It is a testimony to the exceptional importance of the written word on scholarly judgment that the title of the two-volume publication on one of the most elaborate bathing complexes in Ephesus, reviewed here, is given as the ‘Vedius Gymnasium,’ not as the ‘Vedius Baths’ or more aptly, as the ‘Vedius Bath-Gymnasium.’ A complex of nearly 12,000 sq. m. of which two-thirds is made up of monumental spaces heaped upon each other, lofty, light-filled vaults soaring over an intricate and expanding structural geometry, some two dozen furnaces heating two hectares of floor area raised on thousands of pillars, fountains and swimming pools – in sum a mega bath by all reasonable standards. Yet all this concrete reality is rendered invisible and impotent before the authority of an inscription in Greek which unequivocally names the building a λυμνάσιον. To be sure, the authors of this handsome publication, M. Steskal and M. La Torre, stress the primary thermal function of this and comparable others from Ephesus (Harbor, Theater and East ‘gymnasia’) and discuss them as major examples of the ‘bath-gymnasium’ type of Asia Minor even as they remain faithful, in a fundamental way, to the notion of the gymnasium.

A confusion of terminology between a gymnasium and a bath (balaneion) is not uncommon among the inscriptions from Asia Minor and the West. Sometimes these two terms were used interchangeably to denote the same building. To be fair, in Roman Asia Minor the word ‘gymnasia’ came to denote a bath and the nomenclature is to a certain extent justified by architecture since around one-third of the building grafted on to the massive, vaulted bath block is an entity that loosely answers the description of a Hellenistic gymnasium-palaestra: a large, open colonnaded courtyard surrounded by low, featureless rooms covered by wooden-trussed roofs. What exactly went on in these airy, colonnaded central fields is another matter. Overwhelming literary evidence indicates that the palaestrae attached to the baths in the West and the East were used by ordinary bathers for light exercises and games as a prelude to hot bathing. But were they also used, at different times, like Greek gymnasia, to serve the athletic and educational needs of the community? More on this later. Recognized by their dual function and dual identity, the apparent conflict surrounding the name and reality of bath-gymnasia may be only an illusion. These elaborate complexes, special to Asia Minor, represented a proper combination of a bath and a gymnasium, certainly in form but also in function. Although the convergence of the two institutions had been at work from their inception, the mature examples were achieved under the Roman Empire.


2 For the first use of the term ‘bath-gymnasium’ in modern literature, see: F. K. Yegül, The Bath-Gymnasium Complex in Asia Minor during the Imperial Roman Age, PhD
This process was interesting and intriguing beyond mere architectural sense because it involved the interplay and merging of two fundamental ideologies of the classical world, the Greek and the Roman, as represented by the eastern traditions of the Greek gymnasium and the Roman thermae of the West. Throughout Roman history we have seen fascinating instances of this kind of cultural-architectural association and assimilation at work such as the development of the classically inspired temple in Italy with its creative iterations. Now in eastern Greece under Roman rule a similar process of cultural assimilation took shape. Curiously, this remarkable transformational journey of the bath and the gymnasium, each reflecting important differences of social use and each partially retained in the new architectural type, is less known or publicized. Nor is the remarkable architectural sophistication of the new type emphasized. Such a relative lack of interest in the creation of a type unique in its cultural and architectural genesis can be attributed to the lack of information available through full and detailed publications. If this is true, Steskal and La Torre’s final publication of the Vedius Bath-Gymnasium under the aegis of the Austrian Archaeological Institute is a valuable step in the right direction.

Bathing structures of the imperial era tend to be among the largest building enterprises of the Roman world. Their massive concrete walls and vaults once rising to 15–25 m high and now buried to 5–6 m thick in debris, they are among the most daunting nightmares faced by modern archaeologists. Little wonder that few if any of these behemoths are properly excavated beyond a few years of exploratory trenching resulting in cursory annual reports. The imperial bath-gymnasium at Sardis enjoyed a final publication although less than one-half of the giant complex (over twice the size of the Vedius Bath-Gymnasium) was explored; comparable establishments from Aezane, Alexandria Troas, Ankara, Aphrodisias and Perge have been partially excavated and not fully published.

