These, of course, again merge with the architectural composition of the structures to which they are attached. In aristocratic country villas, multi-seater latrines could be used along with more private one-seater affairs (fig. 5.6). At Hadrian’s Villa at Tivoli, constructed in the 2nd century AD, we find that elegantly appointed ‘imperial’ single-seat toilets were also constructed (fig. 5.7). The point is that different groups of people visiting or living at Hadrian’s Villa or other private villas would definitely be afforded different levels of privacy, depending on which toilets were made available to them. If Romans had the means to afford it and had the space, it does seem that the single-seat toilet was their preferred venue for this aspect of their personal hygiene.

Toilets were built by people at all levels of Roman society in all types of buildings, public and private. The public, multi-seat latrines were very likely financed and built by city administrators or even private benefactors. Unfortunately, the evidence of inscriptions is lacking, probably because no one wanted close association with a toilet.

While the impact of public toilets on Roman society should not be put on a par with the impact of the amphitheater or of hypocaust heating systems in public baths, toilets do carry particularly powerful weight when applied to broader questions about Roman sanitation. For better or worse they should get a lot of credit for eliminating filth and for improving cleanliness and health, although to date such assessments are generally based on generations of hearsay rather than on scientific study. They have been more or less ignored altogether in the scholarship of Roman architecture, an omission that is indeed troubling. Roman toilets need to be studied, not in isolation, but along with urban infrastructures, such as sewers, aqueducts, and the water supply systems that serviced them.

5.2. Decorations on Roman Toilets (Eric M. Moormann)

Roman house toilets are normally seen as gloomy and dirty spaces. Some of them, however, were decorated with mosaics on the floors and paintings on the walls and ceilings. Sometimes toilets even had precious plaques of marble and marble adornments in the form of sculptures and reliefs. We do not have much concrete proof of toilet accessories like lamps and jugs of water. Wall and ceiling decorations give us a clue as to the chronology of latrines, but in most cases they are too generic to allow us to pinpoint to a certain date.

Floors, Wall and Ceilings: Ways of Decoration

Most floors of toilets have very simple coverings. Many of them are in cocciopesto or are covered with tiles. Sometimes we see marble veneer or even mosaic in opus sectile or opus tessellatum. A marble threshold may enhance the idea of luxury. Apart from plain white floors at Ostia and in Hadrian’s villa at Tivoli, mosaics consist of geometric patterns, e.g. in the Baths of Varius at Ephesus (fig. 5.8; cf. table). In the latrine of the Baths next to S. Giovanni in Laterano in Rome there was a grid of crossing bands; on the crossings circles in black surrounded the now white crossing sections. Figural motifs can either be inserted into the grid in the shape of small panels filled with single objects like fish or birds (Apamea), or occupy the entire central space in front of the seats.
visitors to the toilets in the Baths of Italica (Spain) and Timgad (Algeria) could look and laugh at pygmies in a Nilotic landscape. Such themes are discussed below.

As to the walls, we observe either painted decorations or marble veneer; in the latter case, the toilets clearly belong to the class of the *Prachtlatrinen*, an appropriate term for luxurious toilets coined by Richard Neudecker (fig. 5.9).

Painted decorations are mainly subdivided into two horizontal layers: a dado and a register filled with panels of which lines often are the only remains. The dado can either be monochrome or have a 'zebra pattern'; the latter has been seen as an imitation of marble veneer, especially a white marble with grey veins known as *bardiglio*, but there is no clear consensus about this matter. Gemma Jansen has proposed that the dark paintings on the lower parts of the walls had the practical function of blotting out the dirt. As a matter of fact, bright dados are rare, but we cannot say that this is specifically more so for the toilets than for other rooms, whether luxurious or for practical functions. In contrast, if marble veneer is used in the *Prachtlatrinen*, it is white and shining instead of black. This may be true for painted marblings as well, like that at Fréjus (fig. 5.10).
Ceiling or vault decorations are rarely preserved and will be discussed from the following locations: House of the Silver Wedding at Pompeii (fig. 5.11); Domus Tiberiana in Rome.

