Once I was sitting on the steps near the gate at David's Citadel and I put down my two heavy baskets beside me. A group of tourists stood there around their guide, and I became their point of reference. "You see that man over there with the baskets? A little to the right of his head there's an arch from the Roman period. A little to the right of his head." "But he's moving, he's moving!" I said to myself: Redemption will come only when they are told, "Do you see that arch over there from the Roman period? It doesn't matter, but near it, a little to the left and then down a bit, there's a man who has just bought fruit and vegetables for his family."

MAN NEAR A ROMAN ARCH
MAN NEAR A ROMAN ARCH

Studies presented to Prof. Yoram Tsafrir

Edited by
Leah Di Segni, Yizhar Hirshfeld, Joseph Patrich and Rina Talgam

The Israel Exploration Society
JERUSALEM 2009
Donors:
Ruth and David Amiran Foundation, The Institute of Archaeology, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem
The Robert H. and Clarice Smith Center for Art History, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem
Mrs. Lolita E. Goldstein, New York

Style editor:
Jeffrey Green (English articles)
Israel Ronen (Hebrew articles)

Typesetting & Layout: Yoni Gamliel – Tavim Publishing
Printed by: Old City Press, Jerusalem 2009
Rosenthal-Heginbottom Renate, Israel Antiquities Authority
Rubin Rehav, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Shukron Eli, Israel Antiquities Authority
Talgam Rina, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Tsafrir Sarai, formerly in The National and University Library, Jerusalem
Weiss Zeev, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Weksler-Bdolah Shlomit, Israel Antiquities Authority
Zissu Boaz, Bar Ilan University
LIST OF AUTHORS
AND THEIR INSTITUTIONAL AFFILIATION

Agady Shoshana, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Beth Shean Archaeological Project
Amit David, Israel Antiquities Authority
Arubas Benjamin Y., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Beth Shean Archaeological Project
Aviam Mordechai, Kinneret Academic College and Miller Center at the University of Miami
Avni Gideon, Israel Antiquities Authority
Ben David Haim, Kinneret Academic College
Cotton Hannah M., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Dahari Uzi, Israel Antiquities Authority
Dar Shimon, Bar Ilan University (emeritus)
Di Segni Leah, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Eck Werner, University of Cologne (emeritus)
Elav Yaron Z., University of Michigan
Foerster Gideon, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (emeritus)
Friedheim Emmanuel, Bar Ilan University
Gass Erasmus, Eberhard Karls Universität, Tübingen
Habas Lihi, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Hirschfeld Yizhar, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1950-2006)
Holam Kenneth G., University of Maryland, College Park
Kedar Benjamin Z., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (emeritus)
Klomer Amos, Bar Ilan University (emeritus)
Leibner Uzi, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Levine Lee-Israel, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (emeritus)
Onn Alexander, Israel Antiquities Authority
Patrich Joseph, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Perrone Lorenzo, University of Bologna
Piccirillo Michele, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, Jerusalem and Mount Nebo (1944-2008)
Reich Ronny, University of Haifa
Roll Israel, Tel Aviv University
Mordechai Aviam – Unpublished Fragments of Architectural Elements from the Upper Synagogue at Gush Halav 47*-53*

Lihi Habas – Camel Caravans and Trade in Exotic Animals in the Mosaics of the Desert Margin 54*-73*

Shoshana Agady and Benjamin Y. Arubas – Mihrab Representations in the Art and Architecture of Early Islamic Baysan 74*-87*

D. Archaeology and the Study of History, Culture and Religion

Lee-Israel Levine – Bet She’arim in its Patriarchal Context – pp. 115–129 (Hebrew section)

Emmanuel Friedheim and Shimon Dar – When Did Paganism Cease in the Land of Israel? – pp. 130–134 (Hebrew section)

Yaron Z. Eliav – A Scary Place: Jewish Magic in the Roman Bathhouse 88*-97*

E. Epigraphy

Werner Eck and Hannah M. Cotton – Inscriptions from the Financial Procurator’s Praetorium in Caesarea 98*-114*

Leah Di Segni and Benjamin Y. Arubas – An Old-New Inscription from Beth Shean 115*-124*

Uzi Dahari and Leah Di Segni – More Early Christian Inscribed Tombstones from el-Huweinat in Northern Sinai 125*-141*

F. Urbanism in Roman-Byzantine Palaestina


Joseph Patrich – The Wall Street, the Eastern Stoa, the Location of the Tetrapsilon, and the Halakhic Status of Caesarea Maritima (interpreting Tosefta, Akhilot, 18:13) 142*-168*

Kenneth G. Holom – Et dispositione civitatis in multa eminens: Comprehending the Urban Plan of Fourth-Century Caesarea 169*-189*