Primary archaeological work at the Vedius Bath-Gymnasium was undertaken in 1927–29 by J. Keil and the architect M. Theuer who uncovered slightly over one-half of the building. Long thought to be the ubiquitous ‘palace’ by some early travelers, the uncovering of the suspensurae and extensive waterworks in 1927, steered Keil to trust his eyes and correctly identify the building as a Roman bath, perhaps the Stadium Baths on based on its location immediately north of the Stadium. But the title was quickly ‘corrected’ upon the discovery in 1927 and 1928 of two building inscriptions (IvE 431 and Iv438) which referred to the building as a ‘gymnasium’ and identified the donor as M. Claudius P. Vedius Antoninus Phaedrus Sabinianus and his wife Flavia Papiana, members of the prominent Ephesian family and friends of the Emperor Antoninus Pius. Narrowly dated to A.D. 147–149, the building was dedicated to Artemis and the emperor Pius. The
subsequent uncovering of a sumptuously decorated hall opening into the west ambulatory of the palaestra together with its rich sculpture including a statue base in a central apse and an altar in front of it, seemed to justify the identification of this space as an ‘imperial hall,’ or Kaisersaal. Current concerns compelled the authors to view this evidence with greater caution and skepticism. After the Second World War, minor excavation, restoration and study of the complex was undertaken between 1953–1958 under the directorship of F. Miltner, who planned a major volume subsuming all of Ephesian bath-gymnasia.¹ Miltner’s death in 1959 put an end to this worthy project revived in 2000 after a hiatus of 40 years with the encouragement of F. Krinzinger, the director of the expedition. Spearheaded by Steskal and La Torre, and aided by a dozen contributing scholars, the project focused on a new archaeological and architectural study and recording of the building and included some twenty new trenches between 2000 and 2005. Perhaps, the main contribution of these narrowly focused and carefully conducted sondages and analyses of stratigraphy has been the establishment of a chronology that attributes a single, major phase of rebuilding and redecoration of the complex during the first quarter of the 5th Century. The building ceased to function as a bath by the end of the 5th C, but continued to offer shelter to various groups and served ad hoc functions through its slow decline and destruction.

The two weighty folio volumes (39x30 cm/15.25”x11.75”), text and illustrations, are the palpable result of decade of admirable teamwork on this most typical and informative of Anatolian bath-gymnasia. Volume 2 includes new and historical photographs, ceramic and glass profiles, details of stratigraphy, technical diagrams and charts, but most importantly a new set of superb architectural drawings by La Torre documenting and restoring the building. Sharing similar interests, I appreciate the high quality of these drawings, especially the fine restoration studies, completed painstakingly in traditional precision. There are also computer-generated or -aided studies. The first volume is divided into ten chapters combining descriptive and interpretative material with lists of data and a substantive catalogue of the finds. Chapter II includes a detailed, room-by-room description of spaces (including a catalogue of 188 architectural items); chapter III is a report on the excavations since 2000, evaluation of stratigraphy and finds; chapter IV, the largest part of the publication, is the discussion and catalogue of finds, which includes pottery, lamps, glass, metal, bone, ivory, coins, plant and animal matter and the new inscriptions (text pp. 97–252; plates, 275–336); chapter V is on ornament and decoration; chapter VI is on technical subjects such as heating, water supply systems and lighting and chapter VII on the proved or hypothetical functions of spaces; chapter VIII offers a discussion of the donor’s family and the Ephesian tradition of civic munificence; chapter IX is on the dating and building history of the complex concluding with chapter X on recent restoration and repair work.

The Vedius Bath-Gymnasium Complex is located in the northwest quarter of the city, partially raised on a massive artificial terrace on the northern slopes of Panayır Dağ. A northern view of this terrace, even better the restored north elevations of the same, reveals the magnificent rise of this terrace to a height of 14 m

or so on several levels above which the grand vaulted halls of the bath are built. Monumental stairs wrapping around the northeast and northwest corners of the terrace provide access to the building from the northern plain connecting it to the Artemision by way of the Sacred Road. Separated from the stadium by a colonnaded street and close to the Coressian Gate, these strategically placed baths lying just inside the by then defunct Hellenistic walls would have offered the weary travelers entering (or leaving) town a chance to clean and refresh themselves just as did the East Bath-Gymnasium situated at the east end of the same thoroughfare on the Magnesian Gate.

