A comparison of the descriptions of Pliny the Elder and Statius was made by Newlands (2002: p. 210).

19 Stat. *silu.* 1, 5, 36–41: *shines only stone hewn from Numidia's yellow quarries and that other at which Tyre's and Sidon's purple would weep for envy, only what Attis himself bloodied with gleaming flecks in Phrygian Synnas' hollow cave. Scarce is there space for Eurotas, whose long green streak picks out Synnas.*

The Etruscus' baths shine with the colors of selected types of marble from different parts of the world: yellow-brown Numidian marble, purple Phrygian, Tyrian and Sidonian marble, which was distinguished by green stripes. It is questionable whether at that time readers knew the different types of marble by color and place of origin, or whether Statius wanted to impress with his knowledge of architecture. Anyway, Statius achieved that the reader was convinced not only of the wealth that manifested itself in the luxurious interior, but also of the good taste of the owner of the spa.

Martial also draws attention to the different types of marble in the Etruscus' baths in his epigrams (Mart. 6, 42, 3–21). He also indirectly brags about his technical knowledge. He does it so that the reader first of all admires Etruscan's taste and his investment in expensive and selected materials in the baths. At the same time, the reader is introduced to the world of colors, physical properties of marble and to different corners of the world, where individual pieces of the noble stone come from. The reader will even learn about the exclusivity of marble from deep mining. Martial puts all this into the poetic form of an epigram, marble is personified – individual types of marble compete with each other for preeminence in beauty and attractiveness.

*illic Taygeti virent metalla
et certant vario decore saxa
quae Phryx et Libys altius cecidit.*²⁰

Martial may have been inspired by a technical term found in Varro. The latter used the word *cecidit* to extract marble from the greater depths of the quarry, from where the more beautiful, intact and compact marble was mined (Varro *ling.* 8, 62).

In the following passage of the epigram, the poet indicates the functional properties of marble probably used in a dry sauna called *a sudatorium*. The rare onyx gives off dry heat (*siccus aestus*) and the bather can enjoy this dry heat (*arido vapore*).

*sicos pinguis onyx anhelat aestus
et flamma tenui calent ophitae.
ritus si placeant tibi Laconum,
contentus potes arido vapore
cruda Virgine Marciave mergi,*²¹

Marble was a desirable element in the interior of spas until late antiquity. The authors, who described the decoration of the private bath, mentioned marble even when it was absent in the given property. Sidonius would certainly like to boast of marble paneling in his private baths in a villa in central Gaul. Although he did not have it in reality, he at least pointed out in his letter that he had a taste and knowledge of marble and its uses.

20 Mart. 6, 42, 11–13: *There the quarries of Taygetus are green and stones which the Phrygian and the Libyan have deeply hewn contend in varied beauty.*

21 Mart. 6, 42, 16–18: *Sleek alabaster breathes arid heat and snakestones are warm with slender flame. If you like the Laconian style, having satisfied yourself with dry warmth, you can plunge into native Virgine or Marcia.*

*iam si marmora inquiras, non illic quidem Paros Carystos Proconnesos, Phryges Numidae Spartiatae rupium variatarum posuere crustas, neque per scopulos Aethiopicos et abrupta purpurea genuino fucata conchylio sparsum mihi saxa furfurem mentiuntur. sed etsi nullo peregrinarum cautium rigore ditamur, habent tamen tuguria seu mapalia mea civicum frigus*²²

It can be concluded that marble in Latin antiquity had close connotations with luxury not only in the public sphere, but also in the private. The spa was one of the most suitable objects where marble belonged and the owners were very happy to show it off. They mentioned him even if he was absent from the spa, looking for excuses to justify his absence.

3 Water for All the Senses

One of the basic elements of a spa is, naturally, water. In Latin literature, water in the context of baths has enjoyed significant attention from both poets and novelists. Latin authors reflected and used its mythological, poetic and prosaic character. Water implied many levels of symbolism in architecture, and at the same time had the most ordinary practical meaning, obvious to every person. In the early imperial period, diverse and numerous mythological forms of water were processed mainly by Ovid. One of the most famous stories is associated with Narcissus, who falls in love with himself when he saw his image on the surface of the water (*Ov. met.* 3). This powerful story marked the perception of water for subsequent generations of authors and probably inspired architects. Water is here a medium for illusion, transformation, for mirroring beauty and transience at the same time.

In architectural descriptions, water was mostly perceived as a common functional element of a dwelling. Pliny, for example, described baths in two of his villas, but paid only marginal attention to the element of water, in connection with the presence of a swimming pool (*Plin. epist.* 2, 17 and 5, 6). According to his own words, he had a large enough bath in the Laurentian villa, considering the fact that the villa was right next to the sea (*Plin. epist.* 2, 17, 11). The villa had a pool with heated water from which swimmers could look at the sea. At the end of the letter, Pliny admitted that the villa lacked running water, but this was compensated for by the availability of wells.