G. Christian Studies

Lorenzo Perrone – Pierre l’ibère ou l’exil comme pèlerinage et combat pour la foi 190*-204*

Michele Piccirillo – Liturgical Problems Related to the Church Plans and its Liturgical Furnishings in the Territory of the Province of Arabia (Fourth-Eighth Centuries CE) 205*-223*

Abstracts of the Hebrew articles 224*-229*
TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations

Introduction

Sarai Tsafrir — Yoram Tsafrir’s List of Publications — pp. 1–8 (Hebrew section)


A. The Landscape: Archaeology and the Settlement Pattern

Uzi Leibner — Settlement and Demography in Late Roman and Byzantine Eastern Galilee — pp. 14–28 (Hebrew section)


Rehav Rubin — Models and Relief-Maps in the Archives of the Palestine Exploration Fund in London — pp. 43–56 (Hebrew section)

Israel Roll — Between Damascus and Megiddo: Roads and Transportation in Antiquity across the Northeastern Approaches to the Holy Land 1*–20*

B. Studies in Historical Geography

David Amit — The Location of Jewish Carmel during the Mishnaic and Talmudic Period — pp. 57–63 (Hebrew section)

Haim Ben David — Beyond the Jordan: Definitions and Borders through History — pp. 64–70 (Hebrew section)

Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron — The Archaeological Setting for the Toponyms Gihon and Shiloah 21*–24*

Erasmus Gass and Boaz Zissu — Sel’a ‘Etam and Samson Traditions, from the Biblical to the Byzantine Periods 25*–46*

C. Archaeology and Art

Amos Kloner — Amphorae and Urns as Grave Markers in Idumaea, Judaea, and Nabataea — pp. 71–81 (Hebrew section)

Gideon Foerster — The Production of Decorated Sarcophagi in Palestine and their Relation to the Sarcophagi from Main Workshops of the Roman World — pp. 82–87 (Hebrew section)

Zeev Weiss — Mosaic Art in Fifth-Century CE Sepphoris: Iconography, Style, and the Possible Identification of a Local Workshop — pp. 88–99 (Hebrew section)

Rina Talgam — The Ekphrasis of the Water-Clock and Measuring of Time in Sixth-Century Gaza — pp. 100–114 (Hebrew section)
A SCARY PLACE:
JEWISH MAGIC IN THE ROMAN BATHHOUSE
Yaron Z. Eliav

Recent scholarship has rejected the paradigm that placed religion and magic in two distinct categories, as well as the notion—popularly espoused by 19th and early 20th century historians—that ancient magic was some sort of superstition, a benighted practice of primitive societies, handicapped by ignorance and cultural debility (e.g., Winkelman 1982; Philips 1986: 2711–2732; Farone and Obbink 1991: vi; Graf 1997: 8–19). A much more nuanced view, in which religion and magic interact in innumerable ways in the creation of culture, offers a fertile field for new insights into the ancient world. The cosmology of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean basin was replete with divine beings who animated a world in which magic was utterly inseparable from the organized machinations of religious worship. Angels, daemons, and spirits filled the world of the ancients the way prescription and illegal drugs swarm in our lives today. These metaphysical beings surrounded people everywhere, at all times, as an existential crutch, something to lean on or to blame, to love and to fear. They were more immediate and accessible than the formal gods, whose divine stature, for the most part, created a division, an impenetrable line separating humanity from the heavenly forces in the skies (or, for that matter, on Mount Olympus, or residing in any temple—etymologically, a space carved out of the world; Catalano 1978).

Pervasive and invasive, religious mentality shaped the lens through which the people of the Roman world viewed their surroundings and everyday routines. Religious vocabulary and imagery seeped into everyday strata of language and helped people mediate, explain, and interpret their interactions with their environment. Names and characteristics of gods, the messages of myths and legends, and the force of folk beliefs underlay ancient understanding of both natural phenomena and human situations just as scientific “truth” outlines the contours of our world today. Religion, or to be more precise, what we today call religion, encompassed all.

Magic, as one modern formula correctly puts it, functions similar to the way popular science does in our world, promising, if only ostensibly, some control over the powerful forces that dominate life. Faced with the flu, for example, we choose to take medicine—often following a hasty self-diagnosis and a crossing of the fingers—because “scientific” knowledge tells us so. The act of consuming the medicine, in addition to whatever physiological effect it may have, provides emotional comfort (an

---

* This article is an expanded written version of a paper I presented in 2005 at the annual conference of the American Association for Jewish Studies in Washington, D.C. My first studies of the Roman bathhouse go back fifteen years to my days as an MA student at the Institute of Archaeology in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and my first paper ever on the topic was submitted to my advisor then—Prof. Yoram Tsafir. It is an honor and a pleasure to close the cycle and present a paper on the topic for his Festschrift.