Composed of spaces symmetrically disposed about a strong east-west axis, the plan of the complex is a typical example of a bath-gymnasium of the imperial type. Although Ephesus is well known for its previously mentioned bath-gymnasiums (all three of them earlier than or closely contemporary to our example), the design is closest to the imperial Bath-Gymnasium of Sardis, which was started around the time of the Vedius complex but took a lot longer to finish, perhaps due to its far larger size. The main entrance is from the colonnaded street through a formal propylon located in the middle of the south side of the palaestra – and not (like Sardis) axially from the east. A pair of herms (probably a Hermes and Heracles, patron deities of gymnasium and baths) greeted the visitor at the entrance who, then passed between the rich, columnar displays raised on a continuous podium along the side walls of the room. Although the propylon is known to be an original feature, the decorative scheme of aediculae must belong to a later renovation since the few remaining pieces the cornice and a Composite capital clearly suggest a date no earlier than the end of the 3rd Century. The palaestra is a rectangular enclosure 49x77 m, 62 columns and c. 1880 sq. m (cf. to the Sardis palaestra of 100 columns, c. 6,600 sq. m). The remains of a marble paving in the center area – which is expected to be unpaved to facilitate sporting activities – indicates that at a later date the use of the space was transformed from an athletic to a civic and ceremonial one, just as happened in early 4th C at Sardis; thus the suggested date of 3rd C for the cessation of bath-related sportive activities at Ephesus may be too conservative. A rectangular latrine, semi-open to the sky by a peristyle colonnade and accommodating 62 seats occupies the southeast corner of the palaestra. Direct access from the street as well as from Hall IIIb through a side door underscores its convenience as a facility serving both the city and the bath-gymnasium. An earlier Latrine II, original to the building, is discreetly tucked away in the basement, close to the northeast terrace approach by stairs.

Opening into the palaestra from the west across a frontage of double-engaged columns is a rectangular hall. This special hall was dubbed as Kaisersaal and associated with the Imperial Cult by Keil and Theuer mainly on account of its colonnaded aedicular architecture centered on an apse and an altar. The sumptuous aedicular scheme is familiar to us from its many applications on scenae frons, nymphaea, city gates and similar urban facades especially popular in the Roman East. Immediate models, however, belong to the so-called ‘marble halls’ featured

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in a dozen or so bath-gymnasia in Asia Minor, some of the most distinguished examples coming from Ephesus itself.

A fair number of the decorative elements belonging to the first story of the hall has been found (a triple-fasciae architrave and pulvinated frieze topped by a low, dentilated cornice), but the second story elements are entirely missing. The digital reconstructions of these entablatures in aedicular groups are an excellent demonstration of the effective use of computers in archaeology. The well preserved Composite capitals whose 'twisted-rope' astragal (between the egg-and-dart echinus and the acanthus leaves) is presented as a special Ephesian detail in capital typology. But, this local preference is by no means restricted to Ephesus and can be seen in a general and loose way in Miletus, Sardis and other sites. The authors regard the architectural ornament from the 'marble hall' as original to the building, i.e., mid-2nd C. This may be so; however, based on a limited visual analysis I find the quality of the Ephesian ornament from this hall unexceptional if not mediocre, certainly no better in precision and craftsmanship than the Severan ornament from the Marble Court of Sardis closely dated to 211–12. But, I admit that Roman imperial ornament from Asia Minor, especially from the Antonine period onward, follows no close and clear stylistic systems. It is generalized and creative allowing much individual experimentation and regional variation. For example, we have reason to believe that the particular plasticity of Sardian ornament from the Marble Court may reflect the inspiration and influence of the Sardis Artemision whose Roman era ornament itself was closely modeled on the temple’s superb Hellenistic originals. Another problem with judging on stylistic particulars, even following the close and detailed word descriptions of ornamental comparanda where dozens of examples from many different sites are examined, is the lack of sufficient number of photographs; almost none of the examples described by G. A. Plattner (V.3) are illustrated. In a publication with well over 1,200 figures (and over 50 plates reserved for pottery profiles), restricting comparative architectural ornament to just eight photographs will not do.

Roughly one-third of the bath block behind the ‘marble hall’ is formed by several, interconnected, monumental halls. The most imposing is the H-shaped triple hall (IIIa,b,c) named basilica thermarum, a term found in inscriptions and loosely signifying a large hall with multiple uses (sometimes also referred to as ambulacra). With their 12-meter spans, vaults restored at c. 16-meter heights, marble-clad and pilaster lined walls and enormous thermal windows, the feeling of space in this multiple ensemble must have been imposing. Especially impressive was the treatment of structure expressed through a system of bold projecting piers and deep rectangular niches between them. Recent excavations uncovered pools and fountains in these alcoves making this lofty, light-filled, roaming space,

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as aptly interpreted by Steskal and La Torre, a kind of ‘water court’, pleasantly cool in the summer and warm in the winter. Before this discovery, benches inside the alcoves and the direct connection between the wing units (IIIa and IIIc) and the palaestra implied that this space served as an apodyterium among other uses.\(^1\)

It is now clear that the basins in the alcoves of Hall III were all filled and replaced by benches during a later phase. Apodyteria proper are identified as the twin oblong halls VI and VIII, which, too, have continuous benches and even evidence for ‘boxes’ for the safekeeping of bathers’ belongings. The main entrance to the complex was by way of the palaestra (as is common for all bath-gymnasia) and I am still troubled by the idea of a «centrally located» apodyterium that required roughly a 70-meter trek from the entrance. Roman bathing ritual, though never binding, did require the changing of street clothes upon entering the palaestra in order to engage some form of light exercises before the hot baths. Upon these activities and their logical sequence our sources are solid.

