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## James Terry, *The Baths of Trajan Decius -- or of Philip the Arab?*

In a recent publication Laetitia La Follette collected the evidence for the Baths of Trajan Decius, an important but little-known imperial monument of the mid-3rd c. in Rome.<sup>1</sup> Bringing together the ancient literary and epigraphic sources, a 16th-c. sketch plan, and the results of her archaeological survey on the Aventine, La Follette "recovered" this complex, establishing its topographical position and orientation, part of its plan, and some details of its decorative program. Despite its undoubted usefulness, this study is flawed in one respect. La Follette believes that Decius built his baths on the Aventine *ex novo*<sup>2</sup> but it is far more likely that he completed a bath complex begun by his predecessor, Philippus Arabs.

### The Literary Evidence

The *Notitia urbis Romae*, a catalogue of buildings in Rome compiled or updated in the mid-4th c., provides crucial information about the location of Decius' baths:

REGIO XIII ADVENTINUS continet: Armilustrium. Templum Dianae  
et Minervae. Nymfae III. Thermas Suranas et Decianas.<sup>3</sup>

The compiler lists the *thermae Decianae* as one of two major baths in the Aventine region. The other, the *thermae Suranae* is a well-attested complex dating to the reign of Trajan.<sup>4</sup>

A second reference to the Baths of Decius comes from the *Chronica urbis Romae*. This document lists the Roman emperors up to the death of Licinius (324 C.E.), with brief notices of the events of their reigns and their building activities in Rome.<sup>5</sup>

Decius imper. annum unum m. XI d. XVIII. cong. ded. X CCL. hoc  
imp. thermae Commodianae dedicatae sunt.<sup>6</sup>

Decius reigned for one year, eleven months, eighteen days. He distributed largess in the amount of 250 denarii. While he was reigning the baths of Commodus were dedicated.<sup>7</sup>

Here the text is corrupt because a copyist erroneously repeated a sentence. Just a few lines earlier the phrase hoc imp. thermae Commodianae dedicatae sunt appears in its

proper place, under the reign of Commodus.<sup>8</sup> As Theodore Mommsen noted, in the later passage we expect thermae Decianae rather than thermae Commodianae.<sup>9</sup> We may accept Mommsen's emendation with confidence.

Eutropius' *Breviarium*, composed about 370 C.E.,<sup>10</sup> offers a slightly fuller summary of Decius' reign and a less confused account of his building activity at Rome:

post hos Decius, e Pannonia inferiore Budaliae natus, imperium sumpsit.  
Bellum civile, quod in Gallia motum fuerat, oppressit; filium suum  
Caesarem fecit. Romae lavacrum aedificavit.<sup>11</sup>

After these [the Philippi] Decius, born in Budalia in Lower Pannonia, assumed power. He suppressed a civil war which had arisen in Gaul. He elevated his son to the rank of Caesar. He built a bath at Rome.

Eutr. *Brev.* 9. 4

Finally, in the 6th c., we have the following report in Cassiodorus' *Chronica*:

Decius lavacra publica aedificavit, quae suo nomine appellari iussit.<sup>12</sup>

Decius built a public bath, which he ordered to be named after himself.

Cass. *Chron.* 956

The wording of this account suggests that there was something unusual about the situation. Cassiodorus records several other imperial building projects, but nowhere else does he use similar language.<sup>13</sup> The fact that the emperor had to order (*iubere*) the baths to be named after himself implies that there was some question as to who deserved the credit. Cassiodorus culled most of his information on public buildings from Jerome's *Chronicle* but here he used another source.<sup>14</sup> That source may have spelled out more completely the unusual circumstances surrounding the completion and dedication of the baths.

### The epigraphic evidence

Only one known inscription unquestionably refers to the baths of Decius. It is a bronze slave collar found at Tolentino, some 150 km northeast of Rome, near the Via Flaminia.<sup>15</sup>

FUGITI  
BUS SO REVO  
CA ME IN ABEN  
TINO IN DOMU  
POTITI · VC  
AD DECIA  
NAS

I am a runaway. Return me to the house of Potitus, *vir clarissimus*, on the Aventine near the [Baths] of Decius.