1 An illuminating articulation of the all-embracing religious landscape that prevailed in the ancient world, with an emphasis on the period under discussion here, can be found in Peter Brown’s extensive writing. See for example the chapter on religion in Brown 1971: 49–112; and his more recent article Brown 1998. There he characterizes the “religious common sense” of the period as “a spiritual landscape rustling with invisible presences—with countless divine beings and their ethereal ministers” (632). Keith Hopkins succinctly captures this phenomenon in the title of his book—A World Full of Gods. See Hopkins 1999.

2 In this article I am avoiding the distinction between magic and religion and the debate around it that has baffled modern scholars. Magic here is defined as a ritual act meant to effect a change in human experience and well being. I borrow this formulation from Farone and Obbink 1991: vi, who themselves lean on the discussion by Philip 1986. See also Graf 1991: 188, and the sources he mentions in note 1.
internal balance between fear and tranquility). So too did magic for the people in the world prior to the so-called scientific-industrial revolution, which, following this line of reasoning, changed everything, but actually not a great deal.

From this perspective, the rift that many scholars claim (or formerly claimed) separated ancient Judaism, especially in its rabbinic form, from the realm of magic, tells only part of the story. Jews resorted to magic like anyone else in the Graeco-Roman world. We know this from the multitudes of amulets invoking the name of the Israelite God, not to mention magic spells, curse tablets, incantations in Hebrew and Aramaic, Jewish magical recipe books as well as numerous literary traditions like Sefer ha-Razim (see below). All this evidence testifies to the wide use of magic by ancient Jews (most recently Bohak 2008). Taking this a step further, I think it is anarchistic and misleading to position Jews outside the sphere of magic and to explore either their influence on it or its influence on them, or their interaction with it, as if they were two distinct entities negotiating with each other. Rather, Jews should be placed within the magical environment of the ancient Mediterranean world, and the discussion should focus on their practices and beliefs within this shared cultural landscape. In the following, I wish to illustrate this way of thinking about the Jewish past in relation to one relatively unnoticed locum magicum, that of the Roman bathhouse.

As an existential tool in the world of the ancients, magic, in its many forms, pervaded every corner of people’s life. In one of its most popular manifestations, magical techniques provided a remedy for anxiety (just as drugs, both medical and recreational, serve similar purposes today); these techniques helped the ancients cope, as one scholar puts it, with the realm of fear (as well as other unsettling forms of anxiety such as shame, guilt, and panic; Gager 1992: 116). This aspect of magic was in abundant evidence in the Roman bathhouse.

Being a well-demarcated public space and thus a prime avenue for interpreting the culture that created it, the institution of the bathhouse has been seen variously by modern scholars. For some it is the incarnation of Roman material culture, or the acme of its technological capabilities; for others it is an institution that nurtures the human body, geared to provide bodily pleasure, and even a medical facility; and yet for others it epitomizes the delights of daily leisure or alternatively the degeneration of hedonistic corruption. But, as some scholars have noted, attending the public bathhouse also featured some unsettling experiences. As I will argue below, along with its soothing nature, the public bathhouse may also be seen as what anthropologists label a “scary place” (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003: 225–227).

The huge imperial baths (known as the thermae), with all their splendor and lavish delights, naturally captured the attention of modern archaeologists. However, the vast majority of the thousands of public bathhouses throughout the Roman world were much more modest in scale and far less impressive (Fagen 1999: 20–21, 179–180). The closed, dim halls of such lesser structures created an intimidating atmosphere, especially for bath goers who were accustomed to stroll the open spaces that characterized the Roman urban landscape. The Spanish-born poet Martial, a frequent and enthusiastic patron of the baths in Rome, voices such uneasiness when

---

3 Many scholars fall into this trap, envisioning ancient Jews as a separate, culturally isolated entity, largely detached from the textures of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean and distinct from its other residents. The connections between Jews and their neighbors were forged by these scholars in terms of “influence,” a category that assumes well-defined societies in dialogue with each other by means of cultural exchange. Only recently has this model come under question in works claiming that it may fit modern societies, with well-demarcated lines of separation introduced by modern nationalism and statehood and informed by medieval competition between Christianity and Islam, but is far removed from the convoluted and in many respects seamless cultural setting of the Roman Mediterranean. See, for example, Eliav 2006; Sattlow 2008.