Among the oldest examples of paintings in Roman toilets we know of are some instances at Pompeii. A First Style painting is preserved in House I 20, 4, but these murals belong to a room decoration of the late 2nd century BC originally with the function of a cubiculum that was converted into a toilet in the last decades of Pompeii's life. This change is also observable in the House of the Ceii at Pompeii, where cubiculum I, with Augustan decorations, was converted into a kitchen with a latrine next to it. The simple panel decoration has remained visible and contains vignettes in the shape of monochrome yellow landscapes and wreaths, which have nothing to do with the last function of the room.

An elegant tiny red architectural scheme, with apse-like entablatures on the north and south walls, adorns the toilet of the House of the Silver Wedding. In the center of the toilet's ceiling is a hippocamp surrounded by a circle-shaped embroidery border and a lozenge with four dolphins in its corners. Flower garlands adorn the toilet of the House of the Dioscuri.

Panel decorations remained in use until late antiquity. Among the latest examples is the public latrine, a forica, on the Janiculum Hill in Rome, opposite the church of San Pietro in Montorio. The panels in red and green stripes are adorned with simple foliate motifs and vignettes in the shape of a Medusa head and a goat. Vegetal candelabra are among other items. In Hanghaus II at Ephesus we have the toilet with philosophers within frames (fig. 5.12).

Figural themes

A trident, a shrimp and fish adorn the floor of a partly excavated large latrine in the Baths of Vedius at Ephesus, explored in 2004. The animals swim and ‘float’ on a white background within a double frame. The black-and-white mosaic found forms a tiny fragment of the floor of some 81 m² that can be dated to the years 147-149 AD and belongs to the complex erected by Marcus Claudius Publius Vedius Antoninus Phaedrus Sabinianus, who seems to have introduced the rather Roman fashion of black-and-white mosaic in his hometown. In the public latrine of Apamea from the middle of the 2nd century AD, fish are combined with birds. At Kos we see dolphins in a sort of emblema framed by marble slabs.

The Baths of Neptune at Ostia have mosaics with pygmies as is the case in toilets at Timгад, Dar Buc Ammeira, and Itálica, and - in a painted version - at Bolsena. At Ostia, the dog-like crocodile is apparently attacking a dwarf on the right which is almost entirely vanished. The theme is difficult to explain, unless we think of the notion of apotropaic power of such representations that provoked laughter (see chapter 12, pp. 165-167): the users of the latrines are in a vulnerable position. Veronika Scheibelreiter has suggested that the Nile as a metaphor of water might make sense in this setting, an idea that is attractive. The notion that Egypt represents luxury, truphe, also cannot be discarded.32

The 4th-century villa of Piazza Armerina has three toilets, one of which (room 14b) has a rather simple mosaic of a geometrical pattern and may have been used by the personnel of the complex.33 Latrine 2 is a private multi-seater with a white floor on which animals are running in a circle (fig. 5.13). We can distinguish two birds, a cat, a donkey and a horse that follow each other as in a decursio. The animals run in the direction of the exit, so that the users could contemplate the image. In contrast, the cantharus with a large vine in yellow on a black ground in latrine 59 is turned toward the direction of the entrance (fig. 5.14). All three toilets have a fake marble veneer on the walls. Whereas the two first items date to the period of the construction (around 330 AD), the last one seems to belong to a phase of new ownership some decades later.

As to painted images, the following cases can be singled out. The public latrines at Bolsena with copious seating must have had marble toilet benches and marble veneer on the walls. Above this rich decoration two painted zones were applied: on top two superposed vegetal scrolls and under them a frieze on green ground with the pygmies mentioned (fig. 5.15) and parts of mythological scenes, interpreted as Polyphemus and Galatea and Hippolytus fallen from his chariot. It remains a puzzling question why these two amours fatales would be appropriate for a toilet. As the remains are rather scanty, one should be cautious with these readings; the presence of a laughter-provoking caricature is again possible, but attempting an interpretation of certain myths may be fruitless. If we consider the tale from Ovid, however, which highlights the hairy body of Polyphemus, as well as the marine setting of both stories, perhaps the myth’s appropriateness becomes more clear.34 Perhaps the point of correspondence between the myth of Hippolytus and the place-
Fig. 5.13. Piazza Armerina, latrine 2, detail of the mosaic floor (photo M. Dolmans).

