

*Nosse iuvat Tauri dictas de nomine thermas. The
controversial question of the Taurine Baths*

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Introduction

The Roman baths, designated as Taurine baths in the city of Civitavecchia, in the province of Rome (Italy), represent, in terms of area, size and state of conservation, the most important example of this type of Roman architecture in an area of Etruria known geographically as the Tolfa Mountains. The popular tradition attributes them to the evergetism (R. Castagno 2008) of the emperor Trajan when he founded the port of *Centumcellae* (modern Civitavecchia). In reality, archaeological excavations and studies carried out for decades have revealed different conclusions and these often conflict with the functional attributions. Therefore, within the limits of this short article, i would like to give an updated overview of the knowledge of this important archaeological complex, considering the most recent bibliography.

History of the excavations

The Taurine Baths are located about 4 km northeast of the port of Civitavecchia, and were indicated in the past as Baths of Trajan or Palaces. The decision to build these baths on a hill was due to the presence of a hydrothermal spring, with a temperature of about 47 °C, which the Romans exploited for recreational and healing purposes. The history of the excavations (S. BASTIANELLI 1954) of this archaeological complex begins with the brief investigations of G. Torraca in 1777 and P. Manzi in 1820, further excavations by R. Mengarelli until 1923 and of S. Bastianelli until 1933. In modern times, interventions were carried out

by the Archaeological Superintendence (SABAP-RM-MET) from 1954 until today. These investigations, aimed at the delimitation of the site, have left some areas unexplored, with resulting different interpretations on the functional aspect of these baths: for this reason even today the research cannot be defined as completed.

The Taurine Baths

A hypothesis sees the baths as part of a private residence (M. TORELLI 1980, S. STEIN-GRABER 1999) in the past attributed to the *villa* of the Emperor Trajan, built together with the port of *Centumcellae* around AD 107 and mentioned by Pliny the Younger (*Epistulae* 6, 31 ; *Villa pulcherrima cingitur viridissimis agris*). However the most recent studies (W. HEINZ 1986, R. TURCHETTI 1999, I. CARUSO 1999, J. KÖLHER 1999, M.G. BEAUVOIS 2000, F. GUIDOBALDI, C. ANGELELLI 2001, R. CHELLINI 2002, J. KÖLHER 2007), concerning architectural structures, votive epigraphic finds and *opus sectilia* pavement, contrast with this first interpretation and converge in seeing in these ruins as those of public baths, with curative functions (M.G. BEAUVOIS 2000 , J. KÖLHER 2007, M. BASSANI 2012, S. SOUTELO 2019), thus explaining the original articulation of the environments, rather aimed at following the morphology of the ground and the proximity to the hot spring than the regularity found in the city baths of Imperial Rome. The meaning of the name Tauri was equally debated, a first hypothesis benefits from the correct distance of three miles from the port of *Centumcellae* from *Rutilius Namantianus*,

leaves us in his poem (*De Reditu suo* 1, 249) from c. AD 416, where he informs us that he has visited such baths, so called because a bull (*Nosse iuvat Tauri dictas de nomine thermas*), perhaps a deity, scraping the ground, had created the thermal spring. Beyond this hypothesis, there is that whose name, would derive for territorial belonging to the oldest Roman municipality of the *Aquenses cognomine Taurini*, reported on the Tabula Peutingeriana as *Aquas Tauri*, and already existing during the Augustan partition in *Regiones* as reported by Pliny the Elder (*Historia Naturalis*, 3, 52) in AD 77, a name that would be related to *Titus Statilius Taurus consul suffectus* in 37 BC, and a general of emperor *Augustus*, hypothesis that has never found an archaeological confirmation. The vast complex of the Taurine Baths includes about eighty rooms, which develop within an area of about 20000 square meters, with an oblong shape approximately aligned on a north-south axis. The northern part is the oldest one, in fact it has *opus reticulatum* and *opus incertum* masonry of Republican age, followed by an imperial phase in *opus testaceum* which incorporates the previous one. Of the first period worthy of note are the *calidarium*, the *frigidarium*, the *laconicum* and the *peristylum*, the recent study of the masonry parameters dated the two pools to the late Republican or Augustan