4 Most notably Dunbabin (1989: 35–46) who has noticed this aspect of the baths but did not fully realize, I think, the physical, tangible element that ignited human anxieties in this institution. Levinson (2006: 15), to mention another example, rightly identifies the bath as a “dangerous place” (following Dunbabin and others), but misses the mark when he ties the danger with the daemons that populated the place. According to the model I am presenting here, the daemons are not the cause of the danger but rather its outcome and reflection. In other words, the multiple hazards of the baths that will be presented below, physical, emotional (sexual), and social, registered in the ancient mind in demonic language and imagery. See also Clarke 1998: 130.
he complains about the _tenebrosa balnea_ (murky baths) of Lupus and Gryllus (Martial, _Epig._ 1.59).

Furthermore, bathhouses featured many hazards to their clientele: If not properly watched, furnaces and their firewood could easily turn into deadly conflagrations (e.g. _Il.Paest._ 100; _CIL_ 11.4781, 6225), or less dangerously but not less disturbing, smoke could leak into the bathing halls (Fagen 1999: 186-187); the constant humidity made the floors slippery (e.g., v. _Yom-tov_ I 60c); the hot steam in the ceramic and copper pipes that ran along the walls could scorch the bare flesh of those crowded into the rooms of the baths (e.g., _CIL_ 4.1898; Varone 2002: 59) and could even prove lethal (Tacitus, _Ann._ 15.64), as could the hot, often boiling water and the searing floors of the tubs and pools. Numerous Roman sources testify to heat-related injuries that the baths inflicted on customers (Nielsen 1990: 18 and n. 48; Yegül 1992: 380-381).

The Talmud relates that R. Mana used to draw up a will prior to attending a heated bath (v. _Ber._ 4.8b), perhaps an extreme measure but one that reflects anxiety of bath goers. A later rabbinic collection enumerates numerous safety measures that developed over the years to cope with the risks of the baths – for example, one should not bring oil in a glass vessel because it “endangers life” (if the glass shatters), nor should one spit on the floors, or greet one’s fellow in peace (probably a superstitious provision). Also mentioned is the life-threatening danger of jumping into a shallow pool (_Der. Er. Rab._ 10.2-3; _Kallah Rab._ 9.15-17). It was not unheard of for people to die in the baths, like the eight-year-old child who drowned in the pool of the baths of Mars in Rome (_CIL_ 6. 6740; Dunbabin 1989: 35 and n. 190).

Even more daunting were the frequent collapses of the floors. The heart of the ingenious heating system that Roman engineers adopted and perfected for warming the water of the baths were the raised floors of the hot rooms. Known as the hypocaust (Greek for “heating from underneath”), this system was comprised of small pillars (pilae), often made of bricks mounted on top of one another, which were used to elevate the stone, or at times marble, surface of these rooms (thus named _suspenura_) and create a cavity underneath. A furnace in a side chamber (_praefurnium_) channeled hot air into the void under the raised floors, heating them – and the water above – before flowing outside through vertical pipes that ran through the sides of the room (_Vitruvius, De Arch._ 5.10). This hot chamber (known as the _caldarium_) usually included a communal pool (_alveus_), a basin (_labrum_) for cold water, and occasionally benches around the walls. The hypocaust was simple and easy to make, a technique that, once introduced, was reproduced thousands of times throughout the Roman world (Nielsen 1990: 14-22; Yegül 1992: 356-383). Its one weakness lay in its vulnerability to collapse: the combination of water and humidity with the weight of the people who attended the place, compounded by occasional inefficient building practices, resulted in the frequent disintegration of these floors. Numerous inscriptions record the recurrent repairs that were required for the maintenance of the baths (Dunbabin 1989: 35 and n. 191; Fagen 1999: 164, 180-181), and many, like the one from the Licinian Baths in Thugga (southeast of Carthage) complain about the imperfect work (imperfecto opera) executed by earlier builders (_IL.Tun._ 1300). The benefactors who funded the repairs proudly inscribed their deeds for posterity, but imagine the poor individual coming to relax in the baths who found himself (or herself) falling into the searing space underneath the floors. Not a happy scene, and one that could easily make bath goers apprehensive.

Indeed, a string of folk stories voice the people’s anxieties about the danger of collapsing floors. One talmudic anecdote recalls that “R. Abbahu [once] went into the bathhouse and the floor of the bathhouse gave way beneath him, and a miracle was wrought for him, and he stood on a pillar and rescued a hundred and one men with one arm” (_b. Bava Batra_ 60a). Such a scene, in which the bathhouse floor collapses and a random pillar happens to be in the path of R. Abbahu’s fall, although fantastic in its very nature, is modelled on this common hazard of the heating system, namely the crumbling floors of the hypocaust (Elia 2002: 242-252). A similar convention informs a Christian tale about the Apostle John, who met Cerinthus, a gnostic heretic, in the bathhouse and proclaimed “Let us flee, lest the bathhouse fall in” (μὴ καὶ τὸ βαλανεῖον συμπέσῃ; Eusebius, _H.E._ 3:28:6; see also Irenaeus, _Adv Haer._ 3:3:4; Epiphanius,
Panarion 30:24; Berger 1982: 47–50; Hanouné
1980: 257–259). The same anxieties lurk behind the boastful and self-promoting records of Ancius
Auchenius Bassus, the fourth-century proconsul of
Campania, when he describes the bath prior to his
repair as “dangerously unstable overhanging struc-
tures threatening to collapse, which used to keep
the bathing populace away out of a fear of being wor-
rried” (CIL 10.6656; transl. in Fagen 1999: 244).