The authors’ apparent comfort with the idea of palaestra-apodyterium relationship that is less than ideal seems to stem from their assessment of the complex not primarily as thermae, but as a gymnasia (it is telling that ‘gymnasium’ and ‘thermae’ are separated as distinctly different entities in the outline of room functions, p. viii). In this view the palaestra is the gymnasia; hence the paving of the palaestra as early as the 3\(^{rd}\) C making it unfit for any sort of exercise – including those traditionally linked with bathing – is meritoriously explained as a reflection of the transformation of the gymnastic education from an athletic concern to an intellectual one. The question of the nature of the bath-gymnasia as a Roman and Anatolian institution is a significant and legitimate one.\(^2\) The evidence, limited as it is, leaves no doubt that the palaestra component of the bath-gymnasia could and did sometimes serve as an independent gymnasium in the Graeco-Roman city, but its primary function in the context of a bath-gymnasia firmly remained subservient to the needs of bathing.

The discovery in 1927 large sections of the fallen vault in bricks placed on ends (not radially) inside Room VI (south apodyterium) and a similar vault construction in the main caldarium (XVII) made with slightly trapezoidal bricks (illustrated in Theuer’s drawings Taf 167,3,4 and Taf 200,1,2) is an eye-opener. Pitch-brick vaulting in Asia Minor is uncommon and modest. Covering spans of 12–14 m, this must be one of the most ambitious and earliest uses of pitched brick vault construction in Asia Minor. Besides ‘unearting’ such remarkable but relatively obscure information from the Keil years, one of the most valuable results of the recent work on the building has been the partial excavation, cleaning and study of the subterranean facilities along the terraced north front. Developed as a row of rectangular, barrel vaulted units supporting the massive concrete terracing,
these rooms open wide into the ‘cryptoporticus’, or rather a roofed gallery that extended along the full length of the north side, whose front wall is entirely gone but restored on paper as a kind of a ‘window wall’. The chambers and corridors of the northwest end (K-J-I-H-M-N-L) are in poor shape and were mainly for the heavier services and drainage; the cluster at the northeast end (G-F-E-D-C-B and Latrine A), with plastered and painted walls and tall, arched windows that brought light above the cryptoporticus roof, must have been intended for more genteel uses – perhaps, as work rooms or lounges for the staff. Often too impressed by the luxury of upstairs we tend to overlook the industrial nature of the services essential to run these giant public baths and the army of staff and servants that ran it. One of the subterranean rooms of the Thermae of Caracalla in Rome was identified as a staff office because the discovery of a white marble plaque which bore charcoal scribbles listing the names of servants, their duties and work hours for the day of April 19, 226.¹

Let us consider the controversial issue of the nature and function of the so-called Kaisersaal or the Marmorsaal, recently re-named. The dedication of this room to Artemis of Ephesus and to the emperor Antoninus Pius; the discovery in situ of a statue base inside an axially disposed apse and an altar in front of it; and the extraordinarily rich marble architecture, seemed sufficient to associate this space with the cult of the emperors. Although the statue of the emperor was not found (a very large portion of the room’s marble architecture and statuary did not survive), it could be logically surmised that an image of Pius would have occupied the apse, perhaps along with the statue of the donor Publius Vedius Antoninus, which was found. The iconographic program of the statuary clearly alluded to the city’s mythical past and auspicious future, themes complimentary to imperial purposes. The Marmorsaal of the Vedius complex is of course only one example of this architectural type special to the bath-gymnasia of Asia Minor under Roman rule. Among the many very similar creations (some from Ephesus) perhaps the largest, and most lavishly decorated is the restored Marble Court of Sardis which bears a dedication to the Sardian Artemis to be sure, but pointedly to Septimius Severus, his wife Julia Domna, sons Caracalla and Geta, the Roman Senate and People, ending with the names of the local donors, two eminent women of consular rank. With its powerful, apsidal, axial design, rich sculptural program emphasizing Dionysiac themes (and possibly an imperial altar), this space also appeared to be a place where the imperial family was honored, but not officially worshipped.² To be sure, there is no clinching evidence, particularly no epigraphic record that spells out the proposed association, but there is a rather large number of indicators that collectively make the inclusion of the imperial cult in the popular setting of a Roman bath strongly plausible. These ‘marble halls’ were honorific spaces admitted into the secular context of the politically