One of the most important authors when it comes to the poetic presentation of the element of water in the architectural context of baths is Statius. He presented water as an element that acts on all the senses in the architecture of villas or baths and contributes to the great pleasure of the owners and the sincere admiration of visitors. Statius noticed the use of the benefits of water in the architecture of buildings. He did it not as a designer who knows all the technical secrets of swimming pools, saunas, or fountains, but

²² Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2, 7: *If you ask what I have to show in the way of marble, it is true that Paros, Carystos and Proconnesos, Phrygians, Numidians and Spartans have not deposited here slabs from hill-faces in many colours, nor do any stone surfaces, stained with a natural tinge among the Ethiopian crags with their purple precipices, furnish a counterfeit imitation of springed bran.*

as an admirer who is overwhelmed by pleasures that attack all the senses. Therefore, the reader will learn more about its clear surface reflecting the lights of the sky, the hissing of water in the pipes, its pleasant temperature in the pool, or the hot steam in the sauna.

In his poem about the luxurious villa of Manilius Vopiscus, located in Tibur (Tivoli), on the banks of the river Annio, Statius devoted almost half of the verses to the element of water.²³ Although there is a relatively brief mention of the baths in the villa, it was implicitly obvious to the reader that the architecture of the villa resembles the baths of Emperor Titus. These were organized in such a way that they formed symmetrical rooms of different temperatures, in the middle of which was a cold room, a *frigidarium*. Vopiscus' villa was special in that it was located on two banks of the river.²⁴ On the one hand, this showed the immense wealth of the owner, but also the artful use of natural elements for the comfort of visitors to the villa. The river served as a natural *frigidarium*.

*an quae graminea suscepta crepidine fumant
balnea et impositum ripis argentibus ignem,
quaque vaporiferis iunctus fornacibus amnis
ridet anhelantes vicino flumine Nymphas?*²⁵

In this case, the river Annio was at the service of the needs of the Vopiscus' baths, similar to how the aqueducts in Rome provided the Roman baths. Thanks to the very imaginative use and availability of water from a natural source, Vopiscus' private baths were unique, rich, and admirable.

Water also played an important role in another villa located on the seacoast, near present-day Sorrento in the Bay of Naples. *Villa Maritima* belonged to Statius' good friend, Publius Pollius Felix.²⁶ He sang of it in poem 2, 2 and again in a way that cannot be considered a systematic architectural procession through the property. The main motif of the poem is a celebration of Pollius' personality, his wealth and ingenuity. Pollius was able to collect in his country villa those architectural elements that were reserved for the public sphere in Rome. He considers the spa in Villa Statius to be the first attraction of the place (*gratia prima loci*). They had two rooms, which resembled the symmetrical doubling of spaces in public baths. Water is presented here in two qualitative forms – salty and sweet, which is quite exceptional in the context of Latin literature.

*Gratia prima loci, gemina testudine fumant
balnea, et e terris occurrit dulcis amaro*

23 Stat. *silu.* 1, 3. For an analysis of the element of water in Vopiscus' villa, see: Cancik (1978: p. 119).

24 Comprehensive assessment of the description of the villa and its components, including the element of water: Newlands (2002: pp. 119–153).

25 Stat. *silu.* 1, 3, 43–46: *Or of the steaming baths taken up by their grassy ledge and fire imposed on chilly banks, where the river linked to a vaporous furnace laughs at the Nymphs as they pant, though the stream be hard by?*

26 Archaeological traces are scanty. D'Arms (1970: pp. 220–221). Poem 2, 2 was written around 90. Newlands (2002: pp. 154–198).

*Nympha mari. levis hic Phorci chorus udaeque crines
Cymodoce uiridisque cupit Galatea lavari.*²⁷

Salt water here is personified by the Nymph. Mythological creatures are so enthusiastic about Pollius' baths that they prefer them to their natural habitat. The disposition of the water that flows into the sea from the baths on the rock is remarkable and deserves admiration not only from people, but also from supernatural beings.

The element of water was also emphasized in the Etruscus' baths, by the two poets who praised them, Statius and Martial. At the very beginning of his poem, Statius invokes the Nymphs and goddesses of the aqueducts, instead of the traditional deities of epic invocation, such as Apollo or the Muses. Thus, he gives the element of water a privileged place at the very beginning of the poem (Stat. *silv.* 1, 5, 25–30). Water personifies herself in verses 47–50, choosing to stay in the silver pools where she is happy. Thanks to silver, whose color resembles water, the visitor does not know where the water begins and where it ends.