CIL XV, 7181

Although it offers moving testimony about one individual's quest for freedom, this inscription adds only a little to our stock of information about the Baths of Decius. An aristocratic *domus* was situated nearby. This may have been in the second half of the 4th c., if we assume that the owner, Potitus, was the same individual as the *vicarius urbis* of 379/80.<sup>16</sup>

La Follette discusses eleven other inscriptions in connection with the Baths of Decius.<sup>17</sup> One of these, *CIL* VI, 1165, bears no plausible connection to the baths, as the author herself points out.<sup>18</sup> Of the remaining ten, two are dated to the urban prefecture of Caecina Decius Aginatus Albinus (414-15 C.E.).<sup>19</sup>

SALVIS · AC FLORENTIBVS · DD NN · HONORIO · ET ·  
THEODOS[io]  
PERPETVIS · SEMPER · AVGG · CAECINA DECIVS ACINATIVS  
ALBINVS · V · C · PRAEF · VRBI · VICE SACRA IVDICANS  
CELLAM TEPIDARIAM · INCLINATO · OMNI PARIETE  
LABENT[em]  
DE · QVA CELLARVM RVINA PENDEBAT ERECTORVM · A  
FOV[n] DAMENTIS · ARCVVM DUPLICI MVNITIONE FULCIVIT  
D · N · M · Q · EORUM

*CIL* VI, 1659

SALVIS · DD · NN  
HONORIO · ET · THEODOSIO  
PP · FF · SEMP · AVGG ·  
CAECINA DECIVS  
ACINATIVS · ALBINVS  
V · C · PRAEF · VRBI  
FACTO A SE ADIECIT  
ORNATVI

*CIL* VI, 1703

Both inscriptions commemorate building repairs. The first, which mentions a *cella tepidaria*, undoubtedly refers to a bath. *CIL* VI, 1659 was found in the Cavalletti vineyard on the Aventine; *CIL* VI, 1703 "between the Tiber and the Aventine." So the two inscriptions are likely to have come from one of the two bath complexes on the Aventine, the *thermae Decianae* or the *thermae Suranae*. In each case the reported findspot fits better with the presumed location of the *thermae Suranae*, but the stones may have been moved from their original positions, so this is not decisive.<sup>20</sup> Lanciani speculated that there may have been a connection between the 3rd-c. emperor Decius and his 5th-c. namesake, a member of the distinguished family of the Ceionii Rufii.<sup>21</sup> It is possible that a 5th-c. nobleman adopted the name Decius and claimed a family connection (surely fictitious) with the 3rd-c. emperor.<sup>22</sup> But it is equally or perhaps even more likely that the name was meant to invoke the prestige of the heroic Republican Decii. In any case, the name cannot be used as evidence that these inscriptions came from the Baths of Decius without circular reasoning. Moreover, we need not have recourse to Lanciani's hypothesis to provide Caecina Decius Aginatus Albinus with a motive for improving baths on the

Aventine. An inscribed lead pipe found near the church of S. Alessio suggests that Albinus' family owned property on the western edge of the hill.<sup>23</sup> What could be more natural for a Roman nobleman than to finance repairs to public baths near his own town house, where his munificence would not only increase his prestige but could also be enjoyed directly by his family and retainers?

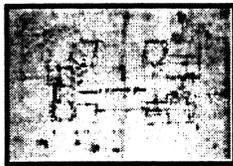
Another inscription is unpublished. La Follette saw it immured in the Cortile Torlonia on the Aventine. The stone, as presented by La Follette, reads:

dd. nn.  
thermas dec]  
vicini par]  
solo strat]  
et porticu]<sup>24</sup>

La Follette claims that it "refers clearly to the Baths of Decius,"<sup>25</sup> but this is not strictly speaking correct. Supplementing line 2 as *thermas dec/ianas]* is an strong possibility, suggested by the current location of the stone. But a form of the verb *decorare* is also a possible reading of the fragmentary word at the end of line 2 (compare the inscription from the Maritime Baths at Ostia: *CIL XIV, 137*). All we know for certain is that the stone records repairs or additions to a bath--either the Decian Baths or, possibly, the Baths of Sura--executed during a period of joint imperial rule.

Seven statue bases with inscriptions dating from the 4th through the 6th centuries were also found on the Aventine.<sup>26</sup> These suggest that in this period the Baths of Decius may have housed a series of honorary portrait statues, though again it is possible that some or all of these bases came originally from the *thermae Suranae*.

### Palladio's sketch plan

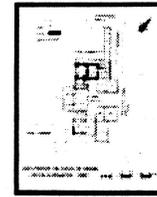


**Fig. 1.**  
**Palladio's**  
**sketch plan of**  
**the Baths of**  
**Decius on the**  
**Aventine**  
**(1554?). RIBA**  
**fol. XV/11v.**

Another important source of information about the Baths of Decius is a freehand plan sketched by the Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio (1508-80), probably on the occasion of his last trip to Rome in 1554.<sup>27</sup> The bath complex was in ruins when Palladio saw it but the plan and dimensions of the structure were at least partly discernible. Palladio's sketch plan shows two symmetrical ranges of rooms. Rooms E, E', F and F' (following La Follette's labelling) open through column screens onto the SW façade. D, D', C, and C' are rectangular rooms roofed with cross vaults. Room B is also shown as cross-vaulted, while its counterpart B' appears to carry a barrel vault, perhaps the result of a later rebuilding. The two large rooms A and A' were square on the exterior, circular inside, and presumably domed. These were probably cold bathing rooms.<sup>28</sup> Each was provided with four semi-circular niches which may have held basins or small plunge baths. The measurements recorded in Palladio's hand on the sketch indicate that the width of the preserved portion of the SW façade was slightly more than 70 m and the length from the SW façade to the NE walls of rooms A and A' was about