Fig. 5.14. Piazza Armerina, latrine 59, mosaic floor (photo G.C.M. Jansen).

Fig. 5.15. Bolsena, insula 1, public toilet with pygmy painting (photo A. Barbet).

The merit of this theme in a latrine was his purity. The hairiness of the monster Cyclops might refer to the bottoms of the men seated in the toilet and of the ugliness they exposed, whereas Hippolytus forms a strong contrast with his beauty and purity.

At Pompeii, five instances of Fortuna are known (cf. G.C.M. Jansen in chapter 12.1, pp. 167-170). The famous Pompeian image of Fortuna next to a defecating man flanked by two snakes has been illustrated in many books and articles since its discovery in 1880. It adorned the toilet of IX 7, 22 and is marked by the inscription Cacator, cave malu(m) (see here fig. 12.5). Fortuna, sporting her rudder and cornucopia - her usual attire, shown in the other images as well - is standing next to him while he is flanked by two snakes in the function of agathodaimones. The Fortuna in the Barracks of the Firemen’s barracks at Ostia can be added to the Pompeian instances (figs 12.8-9). The goddess clearly protects the users of the toilets from the evil eye and the bad smell.

The latrine in sector 12, under room 71 of the Domus Tiberiana on the Palatine, has on the preserved south and west walls, above the now lost wooden benches, a yellow dado with red veins (imitation of giallo antico?) followed by a white surface. On the long wall three gladiators are preserved: thrax, man in heavy armor, and a lanista, trainer. The gladiator on the right is accompanied by the inscription, a ianuarius. The legs of two more gladiators are preserved on the short wall. The vault bears a stray pattern of flowers, small twigs, and birds on a white ground. This latrine probably dates to the Vespasian period and was likely used by the personnel. All the men had names and represent well-known fighters in their day. They served as role models for the users of the toilets, who belonged to the same social ranks as the heroes of the amphitheater. These gladiators had obtained some fame serving in the emperor’s games and were now even depicted. Other gladiator representations have been found in 1989 in a 3rd-century toilet at Poitiers (see A-M. Jouquand-Thomas and J. Seigne, case study, chapter 6, p. 89).

A long series of athletes and pairs of boxers were painted in an arcade of the two walls of a large latrine in the Baths at S. Romain-en-Gal: the north wall has five panels, the west wall has twelve, whereas the south wall had three scenes, all rather stiff and statuesque. On the top of this is a suggestion of a colonnade in which sculptural groups are exposed - like the portico surrounding a palaestra - the painters designed a rich entablature, with metopes and triglyphs and a horizontal sima. In connection with the baths the themes...
suggest the notion of a healthy body, made better by good training. Interestingly, the last image on the south wall, next to the exit, seems to show the arbiter who invites the users to do sports.39

According to Neudecker, the gladiatorial games make a reference to digestion, and he suggests that the vigorous exercise of these fighters was healthy and good for promoting defecation.40

The eight-to-nine-seater toilet of Hanghaus 2, 2 at Ephesus contains a panel decoration on a white ground above the seats. In the center of each panel a philosopher is rendered as a caricature, wearing a sort of *exomis* (short tunic of workmen) and having an ugly and bald head (fig. 5.12). Each man is facing a column supporting a sundial. Whereas the text above the man on the west wall is lost, we read next to the others the following in rather large characters ca 2.5 cm tall: north - την ώραν ή τον θάνατον ('the hour or the death') and (south) - τρεις έξ έννναια ('three out of nine'). The latter refers to the number of seats and the minimum as well as maximum numbers of participants in a dinner party, going from the number of Graces to the number of Muses. The first text is about good, regular digestion. I think that these texts say, with gross exaggeration, that if a man does not have regular digestion, he will die. Volker Michael Strocka dated them in his fundamental publication to AD 400-410, but his timeframe has been revised now, and the pictures must have been executed in the second quarter of the 3rd century. They belong to a set of paintings by a specific workshop that produced murals at different levels, depending on the status of the rooms, so that the differences cannot be explained as stylistic features, but as variations of the same stylistic language. In this case at Ephesus, we have the simplest decorative scheme, including only a few colors on a white ground.41

