

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS ON THE ROMAN BATHS IN SEBASTOPOLIS

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Keywords: Black Sea, Tokat, Sebastopolis, Roman architecture, Roman balneae

Abstract: The baths, which stand as one of the significant institutions in Roman social life, represent one of the fundamental buildings of the Roman bathing tradition. In the Roman world, baths were not only places for bathing; they were also socialising venues or tools for political propaganda, embedded in the centre of public life and transformed into symbols of urban existence. Unlike in other civilisations, they were not exclusively used by the nobility but became structures that benefited all segments of society. The Roman bath located in the ancient city of Sebastopolis is one such example. In this study, the architectural elements obtained from excavations conducted to date have been evaluated (1987–2023). Based on the findings, the sections have been identified, and an attempt to propose a historical context has been made using the existing Roman bath terminology. Although the incompleteness of the structure's excavation and the alterations made during different periods, along with its use beyond its original purpose, complicated the dating, an attempt was nevertheless made to date it based on its plan in light of similar structures, and the innovations it brought to Roman bath architecture were highlighted.

Cuvinte-cheie: Marea Neagră, Tokat, Sebastopolis, arhitectură romană, băi romane

Rezumat: Băile, care reprezintă una dintre instituțiile semnificative ale vieții sociale romane, constituie unul dintre elementele fundamentale ale tradiției balneare romane. În lumea romană, băile nu erau doar locuri de îmbăiere; erau și locuri de socializare sau instrumente de propagandă politică, integrate în centrul vieții publice și transformate în simboluri ale existenței urbane. Spre deosebire de alte civilizații, acestea nu erau folosite exclusiv de nobilime, ci au devenit structuri de care au beneficiat toate segmentele societății. Baia romană situată în orașul antic Sebastopolis este un astfel de exemplu. În acest studiu, au fost evaluate elementele arhitecturale obținute din săpăturile efectuate până în prezent (1987–2023). Pe baza descoperirilor, au fost identificate secțiunile și s-a încercat propunerea unui context istoric folosind terminologia existentă a băilor romane. Deși caracterul incomplet al săpăturilor efectuate la această structură și modificările aduse în diferite perioade, precum și utilizarea sa în alte scopuri decât cele inițiale, au complicat datarea, s-a încercat totuși stabilirea acesteia pe baza planului, având în vedere structuri similare, și au fost evidențiate inovațiile pe care le-a adus arhitecturii băilor romane.

INTRODUCTION

The ancient city of Sebastopolis is situated 69 km south of Tokat Province, in the Central Black Sea Region of Turkey, within the boundaries of the district of Sulusaray, which has a population of 4.600¹ (Fig. 1). Although the region was visited by numerous travellers in the 18th and 19th centuries, it appears that none of these individuals made any mention of the ancient city of Sebastopolis². It was not until 1871, during the visit of the researcher Damon to Sulusaray, that the city came to light following the decipherment of an inscription bearing the name Sebastopolis³. The primary reason cited for the city's having remained hidden for so long is that it does not lie along the route of the main road in use today. However, the real cause is that it lies within the floodplain of the Çekerek River (ancient name: Skylax) and that a large part of the city is buried beneath a layer of soil reaching depths of

5–10 metres in places. In addition to all these adverse factors, the ancient city was completely lost from view following the establishment of the modern town of Sulusaray—which bears the same name today—after the region came under Turkish rule. It only managed to return to the public eye following rescue excavations carried out by the Tokat Museum Directorate after architectural remains were uncovered during illegal excavations in the 1980s.

1. EXCAVATION WORK CARRIED OUT AT THE BATH

Excavations at the Roman Bath date back to 1987⁴. During the rescue excavations carried out by the Tokat Museum between 1987 and 1990, only a very small part of the structure was uncovered and its exact function could not be determined; consequently, the structure was recorded as “Excavation Area No. 1” and designated as the “Columned Building”. During excavations carried out inside the structure in these years, marble floor paving, water

¹ Le Guen, Rémy 2010, p. 97.

² Amandry, Rémy 1988, p. 5–6.

³ Amandry, Rémy 1988, p. 5–6; Le Guen, Rémy 2010, p. 96–98; Ramsay 1960, p. 361.

⁴ Özcan 1991, p. 265–266, plan 2–3, fig. 3–4.