

ATHENS AND ROME: LIFE AND CULTURE IN CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY

Lecture 12 – Banquets and Baths

CLCS4007

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Roman Banquets

What was a Roman Banquet

- ▣ *Cena* (pl. *Cenae*) – dinner, the main Roman meal – could be a public or private affair.
- ▣ *Convivium* (pl. *Convivia*) – feasts, banquets, entertainment – an event with guests, thus open to the scrutiny and judgement of others.
- ▣ Importance of a social context, luxury and enjoyment but also social display.

Roman Banquets in the Popular Imagination (1)



House of the Chaste Lovers - Pompeii

Roman Banquets in the Popular Imagination (2)

“They vomit in order to eat, and eat in order to vomit, and banquets for which they scour the whole world they do not even bother to digest.” –

Seneca Ad Helviam Matrem de Consolatione 10.

Elements of a Banquet – Food and Drink

- ▣ A mixture of simple and complex dishes – extravagance designed to impress guests.
- ▣ Expensive meats and fish, especially in combinations – also spices (especially black pepper) – see recipes of “Apicius”.
- ▣ Fine wines – spiced wines – one recipe involving pepper, mastich, nard and saffron among other ingredients – *Apicius De Re Coquinaria* 1.1.

“Scald the flamingo, wash and dress it, put it in a pot, add water, salt, dill, and a little vinegar, to be parboiled. Finish cooking with a bunch of leeks and coriander, and add some reduced must to give it colour. In the mortar crush pepper, cumin, coriander, laser root, mint, rue, moisten with vinegar, add dates, and the fond of the braised bird, thicken, strain, cover the bird with the sauce and serve. Parrot is prepared in the same manner.” - **Apicius**
De Re Coquinaria 6.231.

Elements of a Banquet – Utensils

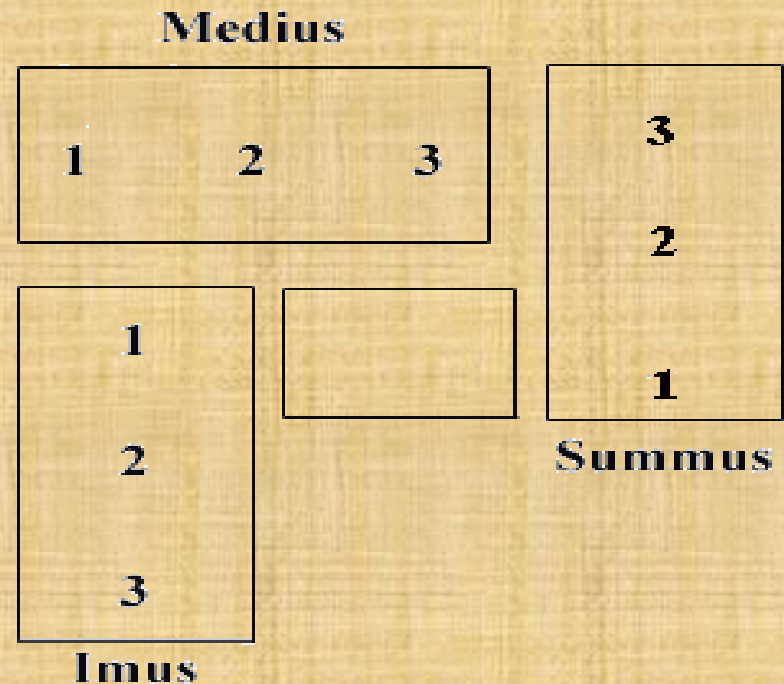
“we have no longer any right, it would seem, to criticize the use of drinking-cups adorned with precious stones, of various other articles in daily use that are likewise enriched, and of rings that sparkle with gems” – **Pliny *Natural History* 37.6.17.**



Rock crystal goblet - Museo Nazionale Archeologico Naples

Elements of a Banquet – Furniture and Seating

- ▣ Furniture with tortoiseshell veneer - **Martial *Epigrams* 14.87; Pliny *NH* 16.8.43**
- ▣ Citrus and ivory table - **Juvenile *Satires* 11.120-121.**
- ▣ Jewelled furniture - **Seneca *Epistles* 110.12.**



Summus – top/supreme/highest.

Medius - middle/midmost .