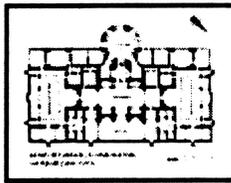
### La Follette's survey

In the 1980s La Follette surveyed the ancient remains on the privately-owned site of the casale and tinello Torlonia, near the Piazza del Tempio di Diana.<sup>30</sup> The most impressive standing element documented by La Follette is the NW exedra of room E (fig. 2, "1") where the ancient wall is preserved to a height approximately 6.60 m above the modern floor. La Follette's survey also mapped several walls preserved at the basement level, including the NE and SE walls of room E, most of the walls of room D, the NW wall of room F, part of the wall dividing rooms F and F3 and part of the wall dividing rooms C and C4. In addition La Follette's survey documented two huge brick arches immured in the SW wall of the casale Torlonia (fig. 2, "2") and a short stretch of the foundation for the SW wall of room E' (fig. 2, "3"). Most importantly, La Follette's survey fixed the topographical position and orientation of the baths and generally confirmed the reliability of Palladio's sketch and the accuracy of his measurements.



**Fig. 2. Extant remains of the Baths of Decius superimposed on the Palladio plan and modern buildings and streets. After La Follette (1994)**

### Interpretation

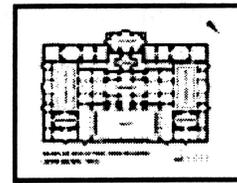


**Fig. 3. Plan of the Baths of Caracalla, Rome (211/2 - 216 C.E.). After Nielsen (1993).**

A flaw in La Follette's analysis is her assumption that the rooms sketched by Palladio define the full extent of the central block of the baths. This assumption is entirely unwarranted. Palladio's field sketch does not claim to present a complete ground plan of the complex in the way that a restored plan prepared for publication would.<sup>31</sup> Palladio's sketch shows us the parts of the ruins that he could see and measure but not what was absent, invisible or inaccessible because of stone-robbing, overbuilding or collapse.

The two surviving 3rd-c. imperial baths in Rome, the Baths of Caracalla (fig. 3) and the Baths of Diocletian (fig. 4), define the type. Their plans are essentially similar: compact rectangular blocks containing symmetrically arranged rooms with recognizable forms and functions: apodyteria (dressing rooms), natationes (swimming pools), basilicae thermarum (exercise or meeting halls), frigidaria (cold rooms), tepidaria (warm rooms) and caldaria (hot rooms).

Palladio's plan tells us almost nothing about the central halls of the Baths of Decius, but we may reconstruct their outlines based on La Follette's discoveries and comparison with the other 3rd-c. imperial baths. In order to take advantage of passive solar heating, the *caldarium* of the Baths of Decius undoubtedly projected from the center of the SW façade, exactly as in the other imperial baths of the period. This placement is confirmed by a feature noted by La Follette: underground corridors, clearly part of the heating system for the *caldarium*, extend under the patio of the *casale* Torlonia. (fig. 2) The *tepidarium*, a smaller, transitional space, was situated between rooms F and F'. It was separated from the *caldarium* by the two huge brick arches noted by La Follette and separated from the *frigidarium* by the parallel arches indicated on Palladio's plan. This room was presumably heated by a hypocaust (*hypocaustum*), exposed during renovations in the NE portion of the *casale*, and the *tubi* (terra cotta wall flues), preserved in the lower level bathroom on the SE side of the same structure.<sup>32</sup> The *frigidarium*, always the most impressive room in an imperial bath, must have occupied the entire space between the SE walls of D, B and A and the NW walls of D', B' and A'. All of these central spaces were apparently inaccessible to Palladio, probably because the collapse of the large vaults had filled them with rubble.<sup>33</sup>



**Fig. 4. Plan of the Baths of Diocletian, Rome (298 - 305/6 C.E.). After Nielsen (1993).**

It is unlikely that the patron of the Baths of Decius would have omitted the other essential elements of an imperial bath, although these features were not recorded by Palladio. The *basilicae thermarum*, rectangular halls surrounded by porticos, were probably placed symmetrically to the NW and SE of the portion of the ruins documented by Palladio. The large, rectangular *natatio* would presumably have been situated NE of the *frigidarium* and we would expect *apodyteria* to have flanked the *natatio* to the NW and SE.

