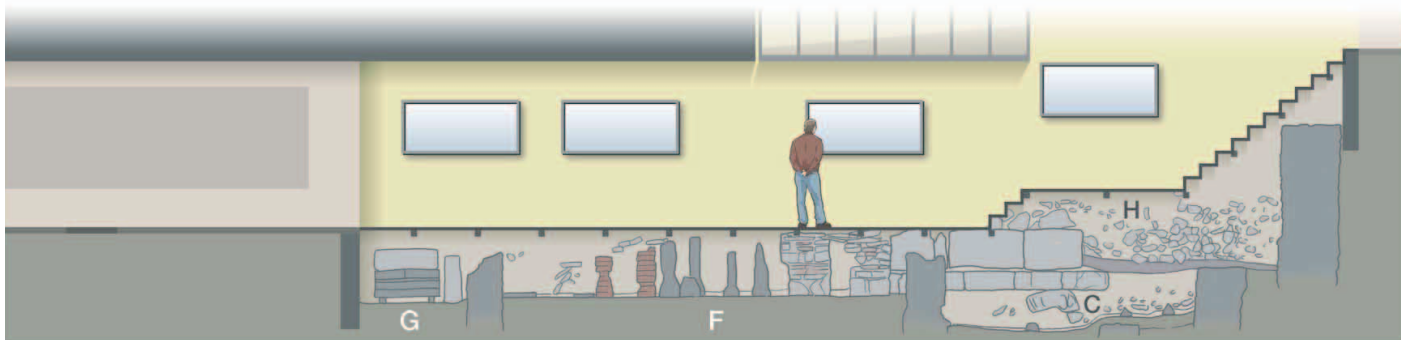


THERMENGASSE: THE ROMAN BATHS IN TVRICVM

Today



1800 Years earlier



Drawings by Oliver Lüde, Winterthur

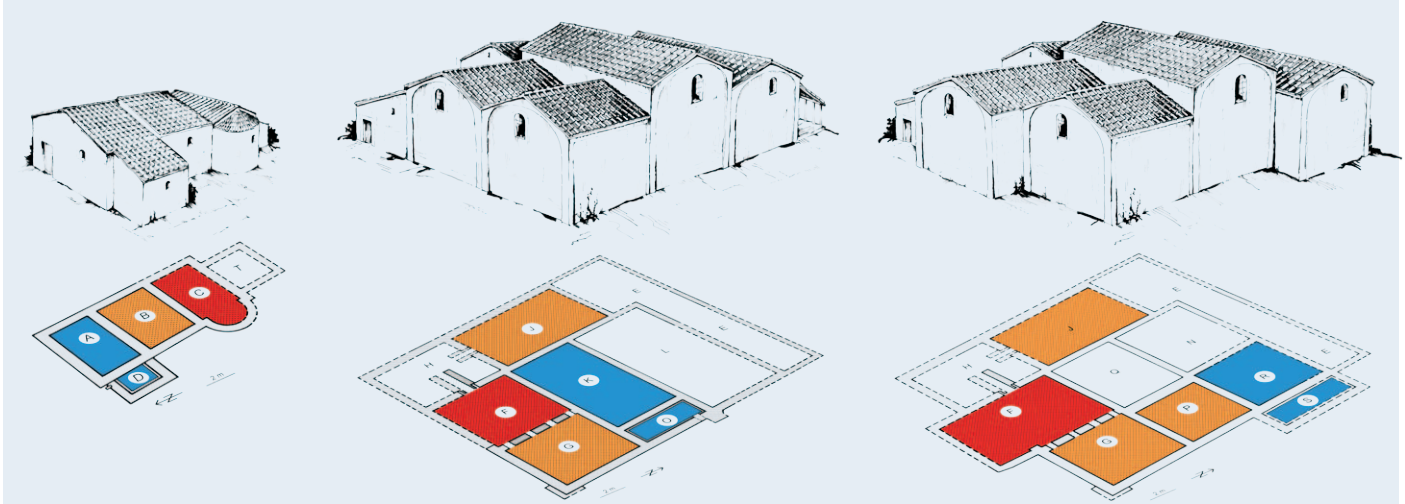


The remains of two bathhouses were discovered in 1983/84 during construction work carried out beneath the present-day houses at Weinplatz in the ancient port district beside the River Limmat. The remnants of painted wall plaster and tesserae pointed to the rather luxurious style of furnishings, while traces of soot and lime indicated that the baths had been used intensively.

The earlier of the two baths (Bath 1), built around AD 70, was quite small. After the middle of the 2nd century it was replaced by a significantly larger building (Bath 2a). The last change occurred in the early 3rd century (Bath 2b). It is unknown when this bathhouse closed down; it may have happened in the later 3rd century.



Thermengasse: Various hypocaust pillars (Underfloor Heating) in the CALDARIUM. Photographs by Archaeological Department of Zurich City



Bath 1

It contained a FRIGIDARIUM (A) with a basin (D) and two rooms heated with a hypocaust – a TEPIDARIUM (B) and in the very south a CALDARIUM (C) with an apse.

Bath 2a

A spacious changing room (L) was located in front of the actual bathing section. From this changing room, one could enter the cold room which has a basin (K and O) and was more than double the size of its predecessor. Various other rooms lay adjacent and were heated by the same furnace room (H) – a TEPIDARIUM (G), a CALDARIUM (F) and another large room (J), where one could probably while away the time and be pampered.

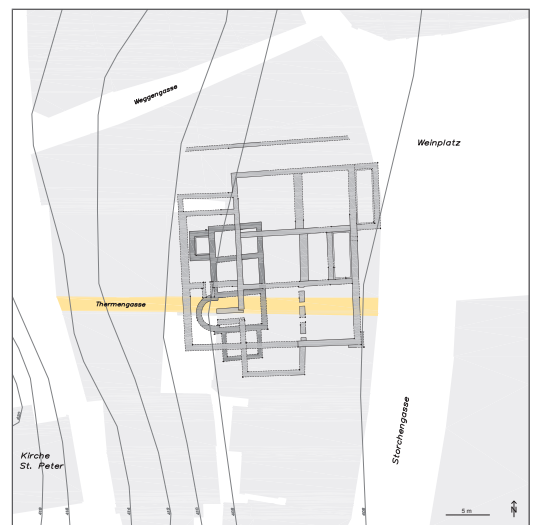
Bath 2b

Renovation works enlarged the heated area of the bath by extending the CALDARIUM (F) and by dividing off a section of the old FRIGIDARIUM and heating it (P). The FRIGIDARIUM was now relocated and fitted with a new pool (R and S).

Drawings by Beat Scheffold, Winterthur

Ancient Spas – More than just Personal Hygiene

The Romans adopted their culture of bathing from the Greco-Hellenistic region. While the Greek wash-rooms were usually just simple affairs, the Romans created complex edifices with their own particular style of architecture, where one tended to spend long periods of time. One could get massages, rub-downs with fragrant oils and have one's hair dressed, as well as play games and pursue sports, and buy and consume food. Bathhouses became centres of Roman social life, where business contacts were made, and where people met to talk and attend lectures. Because only members of the rich upper classes could afford to have their own bathing facilities, public baths played an important role in Roman towns and cities.



Present-day city map (light grey) with Thermen-gasse (yellow). Ground plan area of the Roman Bath 1 (dark grey) and Bath 2 (medium grey). Image Archaeological Department of Zurich City

Contact: Baugeschichtliches Archiv, Neumarkt 4, 8001 Zürich | 044 266 86 86 | afs@zuerich.ch