Aerial view of the Taurine Baths. 1. Laconicum, 2. calidarium, 3. frigidarium, 4. Peristylum, 5. imperial calidarium, 6. imperial frigidarium, 7. castellum aquae, 8. Biblioteca, 9. hospitalia and cubicula. Google Earth image 2021.

age, while the circular *laconicum* (diameter: 3,05 m ; depth: 1,06 m) built in *opus incertum* could, in its original bath destination, back to the second century BC. The second *calidarium*, the *tepidarium*, the second *frigidarium*, the *bibliotheca*, and in the southern extreme, the *hospitalia* with *cubicula* are of the imperial period, however. The water supply of the spa was provided by a hot spring adjacent to the imperial *calidarium* and a series of cold water springs, located about 700 meter to the North-East of the baths. An aqueduct poured the water into a circular *castellum aquae* and the distribution was made possible through *plumbfistulae*. It is therefore a vast thermal complex, which has undergone a long architectural development and which salient features can be better understood through this short description referring to the northern area, where the *calidarium* of Imperial age is leaned against that of Republican age, through a narrow corridor that separates them spatially and historically. The late Republican *calidarium*, with basilical plant, is similar to that of *Praedia Iuliae Felicis* of Pompei, inside there is a rectangular pool (length: 11,5 m ; width: 6,4 m ; depth: 1,3 m) of 95680 liters vol-

ume and, at its base, runs a perimeter *solium*, 40 cm high, interrupted by the staircase leading on the east side. The bottom does not have *suspensurae*, because the Romans used to carve the natural travertine rock bank. Around the pool there was a porch of travertine columns that supported a gabled roof. During the imperial times, to make room for the largest *calidarium*, two sides are removed and built again in brick to support a new vaulted roof in *opus caementicium*. The new north wall has an apse wall in *opus vittatum* and at its center was created an axial niche in *opus mixtum* (length: 1,38 m ; width: 0,98 m ; depth: 0,26 m). The niche is supposed to have been an *aedicula*, or *lararium*, containing the *simulacrum* of the tutelary deity of the water due to the discovery (MENGARELLI 1923) of a votive altar, in Lunense marble, with the dedication in Greek of *Alcibiades* (SEG 2, 529 ; $\lambda\kappa\iota\beta\iota\acute{\alpha}\delta\eta\varsigma$ | $\pi\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\theta\epsilon\rho\omicron\varsigma$ | A $\tau\omicron\kappa\rho\acute{\alpha}\tau\omicron\rho\omicron\varsigma$ | $\delta\rho\iota\alpha\nu\bar{\upsilon}$ $\kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}$ | $\pi\grave{\iota}$ $\kappa\omicron\iota\tau$ $\nu\omicron\varsigma$ | $\chi\alpha\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$ | $N\acute{\upsilon}\mu\phi\alpha\iota\varsigma$.) , freed of the emperor Hadrian, thanking the water-protection nymphs. The imperial *calidarium*, entirely in *opus testaceum* was covered by a cross vault 10 m high. Internally it has a large pool (length: 20,2 m ; width: 9,3 m ; depth: 1,17 m) of the volume of 219796 liters. Also in this case at the base there is a perimeter *solium*, 40 cm high, always integrated with a large access staircase, made of five steps, which covers the north side. The eastern wall is remarkable, with its three-sided window vault, overlooking three open niches, represents the oldest of its kind preserved to this day. On the bottom, equipped with *suspensurae*, a marble head of nymph has been discovered. This, together with the dedication of *Alcibiades*, would indicate the healing and sacred aspect of at least this part of the roman baths which should be accompanied by the more strictly hygienic of the other environments (M.G. BEAUVOIS 2000, J. KÖLHER 2007, M. BASSANI 2012). The imperial complex has returned a hundred brick stamps of Hadrian age ranging from AD 123 to AD 136 and only someone of Trajan age. For this reason it is believed that the construction of the buildings took place under the emperor Hadrian and not Trajan, as instead tradition dictates, while the definitive abandonment of the baths is to be framed between the Gothic War of the sixth century AD and the destruction of *Centumcellae* by the Saracen corsairs which occurred at the beginning of the ninth century AD.