On a different level of experience, the mixing of
men and women in an environment that did not pre-
clude physical exposure surely contributed to the
unrest. Centuries of Christian and Jewish piety in
the Middle Ages – all of which endorsed the sup-
pression of the body – has distorted our vision of
the Roman world. It was a much more revealing
landscape, in the physical, fleshy sense of the word,
than ours: it was a world where people urinated in
the middle of the street (and the urine was then used
detergent; Martial, Epig. 6.93; Macrobius, Sat.
3.16.15), where men and women shared the open
space of public toilets (Fagen 1999: 77–78 and n.
10); and in general, body parts that we today tend
to conceal were, in this pre-underwear age, much
more on display. The frequent articulation of eroti-
cism in the Roman visual environment testifies that
the common practices of ancient people regarding
nudity and sexuality were very different from ours
(Clarke 1998).

Men and women throughout the Roman world
normally bathed together in public bathhouses,
more often than not with their bodies fully ex-
posed (Ward 1992). Questions about this habit’s
universality (did everyone bathe in the nude?),
chronological scope (did people always bath in
the nude? and if not, when did this phenomenon
begin or end?), and geographical extent (was nude
bathing practiced everywhere?), are complicated
and have not received sufficient attention. In gen-
eral, although some establishments implemented
partial segregation between men and women (the
Stabian baths in Pompeii are the best documented
dexample), and some emperors legislated against
the sexual licentiousness there, only a few of the
thousands of structures that have been excavated
throughout the Mediterranean basin give any evi-
dence for a double bathing arrangement that could
accommodate the simultaneous but segregated use
by men and women (Nielsen 1990: 146–148; Ward
1992: 128–139; and references to Jewish sources
in Eliav 2008). Here and there we hear of separate
hours for men and women (the best known source
is the Hadriancan text Lex metalli Vipascensis; CIL 2
[supp.]. 5181), but on the whole the sexes used this
institution together; and even if some wore certain
bathing garments, many did not (see in detail Eliav

References to naked people in the baths resonate
in several rabbinic passages. For example, one ha-
lahaka specifically mentions “a place where people
stand naked” in the bath (t. Ber. 2.20), although
it does not speak of the presence of women at the
same place. A later source which cites this halakha
labeled the bath as a “House [room?] of the nude”
(Tep. 17). Undressed bathers are in the background
of the famous tale about R. Gamaliel visiting the
bathhouse of Aphrodite (m. ‘Abod. Zar 3.4). The
bare flesh led to R. Gamaliel’s refusal to respond
to Proklos’ question inside the bath, since rabbinic
law prohibits “holy” activity – such as prayer or
discussing halakha – in the presence of undressed
bodies. Mixed bathing also figures in the proscrip-
tion against dealing with a woman who “washes
and bathes in the public bath with just any one” (t.
Ketub. 7.6). A story preserved by the fourth-century
Church Father Epiphanius tells of the misconduct of
the Jewish patriarch’s son with a beautiful wom-
an he met in the hot room of the thermal baths in
Gadara (Panarion 30.7.5–6 [ed. Holl, 342]).

Quite expectedly, sexual activities were not un-
common in the baths (e.g., Ovid, Ars 3.638–640;
CIL 4.10677–8; Fagan 1999: 34–36). The range of
reactions that nudity and sex provoked in ancient
people included (among other things) agitation and
urgency, what some scholars call “the constraints
of eros” (Winkler 1991; Clarke 1998). The un-
controlled bodily reactions – the sweat, high pulse
rate, etc. – could result in uneasiness and tension.
Obviously, for some the promiscuous environment
could be part of the fun of going to the baths, but
not if you were getting harassed, physically and
verbally, or if you are unable to control your erec-
tions, ashamed of your body and so forth. In the an-
cient world such a state of mind called for magical
remedies (ibid.).