To the same period a similar set is dated, viz. the persons in a panel decoration adorning a toilet in the House of the Rape of Europa at Kos. Here the white dado is enlivened with tendrils, whereas the main zone has panels. One of the vignettes shows a man bearing a sundial on a pole over his shoulders, accompanied by a text (see below). The two other figures, probably similar, have been lost. The sundial apparently is a device seen as typical for these images, although it is an instrument connected with the early natural philosophers as well.42 It might refer both to the regularity of defecation and its timeless character alike: we all have to cope with the 'problem' every day and hope to have regular bowels.

*Texts*

Sometimes images are accompanied by texts. The defecating man in house IX 7, 22 at Pompeii (fig. 12.5) is accompanied by *cacator, cave malu(m)*: 'shitter, beware of danger!' The cult niche in the latrine of the Baths of the Guardians in Ostia (fig. 12.9) bears the inscription *Fortunae sanct(um): 'dedicated to Fortune'.

An important example of texts is that of the Ephesus toilet described above. Ephesus yielded some more inscriptions in a latrine next of the Bath of Constantine, found during one of the first campaigns of the Austrian excavations. It is said that the letters of these hexametric verses were written with care on simple stucco decorations, viz. *'einfachen Stuckmalereien', whose nature remains unknown, but we may think of panels.*

[no 1]

άλθε ποδί κινήσαι και πτέρες χερονίζας και βήζας προσδίδοντες, οδον δε τε σώμα δονήσας εξ ονύχων χέρων ορθά τερπέο μήδε σε γάστε 
μήποτε λυπήσειεν έμον ποτε δώμα μόλοντα.

Kicking afoot and raising fists high ahand
And coughing your heart out and shaking your whole body
Take full pleasure in shitting your brains out,
and may your stomach
Never give you pain whenever you come to my house.43

[no 2]

άν μή γελώμεν τόν βιον τόν ωραίον 
πίνοντες ή τρυφώντες ή λελουμένοι
όδυνήν έαυτοίς προξένουμεν πάντοτε
άναξίους όροντες ευτυχεστέρους.

If we don't laugh during our whole fleeting life, 
drinking or luxuriating or getting ourselves bathed, 
we will in every way gain pain for ourselves as we watch the undeserving [being] happier [than we are].

These epigrams are similar to various literary epigrams, the latter is almost identical to a poem by Palladas.44 The first text is addressed to someone who is having great difficulty defecating, straining, and contorting himself in the public lavatory. It expresses the hope that he may relief himself easily when invited to dinner at my place. The second epigram is Epicurean advice to take good
care of your own living situation. Both texts are comparable to the sentences in the Baths of the Seven Sages at Ostia (see below).

The latrine at Kos has the following:

[no 3]

τὰς δώδεκα ώρας
άπάσας δλας τρέχω

'I run for all twelve whole hours put together.'

It accompanies the caricature of a man carrying a sundial on his left shoulder. The caricature is similar to those in Ephesus. Perhaps the sundial itself is speaking to us and is referring to the need of regular defecation, apparently happening at least once a day.

Clearly, the philosophers have become a sort of simple medical doctor or one of the Seven Sages, uttering futile warnings or advice most people did not need at all. The quasi-intellectual atmosphere had to provoke laughter (cf. chapter 12), like that stimulated by pygmies in other latrines. A merry mood would offer some relaxation to those visiting these dark corners of the house or the baths. Strikingly, few images of urinating or defecating people - not even of pygmies - are preserved in the toilets apart from the caca-tor at Pompeii.

Conclusions

These few examples of decorations in Roman toilets do not provide an image that differs considerably from walls and floors we know in other domestic contexts. They are chronologically and stylistically similar. The sober use of color and the frequency of simple schemes make clear that the mosaics and paintings belong to the simplest modes of decoration. The marble veneer in various Prachtlatrinen corresponds with the custom to install a marble revetment in public buildings and houses from the late first century onwards.