Imus (superl. from *inferus*) – bottom/lowest.



Triclinium – dining room

Elements of a Banquet – Clothing, Jewellery and Perfume

- ▣ Rose banquet –
Suetonius *Nero* 27.

“Good unguent, I’ll admit,
you gave your guests
yesterday, but you
served up nothing. It is a
comical thing to be
scented and to starve. He
who doesn't dine, and is
anointed, Fabullus,
seems to me to be indeed
a corpse” – **Martial**
Epigrams 3.12.

“Why are Indian pearls
so dear in your sight?
So your sluttish wife,
draped in the diver’s
delight, may open
her legs on her
lover’s couch?” –
Petronius *Satyricon*
55.6.9-16.

Moral Outrage

“We do not need to scour every ocean, or to load our bellies with the slaughter of animals, or to pluck shell-fish from the unknown shores of furthest sea... They seek to stock their pretentious kitchens by hunting beyond the Phasis, and they aren't ashamed to ask for birds from the Parthians, from whom we have not yet exacted vengeance.” - **Seneca** *Ad Helviam Matrem de Consolatione* 10.

“It is quite surprising that the use of pepper has come so much into fashion... its only desirable quality being its bitter flavour; and yet it is for this that we import it all the way from India!” - **Pliny** *NH* 12.14.29.

Sumptuary Laws

“The consulate of Gaius Sulpicius and Decimus Haterius followed [AD 22]... there was uneasiness against the luxury which had broken all bounds... it was the apparatus of gluttony and hedonism which had become the eternal theme of gossip and had awakened anxiety lest a prince of old-world thriftiness might adopt too harsh measures... the sumptuary law was a dead letter... prohibited prices for articles of food were rising daily...” – **Tacitus** *Annals* 3.52.

“[Speech of Tiberius]... but let any one pass a law and set down a penalty, and the same voices will be raised against 'this subversion of the state, this death-blow to all magnificence, this charge of which not a man is guiltless'!...” – **Tacitus** *Annals* 3.54.

Extravagance as Social Necessity

“...wealth loses all its radiance without an audience,’ [when there is] ‘no one to see or to look on.’ - **Plutarch *Moralia* 528a.**

“those more sumptuous banquets which you provide just once in the whole year you now set out at the pathetic cost of some dirty coppers... We wish you a hundred millions, Calenus. If this sum fall to you, you will die of hunger. - **Martial *Epigrams* 1.99.**

“The full-dressed crowd shout a loud "Bravo" to applaud you. ‘It is not you, Pomponius : it is your dinner that is eloquent” - **Martial *Epigrams* 6.48.**

“For a dinner of meats without the company of a **friend** is like the life of a lion or a wolf.” - **Seneca *Epistles* 1.19.**

Extravagance as Compulsion

“Gradually Nero’s vices gained the upper hand... His feasts now lasted from noon till mid-night, with an occasional break for diving into a warm bath or, if it were summer, into a snow-cooled water... He also forced his friends to provide him with dinners; one of them spent four million sesterces on a *cena mitellita*, and another on a rose banquet.” – Suetonius *Nero* 27.



Banquet given in honour of Louis XIV by the Corps Municipal at the Hotel-de Ville (c.1680).