Finally, on the social level, the spatial layout of
the bathhouse meant that hierarchal, communal, and cultural boundaries were, even if for a short while, blurred and even erased. Since it catered to people from all walks of life, the public bathhouse became a social arena, a unique environment where the governing class and the elite blended with the lower strata of society, including the poor, women, and slaves (Fagan 1999: 189–219). Similar to the dynamics that anthropologists detect in the cafés of 19th century Paris (Heise 1987: 154–197), bathhouses drew people together and eliminated the various status marks that differentiated them in the outside world: in the baths a person was separated from his clothes and jewelry, without the identifying signs of career or home, stripped of the symbols of his or her social role. Many sources illustrate the colorful social mix, as the upper echelons of society rubbed shoulders with the lowest. Such mingling obscured designations of social order; unlike theaters and stadiums, where reserved seats and segregated sections delineated social rank and stature, in the public baths (despite some notable exceptions) people shared the space quite equally. Close proximity with others undermined social boundaries, whether communal, political, or religious (Fagan 1999: 206–219), taking away the security mechanisms that social boundaries provide. People were exposed not only with their hidden body parts but also with their beliefs and cultural assumptions (think, for example of the statement that comes with circumcision). The results were myriad, but it is safe to say that the experience in the bathhouse could be quite daunting.

Rabbinic stories and anecdotes associated with the public baths, both real and fictional, provide illuminating insights into the social dynamics of this institution in the provincial setting of Roman Palestine. Many of the elements featured in these texts resemble typical bathhouse life throughout the empire. For example, the beggars and thieves who crowd the place in some rabbinic stories (e.g., y. Berakhot 2:5c; y. Pe‘ah 8:21b) are known to have been a constant annoyance to bathers all over the Mediterranean (Fagan 1999: 36–38). In another instance, when R. Abbahu, a fourth-century rabbinic scholar and a local dignitary in Caesarea, visits the bathhouse of Tiberias, the talmudic story assigns Gothic slaves to accompany him, accentuating his (perhaps imagined) political distinction (y. Yom-tov I 60c). Here, too, many non-Jewish sources speak of the role of slaves in the shared social environment of the public baths – keeping the populace away from their masters, thus carving out an elevated arena within the shared space, guarding the clothes from thieves, and providing extra services such as drying their masters with towels or anointing and massaging them with oil (many of these references are collected in Fagan 1999). Bringing slaves to the bath mirrors the challenges of social promiscuity and shows that people were looking for ways to cope with them. Rabbinic sources refer to the same social milieu and depict the slaves in the baths in similar ways (e.g., Sifre Num 115 [ed. Horovitz, 127]; t. Qiddushin 1:5). Other bath stories depict rabbinic figures coming into contact and conversing with a variety of characters who normally would be outside their circle. A good example of such an encounter resonates in the mishnaic passage mentioned above, in which a pagan philosopher question Rabban Gamaliel’s attendance in an Acre bathhouse in the presence of a nude statue of Aphrodite (m. ‘Abod. Zar. 3:4).

All in all, although bathhouses were amenities enjoyed and vastly attended by the populace, which is why they were built and maintained, they also featured sinister aspects, which affected people in multiple ways. The slippery, and at times dark halls, with the constant risk of physical danger and the infusion of sexual intimidation, as well as a boundary-less cultural mixture, all amounts, in my view, to the anthropological model of a “scary place” – a locum magicum – where magic was needed to ensure one’s safety.

Indeed, many magical sources refer to spirits and demons that dwell in this place (Bonner 1932; Dunbabin 1989: 36–43), and to the wide spectrum of magical activities that were practiced there. Examples include tossing papyri with inscribed formulae into the searing space of the hypocaust (PGM 2:50, 7:469), or smearing a papyrus with the blood of an ass and gluing it to the vault of the caldarium in order to “attract men to women and women to men, and make virgins rush out of their homes” (ibid. 36:69–77; also 127:3–4). People also carried out all sorts of magical procedures associated with medicine in the baths (e.g., Meyer and Smith 1994:}
Similarly, many inscriptions unearthed in bathhouses throughout the empire point to spiritual significance that was intrinsic to the baths. The steps of the bathhouse were personified as gods and goddesses; nymphs were housed there as well. Rooms and sometimes entire bath complexes were named after gods (Dunbabin 1989). Magical activities in the baths were also common among Christians (Böcher 1970; Berger 1982: 132ff.).