There seem not to be specific devices to make these decorations more suitable for the rooms they adorn. Sometimes the lower sections of the walls are covered with a sort of damp-regulating red mortar with elements of pottery in it that absorb the fluids. The tiles on the floors of small toilets have the same function. Paintings do not have a film to protect them from the acidic effects of urine, and they were apparently so cheap that they could easily be replaced by new ones.

The figural motifs decorating floors and walls could be seen best when you entered the room. The decorations covering the walls above the seats would only make sense if one could contemplate them before or after defecation. A person who came in for the first time would have felt a certain curiosity about the meaning of these depictions, and we cannot but speculate about them. In the case of the large toilet room of the Baths of Neptune at Ostia, however, people could study the pygmies while seated at the toilet. As the user entered the toilet room, all the images on the floor were upside down since the tops of the images were just inside the door. Once one was seated on the toilet, the images could be viewed and appreciated from the proper perspective.

Some of the figural motifs indeed might have had a particular meaning. As we saw, the images are not specific in the sense of depicting the activities of a latrine-goer, but they can often be related to the health of people who have good bowel movements. The theme of the gladiators seems to be a private association of particular users. It is not clear whether the rather banal motifs of flowers, twigs, and animals, like fish and fowl, really refer to sanitation and water, and so to the toilets, or not. In other contexts they are ubiquitous as well.

The mosaics and paintings, in sum, match the decorations in all other rooms of private and public buildings of the same age they were made. In other words, toilet decorations do not form a special branch of folkart.

Furniture in Toilets

Small toilets will have been very simple and, as far as we know, did not contain luxurious marble seats and armrests. Such armrests can be seen in Pozzuoli, Timgad, and Ephesus, where dolphins form the upper part of the armrests. In some large latrines statues and lavish architectural features enhanced the atmosphere. The large latrine in the Macellum - traditionally called the Serapeum - at Pozzuoli, studied as early as the 18th century and now stripped of all precious elements, must have been an excellent example of such a rich furniture. A toilet in Hanghaus 1, 1 at Ephesus contained the statue of a mingen, not in a mythological guise like Herakles (see chapter 12), but a man who comes from a symposium. It was found in the fill of latrine L, but seems to have stood in the niche encountered by the excavators during the first phase of existence, thrown away at a later time.
## Appendix: List of Toilets with Paintings and/or Mosaics