*nusquam Temesaea notabis
aera, sed argento felix propellitur unda
argentoque cadit, labrisque nitentibus instat
delicias mirata suas et abire recusat.*²⁸

From the perspective of the spa architecture, the element of water, according to the poet, is used here to create the so-called infinity pool, which may evoke modern metal pools without edges for the 21st-century reader. Statius showed sincere enthusiasm for this facility and adds that even the nymph Cytherea would have preferred to be born here, and Narcissus would have seen an even more beautiful face on such a surface (Stat. *silv.* 1, 5, 54–55).

Martial combined the effect of water, light, and marble into one passage. Water in his poem serves as the purest medium for the reflection of the sky, and in the marble pool it is as clear as if it were not there at all (Mart. 6, 42, 19–21).

A direct description of the element of water in the baths can be found in the letter of Sidonius Apollinarius.²⁹ Even in the sixties of the 5th century, when this letter was written, not only were the practical effects of water valued, but also its decorative and luxurious dimension. Already at the beginning of the passage about the private baths in his villa in central Gaul, he pointed out the fact of hot water hissing in lead pipes (Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2, 4). Sidonius then greatly emphasized the presence of a pool with run-

27 Stat. *silv.* 2, 2, 17–20: *The spot's first grace is a steaming bathhouse with two cupolas, and from land a stream of fresh water meets the briny sea. Here Phorcus' lightsome choir and Cymodoce with her dripping locks and sea-green Galatea delight to bathe.*

28 Stat. *silv.* 1, 5, 47–50: *Nowhere will you mark Temesean copper; by silver the happy flow is channeled and into silver falls, urging the bright brims, marveling at its own charms and loath to leave.*

29 The exact identification of the villa has not yet taken place. Several attempts were made. Lauro & Claridge (1998: p. 47). In 2005, De Franceschini published the results of research in the Castelfusano location: Franceschini (2005: pp. 260–264).

ning water, thus distinguishing himself from the similar villas of his friends Ferreolus and Apollinarius, who lacked a pool.³⁰ He presented his pool to the reader so that they would perceive it with all their senses and appreciate its excellence (Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2, 4–9). In particular, he pointed to its extraordinary size, a volume of 20,000 modii, which is a remarkable size even by today's standards and equal to two-thirds of the volume of an Olympic swimming pool (Hanaghan 2019: p. 25). Then Sidonius presented himself as an aristocrat educated in the technical affairs of water elements. He described how the pipes supplying water encircle the pool, and then flow into it through six outlets in the form of lion's heads (Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2, 8). He then switched from visual to auditory as he pointed to the sound of water falling from the lions' heads into the pool. The sound is so distinct that the bathers can talk as if in secret, which Sidonius says is very amusing.

*Hic si dominum seu domestica seu hospitalis turba circumstet, quia prae strepitu caduci fluminis mutuae vocum vices minus intelleguntur, in aurem sibi populus confabulatur; ita sonitu pressus alieno ridiculum adfectat publicus sermo secretum.*³¹

The reader of Sidonius' letter could thus visualize the water elements in his villa through the three senses, leaving aside only taste and smell.

Conclusion

The architectural innovation of the luxurious baths in imperial Rome was clearly reflected in various genres of Latin literature. Both poets and novelists carefully described the luxurious elements of private baths, celebrating the good taste of the owners and pointing out their own knowledge of the standards of sumptuous architecture and its artistic decoration. They never tried to systematically describe the floor plan of the baths. The goal was to capture the emotional elements of spa architecture. Among them, three elements stood out – light, marble and water. The light had the task of highlighting the artistic decoration and adding shine to the luxurious spa equipment. Poets did not hesitate to use fanciful metaphors to enhance the effects of playing with light in the interior of buildings. Marble was an essential part of the luxurious character of public and private monuments. When describing the different types of marble used in the baths, the authors boasted of their knowledge in both artistic and technical contexts. Marble is even personified in Martial. It was mentioned as a desired element in private spas even when it was missing for various reasons. The last of the monitored elements was water. Poets and novelists reflected on its functional, aesthetic, and mythological character. In the literary works of the imperial period, it is presented as an element that affects all the

30 Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2, 9. The contrast between villas that had functional baths and those where they were absent was very important for the late antique aristocrat. Hanaghan (2019, pp. 25–27).

31 Sidon. *epist.* 2, 2, 9: *If the owner is surrounded here by a crowd of his own people or of visitors, so difficult is it to exchange words intelligibly, owing to the roar of the falling stream, that the company talk right into each other's ears; and so a perfectly open conversation, overpowered by this din from without, takes on an absurd air of secrecy.*

senses in the baths. Poets praised the subjugation of this element to the service of man. It is subtly used in spas for the comfort and pleasure of visitors. The temperature of the water, its origin, sounds, and quantity were important. The combination of different properties of water created not only a luxurious impression, but also provided entertainment for the guests.³²

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