How did Jews (or shall we say, due to the nature of the sources: how did rabbis) function within this environment? The answer is quite clear: just like everyone else, they used magic. Take for example the following Palestinian story about the encounter between two sages — Raban Yudan Nesia and Shmuel bar Nahman — and the emperor Diocletian:

Diocletian the swineherd—the students of R. Yudan the patriarch would make fun of him. He became emperor and went to Paneas [Caesarea Philippi]. He sent written orders to the rabbis, [saying]: "Be here in front of me immediately at the end of the [coming] Sabbath." He instructed the messenger [who was to deliver these orders], "Do not give them the document [with the orders] until the eve [of Sabbath], just as the sun is setting." [Diocletian wished to force the rabbis to miss the appointment, because they could not travel on the Sabbath. Then he could avenge their previous disrespect for him]. The messenger came to them on the eve [of the Sabbath] as the sun was setting. [After receiving the orders,] R. Yudan the Patriarch and R. Shmuel bar Nahman were going to bath in the public bathhouse of Tiberias. Antigiris, [a certain spirit] came in front of them and R. Yudan the patriarch wished to rebuke him [and chase him away]. R. Shmuel bar Nahman said to him [i.e., to Yudan], "Leave him be, as he appears for a trial [and a miracle]". He [the Antigiris] said to them, "What are you rabbis doing [what is troubling you]?". They told him the story. He said to them, "[Finish] bathing [in honor of the Sabbath]. For your creator is going to perform miracles [for you]." At the end of the Sabbath [the Antigiris miraculously] carried them and brought them in [to Paneas]. It was said [to Diocletian], "Those rabbis are outside." He said, "They shall not see my face until they have bathed." There was [there] a bath that was heated for seven days and nights. [The Antigiris] entered before them and overpowered [the heat]. [And afterwards] they went in and stood before [Diocletian]. He said to them, "Is it because your creator performs miracles for you that you [allow yourself to] insult the [Roman] Empire?" They said to him, "Diocletian the swineherd we insulted. But Diocletian the king [emperor] we do not insult." [Diocletian said to them], "Even so, you should not rebuke [anyone], neither a young Roman, nor a young associate of the rabbis [for you never know what greatness that individual will attain]." (appearing in y. Terumot 8 46b-c and GenR 63 [ed. Albech, 688–690])

The plot here revolves around the space of two archetypical bathhouses: a safe one in Tiberias and a hostile one in Paneas. The protagonist in charge of mediating between the rabbis and the various dangers they encounter in the baths is a miraculous creature named Angitaris (and in some versions Antigiris-Agentin). The rabbinic narrator’s efforts to "convert" the Angitaris by placing the right views in his mouth ("bathe yourself and your creator will perform miracles") do not detract from his true nature — he is the daemon of the baths, in charge of neutralizing the hazards of fire and steaming water. Thus his name in my view stems from the Latin ignis — fire — and perhaps may be associated with various creatures marked by the name Agni, all of which are associated with fire (Lurker 1988: 10–11). Similar spirits are well known from Graeco-Roman sources. A second-century inscription from Miletus in Asia Minor refers to them as άντίγιτας άτυχοι μεγάλομενοι (the fire-wedded nymphs; λα. 1907.177/78; Fagan 1991: 338–339). Magical sources also offer many ways to appease such a spirit, the most popular of which in the context of the baths was tossing a magical bowl into the furnaces prior to entering (Bonner 1932: 208). Sefer ha-Razim (the Book of Secrets), a Jewish book of magic spells from Late Antiquity, knows of people who "wish to extinguish a bath so its blaze does not grow and burn" (Margalioth 1966: 93), and prescribes a page-long list of magical devices that one can apply in order to avert this risk. Two of the angels mentioned in that same page of Sefer ha-Razim...
(although their role is admittedly unclear) are Agra and Gentes, and the phonetic similarity to the rabbinic Ḥegirār is evident. Fear of fire and heat in the baths led the Jews to embrace magical tools similar to those of their neighbors.

Turning to the social end of the spectrum, to the liminal social environment that characterized the Roman public bathhouse, here too magic plays an important role for Jews and non Jews alike. Consider the following rabbinic passage:

R. Eliezer, R. Joshua, and R. Aqiva went in to bathe in that [famous] bath of Tiberias. A min saw them. He said what he said, and the vault [of one of the bath’s rooms] seized them, [so they could not move]. Said R. Eliezer to R. Joshua, “Joshua b. Haninah, see what you can do.” When that min was leaving, R. Joshua said what he said, and the doorway [of the bath] seized him [the min], and whoever went in gave him a punch, and whoever went out gave him a shove. He said to them, “Undo whatever you have done [to let me go].” They said to him, “Release us, and we shall release you.” They released one another. Once they got outside, said R. Joshua to that min, “Is that all you know?” He said, “Let’s go down to the sea [of Galilee].” When they got down to the sea, that min said what he said, and the sea split open. He said to them, “Now is this not what Moses, your teacher, did at the sea?” They said to him, “Do you not admit to us that Moses, our teacher, walked through it?” He said to them, “Yes.” They said to him, “Then walk through it.” He walked through it. R. Joshua instructed the ruler of the sea, who swallowed him up. (y. Sanhedrin 7 25d)