Conclusions

The various hypotheses about the function of the Taurine Baths converge to consider it a thermal complex, but with the exception of only one article against the trend (A.M. REGGIANI 2018) the most recent ones essentially conclude that they were public baths not purely hygienic, but curative baths and for this reason the springs were consecrated to the gods who had created them. This also explained the apotropaic effect of thermal water, however even in the healing baths the ludic aspect was present (M.G. BEAUVOIS 2000), so do not confuse

them with the places associated with the cult of water (M.G. BEAUVOIS 2003). The expansion of the baths in the imperial age was motivated by the increase in visitors, due the birth of port of *Centumcellae* and to travelers who disembarked, in fact the port was connected to the thermal baths by an easy road axis. The remaining unexplored areas of the Taurine thermal baths leave unresolved questions which can only be clarified by further archaeological investigations.

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Civitavecchia, quando le Terme erano una realtà

Archeologia

La città romana di Aquae Tauri



SOCIETÀ STORICA
CIVITAVECCHIESE

MEMO IN PRODUZIONE
2004

Svelato il fondo del caldarium dopo un secolo A cura di Glauco Stracci - Società Storica Civitavecchiese

Sul Poggio della Ficoncella, nel comune di Civitavecchia, è oggi possibile scorgere i resti di una grande vasca ellittica, a gradini concentrici, interamente intagliata nel banco di travertino. Era il caldarium di antiche terme, costruite in prossimità della sorgente idrotermale per sfruttarne le proprietà curative.

Questi ruderi sono la testimonianza del municipio romano di Aquae Tauri, citato da Plinio il Vecchio nel 74 d.C. nel libro X della sua opera, la Naturalis historia, e probabilmente fondato assai prima, intorno al II secolo a.C. su preesistenti vestigia etrusche.

L'origine del nome è forse dovuto alla figura della divinità etrusca di Acheloo, rappresentata come un toro dal volto umano barbuto che i romani, conquistatori dell'Etruria, assimilarono alla figura del Giove taurino. Le terme di Aquae Tauri iniziarono un primo declino sotto Silla, con la costruzione di nuove terme e, successivamente saranno del tutto abbandonate con l'ampliamento delle terme sillane in epoca imperiale, quando Traiano vorrà fondare il porto con la città di Centumcellae nel 104-107 d.C. Il borgo tauriano invece, stando alla citazione nei Dialogi di Papa Gregorio Magno, sopravviverà almeno fino al VI sec. d.C. Un municipio importante, tanto da preservare il suo ricordo attraverso l'appellativo di Taurine che il poeta Rutilio Namaziano, nel 416 d.C., conferisce alle terme imperiali sopracitate; quest'ultime, trovandosi nel territorio del sud-detto municipio, sono ulteriormente menzionate come "Aguas Tauri" nella tavola peutingiana, copia medioevale di una mappa di epoca romana è stata quindi Aquae Tauri e si può dire che non sono molte le città odierne che possono vantare una così variegata testimonianza storica, importante quanto Pyrgi, Castrum

**A sinistra:
La grande vasca
ellittica, a gradini
concentrici del
caldarium**

**In basso:
la tavola
peutingiana, copia
medioevale di una
mappa di epoca
tardo romana
di Aquas Tauri**



Novum, Centumcellae, a cui una lunga storia intrecciata la lega. La Società Storica Civitavecchiese, grazie alle autorizzazioni ottenute dagli enti preposti (comune, soprintendenza, forestale), ha intrapreso, nei mesi tra luglio e ottobre 2015, un'azione di ripulitura attraverso i propri volontari. E' stato ripulito quasi un ettaro di terra dai rovi, sono stati tagliati gli alberi che minacciavano il crollo murario, rimossa la terra dall'unico esempio laziale di un caldarium scolpito nel travertino, riportando alla luce una vasca interrata da almeno cento anni.