¹ After the date and the name of the emperor Alexander Severus there follows a list of the names of slaves and servants … and near each name a number … which probably refers to the hours of duty each individual.» R. Lanciani, Ancient Rome in the Light of Recent Discoveries, London 1897, 93–4.

motivated cult, which had been indeed, accepted into many aspects of Roman daily life. Taking minimalist views, there are of course scholars who disagree.1

Having been a privileged witness to the authors’ sympathetic views on the *Kaisersaal* and the imperial cult a few years ago, and their unequivocal support of this idea in writing, I was surprised to see them defect to the minimalist camp.2 It is hard to know what part of this change was due to an understandable desire to follow a cautious and safer path appropriate for a ‘final publication’ and what part was motivated by the need to distance themselves from the all too looming presences of the ‘fathers’: Josef Keil and Franz Miltner. The preferred interpretation of these marble halls as spaces broadly expressive of the wealth and power of the Roman Empire and honoring their donors bears reason and demands no contest – after all, all public institutions with stately interiors and lavish marble displays (especially of the columnar sort) were symbolic of the Empire’s wealth and might and the inclusion of any donor’s name with that of the ancestral gods and the ruling family only confirmed their aspiration for greater glory by such associations. The ‘functions’ accorded to the Ephesian *Marmorsaal* are multi-purpose subsuming the uses of a sculpture gallery, a meeting hall, club room, symposium center and a banquet salon – and, of course, a place for the *Selbstdarstellung der Stifter* (296). Yet, so toxic must have been the idea that not even a cursory reference to imperial presence or imperial cult has been allowed in this marketplace of possibilities. Providence moves in strange ways. Even as Steskal and La Torre’s publication was going into press, evidence as ‘clinching’ as we can hope to find was emerging from the field. The discovery at the end of the 2007 season of a colossal head of Hadrian from the Roman baths at Sagalassus was followed in 2008 by the colossal heads of Marcus Aurelius and the Elder Faustina. Marc Waelkens, the director of the Belgian Expedition of Sagalassus, identified the original location of these iconic images over a continuous podium in a central hall of the baths. A six-meter long inscription dedicating the building and this space to Marcus Aurelius accompanied the images.3

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2 Steskal’s accommodating views on the potential association of the imperial cult in Roman bath-gymnasia and their *Kaisersale* and the position of local donors sharing imperial honors through civic gifts («ähnliche Kaisersale» ... diente der kultischen Verehrung des Kaiserhauses und war Ausdruck der besonderen Loyalität des Stifters gegenüber dem Kaiser Rom»): Steskal 2001, 177–88, esp. 184; Steskal 2003, 227–39, esp. 234.

Such critical evidence reinforces my belief and proposal that these ‘marble halls’ (whether one calls them *Kaisersäle* or not), which were integral elements of Roman baths and bath-gymnasia, were spaces that bore the imperial message and honored the imperial masters even as they through word and symbol dignified the munificence of local leaders. Along with other instances that informally celebrated the imperial cult in civic context, they were special, liminal spaces where the fuzzy borders between religious and secular could be crossed.¹

The publication has a few factual and printing errors: four pages (43–46), at least in my copy, are printed double; on figure 5 (45) the heated hall marked XVII should be XVI. Originally created at scales 1/250, 1/350, 1/400, La Torre’s architectural drawings are a joy to study and could have been a greater joy and more useful if they had not been reduced so severely to fit the print format: at a typical sectional drawing, which is packed with information (and discussed in the text), one-meter is represented by c 2–3 mm. Being thoroughly familiar with this problem, I sympathize with the architect who probably wished for something more sensible and lost to the concerns of cost control.

*Das Vediusgymnasium in Ephesos* is an informative and substantive publication whose two volumes display immense scholarship and hard work. It does credit to its various contributors and the Austrian Archaeological Expedition which dared to take on this daunting task and close the 80-year old cycle. But, even more cogently it throws light on a great building and its many parallels in Anatolia. Looking at the handsome, computer-generated axonometric restorations of this great building (and other fine handmade ones), one can hardly hope for a better demonstration of the artistic and structural complexities of Roman architecture as revealed in the masterful composition of masses, voids, spaces, solids, planes and volumes reflecting the special needs of a sophisticated society.

Santa Barbara

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