This rabbinic story places a confrontation between three leading rabbinic figures, R. Eliezer, R. Joshua, and R. Aqiva, and a min (a term for heretic that in this case most likely designates a Christian) in the bathhouse. Without discussing the many fascinating details of this passage (nicely presented in Levinson 2006: 14–19), one can note the magical practices that both sides employ. The min, upon recognizing the three sages “amar ma demar” (said what he said) – a regular talmudic phrase to reference a magic formula – and is able to use the cavity of the bathhouse dome, a known region of spirits and daemons, to capture the rabbis. In other words, he defies the rabbis with his magic and eventually contrasts the traditional Jewish narrative of God’s violent miracles against the Egyptians at the Red Sea with the new Jesus narrative of a pacificistic walk on the Sea of Galilee. The rabbis in turn apply their own magical powers to strike back. Needless to say, rabbinic authors normally depict their own as emerging with the upper hand. But for the topic at hand it is important to note that magic here functions as a device that copes with the social intimidations of the baths – when one wishes to deal with a threatening individual he encounters in the baths, magic offers itself as a ready tool, to those who are capable of wielding it.

Finally, I suggest that this scary landscape, permeated by magic and daemons, is the context in which the rabbinic so-called “prayer of the baths” operated. Here is one of its ancient versions:

A person who enters a bathhouse recites two prayers, one when he enters and one when he leaves. When he enters he says “May it be your will, Lord my God, that you save me from the burning fire, and from injury by the steam, and from the collapse. And may nothing occur to endanger my life. But if something happens, may my death alone for all my sins. And save me from this and similar dangers in times to come.” And when he leaves he says “I give thanks to you, Lord my God, for saving me from the fire.” (y. Berakhot 9 14b)

This passage enumerates many of the physical hazards of the baths – the fire and the scorching waters as well as the collapses of the hypocaust’s raised floor (and not the roof or walls, as medieval commentaries as well as 19th century scholars, both

---

1 Other scholars are reluctant to identify the min in this story with a particular group; see Levinson 2006: 17–18. To me, the association of the Sea of Galilee with the traditions about Jesus walking on it (Mark 6:45–52 and parallels), and the way it plays out in the conflict depicted in the passage here, where the min fails to do the exact same thing, tilts the argument in favor of a Christian figure.

unfamiliar with the mechanisms of Roman baths, wrongly thought; Eliau 2002: 251 n. 30). The rabbinic prayer of the baths should be seen as an enchantment meant to overcome the perils of the baths — to delineate a secure (or in modern words — emotionally stress-free) space by accompanying entry and exit with safeguarding formulae that invoke divine powers to neutralize the threat. Similar formulae are well known from throughout the Graeco-Roman world (Dunbabin 1989: 36—42).

To conclude, the rabbis are not outside observers of the magical environment that prevailed in Roman public bathhouses, at times influenced by it but mostly resisting it. This vision is in my view an anachronism. Looking at them through the prism of magical practices associated with these institutions, the rabbis emerge as ordinary residents of the Graeco-Roman milieu, part and parcel of its cultural texture, and habitual participants in the mechanisms of its daily life. They attend the bathhouses as fre-quently as any other tenants of Roman cities and towns, and to cope with its dangers and the attendant anxieties, they utilize the same means available to all, namely magical techniques and formulae. As many others, the rabbis tried to put a Jewish spin on these magical practices, especially by relating the source of their power to the God of Israel. By doing so, they were no different from other ethnic and religious groups in the Roman Mediterranean — adherents of Serapis, believers in Mithras (who had very prominent presence in the baths), or Christians; Syrians, Phoenicians, or Arabs. Jewish magic in the Roman bathhouse presents its practitioners — the Jews and more specifically the rabbis — as utterly ordinary denizens of the Roman Mediterranean.

Much of the discussion about magic in the bathhouse may apply as well to the thermal baths that were scattered throughout the Roman world. But unlike some scholars who link them, I believe these two institutions, despite some outward similarities, are inherently different, both on the technical and the substantial level, and therefore require separate discussion. See Eliau 2003: 179—180.

* I have been developing this model of a shared cultural landscape in a series of articles, in which I argue against alternative understandings of scholars regarding the cultural situation among the Jews. For a full-fledged bibliography and argumentation, see Eliau 2000, 2003, 2006, 2008.

---

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**Primary Sources**

*AE*: L'Année épigraphique. Paris 1888—.

*b*: Babylonian Talmud [b. with name of tractate]—


*CIL*: Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Berlin 1863—.


*m.:* Mishnah [m. with name of tractate]—Based on Ms. Kn, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Ms. A 50, from the library of David Kaufmann; Facsimile edition by George


Studies


Farago Ch. A. and Obbink D. eds. 1991. Magika
A SCARY PLACE: JEWISH MAGIC IN THE ROMAN BATHHOUSE