Roman Baths

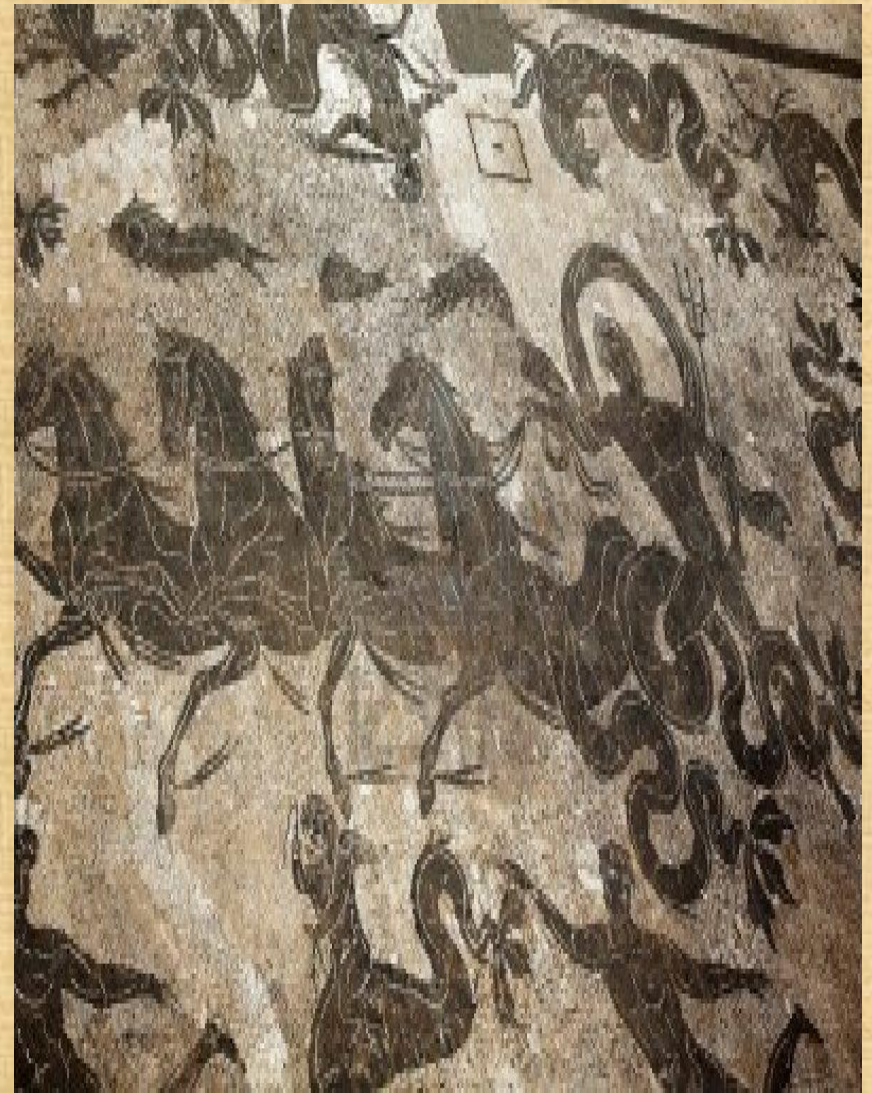
Baths of Caracalla – *Thermae Antoniniani*

“In Rome, the Emperor Caracalla left behind him the great baths in his name. In these baths is a heated tub-room (*cella solearis*), whose manner of construction the architects say cannot be imitated. – SHA *Caracalla* 9.4.9.





Roman bath at Bath



Mosaic of Neptune in Roman bath at Ostia.

Routine and Layout

- Morning devoted to business and public affairs, the afternoon to exercise and bathing in the afternoon.
- Cold room (*frigidarium*), warm room (*tepidarium*), hot room (*caldarium*).
- Entrance halls, areas for reclining, accommodation for servants and attendant, locker rooms for undressing, pools of cold water, slightly warmed rooms, hot rooms and hot water pools, message areas, exercise floor, toilets, water-clocks – **Lucian** *The Bath*.
- Substantial complexes might not just consist of baths but also gymnasia and libraries.

Activities in the Baths

“...a multitude of noises surround me, since I live directly above a bath... the body-builders exercise and strain... When one of the clientele relaxes to a cheap rub-down, I hear the noise of hands as they strike the shoulders... if a ball player comes along and begins to count the score, I’m finished. Add to this the aggressive loud-mouth, the thief who’s been caught, the person who likes to hear himself sing in the baths, and bathers who love to make big splashes when they jump into the pool... hair pluckers... vendors of sausages, pastries... hawking their wares.” – **Seneca *Letters* 56.1-2.**

Bathing as a Necessity and Luxury

- ▣ Social functions – meeting and socialising with friends – major Roman cultural activity.
- ▣ Medicinal functions – “[baths are] beneficial to most patients, to some if used continuously, to others if used intermittently.” – *Regime in Acute Diseases*.

“Rufus, my simple tastes demand but modest things to smooth my path: good wine and food, a barber and a bath...” *Martial Epigrams* 2.48.

Supplying the Baths



[In AD 52] the Emperor Claudius... had the water of the Claudia brought to Rome from the springs called Caeruleus and Curtius at the 45th milestone, and likewise the Anio Novus from the 62nd milestone both at his own expense. – *ILS 218 = CIL 6.1256*