The Roman town of Aquae Tauri

Unveiled the bottom of the caldarium after a century

On the Poggio Ficoncella, in the municipality of Civitavecchia, you can now see the remains of a large elliptical bathtub, in concentric steps, carved entirely in travertine bench. Was the caldarium of ancient thermal baths, built near the hydrothermal source to exploit its healing properties. These ruins are evidence of the Roman town of *Aquae Tauri*, quoted by Pliny the Elder in 74 A.D. in Book X of his work, the *Naturalis Historia*, and probably founded long before, around the second century BC on pre-existing Etruscan remains. The origin of the name is perhaps due to the figure of the Etruscan god *Achelous*, it portrayed as a bull from the bearded human face that the Romans, conquerors of 'Etruria, assimilated to the figure of Jupiter bullfighting. The hot springs of *Aquae Tauri* will begin a first decline in Silla period, with the construction of a new spa and thereafter will be completely abandoned with the expansion of Sulla spas in the imperial era, when Trajan will build the port with the city of *Centumcellae* in 104- 107 AD The Tauriano village instead, according to the citation in Dialogues of Pope Gregory the Great, will survive at least until the sixth century. A.D. An important municipality, so as to preserve his memory through the name of Taurine that the poet Rutilio Namaziano, in 416 A.D., gives the aforementioned imperial baths; the latter, being in the territory of that municipality, are further mentioned as "*Aquas Tauri*" in the Tabula Peutingeriana, a medieval copy of a map of the late Roman era. The first Roman era Civitavecchia was then *Aquae Tauri* and you can say that there are not many today's cities that can boast such a varied historical record, as important as Pyrgi, Castrum Novum, Centumcellae, to which a league long intertwined history. The Historical Society in Civitavecchia, with the authorization obtained by the respective authorities (town, superintendence, Forestry), has undertaken, in the months between July and October 2015, an action of cleaning through its volunteers. It 'been cleaned up almost a hectare of land brambles, were cut the trees which threatened the collapse of walls, removed the earth from' Lazio only example of a caldarium carved in travertine, bringing to light an underground tank at least a hundred years.

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La ciudad romana de Aquae Tauri

Dio a conocer el fondo del caldarium después de un siglo

En el Poggio Ficoncella, en el municipio de Civitavecchia, ahora se puede ver los restos de una gran bañera elíptica, en los pasos concéntricos, tallada totalmente en banco de travertino. Era el caldarium de las antiguas termas, construido cerca de la fuente hidrotermal para explotar sus propiedades curativas. Estas ruinas son evidencia de la ciudad romana de *Aquae Tauri*, citado por Plinio el Viejo en el 74 dC en el Libro X de su trabajo, la *Naturalis Historia*, y probablemente fundada mucho antes, alrededor del siglo II aC en restos etruscos preexistente. El origen del nombre se debe tal vez a la figura del dios Aqueloo etrusca, se presenta como un toro del rostro humano con barba que los romanos, conquistadores de 'Etruria, asimilado a la figura de Júpiter taurina. Las aguas termales de *Aquae Tauri* comenzarán una primera caída en Silla, con la construcción de un nuevo spa y posteriormente se abandonó por completo con la expansión de los balnearios Sila en la época imperial, cuando Trajano construirá el puerto con la ciudad de *Centumcellae* en 104- 107 dC El pueblo Tauriano lugar, de acuerdo con la cita en Diálogos del Papa Gregorio Magno, sobrevivirá al menos hasta el siglo VI. A. D. Un importante municipio, a fin de preservar su memoria a través del nombre de taurina que el poeta Rutilio Namaziano, en el 416 dC, da los baños imperiales antes mencionados; este último, estando en el territorio de ese municipio, son más mencionado como "*Aquas Tauri*" en la Tabla de Peutinger, una copia medieval de un mapa de la época romana tardía. La primera época romana Civitavecchia Fue entonces *Aquae Tauri* y se puede decir que no hay muchas ciudades de hoy en día que pueden presumir de un récord histórico tan variada, tan importantes como *Pyrgi*, *Castrum Novum*, *Centumcellae*, a la que una liga entrelazados larga historia. La sociedad histórica en Civitavecchia, con la autorización obtenida por las autoridades respectivas (ciudad, superintendencia, silvicultura), ha llevado a cabo, entre los meses de julio y octubre de 2015, una acción de limpieza a través de sus voluntarios. Es sido limpiado casi una hectárea de zarzas tierra, se cortaron los árboles que amenazaban el colapso de las paredes, se quitó la tierra de 'Lazio único ejemplo de un caldarium tallada en mármol travertino, sacando a la luz un