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<td>P Schmidt-Colinet 1986, 142, pl. XLVIII.1; Neudecker 1994, 60, 157; Scheibelreiter 2005, 72-73.</td>
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<td><strong>Bolsena, insula 1, public latrine</strong></td>
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<td>P Hallier/Humbert/Pomey 1982, 55-71; Barbet 1982; Neudecker 1994, 60, 158; Cappel 1994, 34, 104 cat. W6; Versluys 2002, 41 n. 107; Clarke 2007, 80.</td>
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<td>P Pandermalis 1997, 37.</td>
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<td>Lower Agora, toilet</td>
<td>Red lines on a white ground.</td>
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<td>Baths of the Harbor (or of Constantine)</td>
<td>Painted text on east wall within a frame of festoons. Fourth century AD.</td>
<td>P R. Heberdey, OeJh 1 (1898) Beiblatt, 75; Weisshaupl 1902; Strocka 1977, 88-89; Börker/Merkelbach 1979, no. 456; Neudecker 1994, 38, 130-131, 159.</td>
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<td>Fréjus, House in Place Jules-Formigé</td>
<td>Marble imitation. Middle first century AD.</td>
<td>PR Barbet 2008, 76.</td>
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<td><strong>Herculaneum</strong></td>
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<td>III 10, upper floor</td>
<td>White speckled ground with red frames. Fourth Style.</td>
<td>PR Jansen 1993, 33 n. 2 [mistakenly II 9].</td>
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<td>IV 14, taberna vasaria</td>
<td>White ground w. red frames. Fourth Style.</td>
<td>PR Jansen 1993, 33 n. 2.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV 21, House of the Stags</td>
<td>White ground w. red frames. Fourth Style.</td>
<td>PR Jansen 1993, 33 n. 2.</td>
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<td>Insula Orientalis I, 1, House of the Gem, rm 17</td>
<td>Graffito: hic cacauit bene in latrina signed by Apollinaris, doctor of Titus.</td>
<td>PR CIL Suppl. 3.4, no. 10619; Neudecker 1994, 34.</td>
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<td><strong>Kos</strong></td>
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<td>House of the Rape of Europa</td>
<td>Panel decoration with caricatures; Greek text. Severan.</td>
<td>PR M. Moricone, BdA 35 (1950) 238, fig. 65; Strocka 1977, 89; Sirano 2005, 152-153, figs 14a-c; Bonini 2006, 97, 301, fig. 74.</td>
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<td><strong>Forica</strong></td>
<td>Floor mosaic with dolphins. Marble on floors and walls; Painted vault. Nymphaeum. Third century and changes before 365.</td>
<td>P Neudecker 1994, 51-52, 160, figs. 21-22; Merletto 2000, 298-299, fig. 2; Scheibelerreiter 2005, 72; here Merletto, p. 64.</td>
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<td>Marble veneer with geometric patterns. Fig. 5.9.</td>
<td>P Neudecker 1994, 161; Gülbay 2006, 462, fig. 6.</td>
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<td>Marble veneer with geometric patterns.</td>
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<td>Black/white mosaic. White ground with foliate motifs.</td>
<td>PR? Jansen 1993, 30.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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Cocciopesto floor with white tesserae. First Style stucco masonry over dado w. lozenge.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | PR PPM II (1990), 1076-1077; Jansen 1993, 33 n. 4.                                                                      |
|                           | II 4, 3, Praedia of Iulia Felix, rooms 37 and 89b  
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Fortuna in red frame on white ground. Fourth Style.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | PR A. Sogliano, NSc 1899, 345, fig. 7; Strocka 1977, 89; PPM III (1991), 1059.                                              |
|                           | VI 9, 6, House of the Dioscuri, room 52  
|                           | VI 16, 7, 38, House of the Golden Cupids, rooms K and X  
|                           | VII 1, 8, Stabian Baths, room O  
|                           | VII 16, a, Suburban Baths  
Fortuna next to altar on white ground. Text (unreadable). Fourth Style. Fig. 12.7.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | PR L. Jaubert, RSIPomp (1987) 153-154, fig. 17; Fröhlich 1991, 40, 301 cat. L114, pl. S0.3; Jansen 1993, 33 n. 2, 5; Clarke 2007, 80.     |
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<th>PR</th>
<th>Strocka 1977, 89; Fröhlich 1991, 40, 59-60, 296-297 cat. L106, pl. 10.1; Jansen 1993, 33 n. 2, 5; Neudecker 1994, 24, 55-56, fig. 5; PPM IX (1999), 869; Clarke 2003, 175; 2007, 78-80, fig. 34.</th>
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### Rome

| Domus Flavia or Augustana, room L | Red dado and white upper zone above seats. Vespasian. | PR | G. Caretoni, NSc 1949, 66, fig. 21; Tomei 1991, 57, fig. 4; Neudecker 1994, 69, 99. |
| Baths of Maxentius, forica | Marble revetment (mortar remains). Maxentius or Constantine. | P | Herrmann 1976, 416-417, pl. 144.1; Neudecker 1994, 164. |
| House of Domitia Lucilla | Fortuna. 2nd century. | P | Here p. 168, with reference; p. 193 n. 64. |

### Bagni (baths)


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a. PR: private. P: public. SP: semi-public. This is not an easy distinction

b. The room has been seen as a nymphaeum by K. Dunbabin. See Cappel 1994.

c. Combined with a brothel, according to an inscription (text in Börker/Merkelbach 1979, no. 455, who do not accept this interpretation). See esp. Neudecker 1994, 129 n. 401. The latrine was re-decorated in the time of Scholastikia in the fourth century.

d. Versluys doubts Becatti’s interpretation. He believes that the latrine is a complete reconstruction by Becatti. 100-150 AD.

e. S.C. Nappo calls it an ‘ambiente di servizio’. 

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