tanque subterráneo al menos cien años.

Glauco Stracci -ssc

La ville romaine d'Aquae Tauri

Dévoilé au bas de la caldarium après un siècle

Sur le Poggio Ficoncella, dans la municipalité de Civitavecchia, vous pouvez maintenant voir les restes d'une grande baignoire elliptique, en gradins concentriques, entièrement sculptée en travertin banc. Était le caldarium des thermes antiques, construit près de la source hydrothermale pour exploiter ses propriétés curatives. Ces ruines sont des preuves de la ville romaine d'*Aquae Tauri*, cité par Pline l'Ancien en 74 apr. J.-C. dans le livre X de son travail, la *Naturalis Historia*, et probablement fondé bien avant, autour du deuxième siècle avant JC vestiges étrusques sur la préexistante.

L'origine du nom est peut-être dû à la figure de l'étrusque dieu *Achéloüs*, il dépeint comme un taureau du visage humain barbu que les Romains, vainqueurs de l'Etrurie, assimilé à la figure de Jupiter taumachie. Les sources chaudes de *Aquae Tauri* vont commencer une première baisse de la Silla, avec la construction d'un nouveau spa et par la suite seront complètement abandonné avec l'expansion des spas Sulla à l'époque impériale, lorsque Trajan va construire le port avec la ville de Centumcellae en 104- 107 AD Le village Tauriano place, selon la citation dans Dialogues du pape Grégoire le Grand, survivra au moins jusqu'au sixième siècle. Apr. J.-C. Une municipalité importante, de manière à préserver sa mémoire par le nom de Taurine que le poète Rutilio Namaziano, en 416 après Jésus-Christ, donne les thermes impériaux mentionnés ci-dessus; ce dernier, étant sur le territoire de cette municipalité, sont en outre mentionné que "*Aquas Tauri*" dans la Table de Peutinger, une copie médiévale d'une carte de l'époque romaine tardive. La première époque romaine Civitavecchia était alors *Aquae Tauri* et vous pouvez dire qu'il n'y a pas beaucoup de villes d'aujourd'hui qui peuvent se vanter d'un tel record historique varié, aussi importants que *Pyrgi*, *Castrum Novum*, *Centumcellae*, à laquelle une lieue entremêle histoire. La Société historique de Civitavecchia, avec l'autorisation obtenue par les autorités respectives (ville, surintendance, foresterie), a entrepris, dans les mois entre Juillet et Octobre 2015, une action de nettoyage grâce à ses bénévoles. Il été nettoyé près d'un hectare de ronces terrestres, ont été coupés les arbres qui menaçaient l'effondrement des murs, enlevé la terre de Lazio seul exemple d'un caldarium sculpté en travertin, mettant en lumière un réservoir souterrain au moins une centaine d'années.

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