### **The reign of Decius**

Pioneering articles by Arthur Stein<sup>34</sup> and F. S. Salisbury and Harold Mattingly<sup>35</sup> used the evidence of papyri, inscriptions, and coins to establish the chronology of Decius' reign.<sup>36</sup> Decius defeated Philip in a battle fought at Verona between the end of August and the beginning of October, 249.<sup>37</sup> After his return to Rome and recognition by the Senate, the new emperor turned his attention to three priorities. First, Decius began an extensive campaign of road and bridge repairs, no doubt designed as much to keep his army occupied as to improve the military transportation and communications system.<sup>38</sup> Numerous milestones and inscriptions--from Spain, the Balkans, Palestine, Galatia, Britain, and Africa--record the renewal of roads and bridges under Decius in 249 and 250.<sup>39</sup>

A second priority for the new emperor was a program of religious renewal. Decius required all inhabitants of the empire to sacrifice to the traditional gods of the Roman state.<sup>40</sup> In the Christian sources this policy is presented as a persecution directed at the faithful.<sup>41</sup> However, as Hans Pohlsander observed, Decius' religious program may be understood as a positive attempt to reverse the troubles besetting

the empire by reinvigorating Roman paganism and leading the masses back to the traditional Roman cults.<sup>42</sup> Decius' religious program was underway by the third week of January, 250.<sup>43</sup> The emperor himself may have presided at the trial of the Christian recusant Celerinus before Easter in the same year.<sup>44</sup>

Decius next turned his attention to the military situation, responding to internal threats from usurpers and external threats from the Goths and the Carpi on the Danube frontier. Our best guide here is the pagan historian Sextus Aurelius Victor, who provides a clear sequence of events. According to Victor, Decius first dispatched his son, Herennius Etruscus, to the frontier provinces.<sup>45</sup> This was apparently soon after Herennius' elevation to the rank of Caesar in the spring of 250.<sup>46</sup> Decius himself remained behind in Rome for an undetermined period, during which time he received the head of the usurper Jotapian.<sup>47</sup> At the same time Decius received an alarming report that another usurper, T. Julius Priscus, had allied himself with the Goths and was pillaging Thrace.<sup>48</sup> In response to this threat Decius left Rome immediately: Qua causa, Decio quam potuit maturime Roma digressio.<sup>49</sup>

The thorny problems surrounding the campaigns of 250 and 251 do not concern us here.<sup>50</sup> For our purposes it is important only to note that the Decii never returned to Rome. After some initial successes,<sup>51</sup> the military situation deteriorated rapidly in the spring of 251. Decius and Herennius may have attempted to intercept the Goths as they withdrew with booty from the sack of Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria), but the Roman army was cut off at Abrittus (Hisarlaka, near Razgrad).<sup>52</sup> Decius and Herennius were killed. The news of their deaths reached Rome between June 9 and June 24 of 251.<sup>53</sup>

### **Could Decius have built the baths?**

Why did Decius delay his departure for the frontier in the spring of 250? Aurelius Victor is clear on this point.

Romae aliquantum moratur, moenium gratia, quae instituit, dedicandorum.<sup>54</sup>

[Decius] remained for some time at Rome in order to dedicate a public building which he built.<sup>55</sup>

Because our sources document only one public building dedicated by Decius at Rome, it is virtually certain that Victor is referring to the imperial thermae on the Aventine.<sup>56</sup> La Follette asserts that Victor here "clearly refers to new construction begun by Decius."<sup>57</sup> However, the text is not explicit on this point.

Is it possible that Decius planned, built, and dedicated an imperial bath complex in less than one year, between his arrival in Rome in the autumn of 249 and his departure in the summer of 250? The Baths of Caracalla were begun in 211 or early 212 and dedicated in 216, although the construction of the surrounding porticoes probably dragged on until the reign of Severus Alexander.<sup>58</sup> The Baths of Diocletian

took between seven and eight years to complete, from 298 to 305 or 306.<sup>59</sup> To judge from the size of the rooms recorded by Palladio, Decius' baths must have been significantly smaller than either of these--perhaps less than one-quarter the floor area of the gigantic Baths of Diocletian. Still, it is wrong to assume that construction time is simply a function of floor area. Architectural planning, site procurement and clearance, and the production and transport of building materials are subject to their own timetables, independent of the dimensions of the final product.

Of course, the most important factors affecting construction speed are the financial and manpower resources available for a given project. Though our evidence for imperial finances in the mid-3rd c. is incomplete, there is good reason to believe that Decius was short of cash throughout his reign. We can identify several extraordinary expenditures which must have drained the imperial treasury in the period before 250. First, there was the huge ransom (reportedly 500,000 denarii) paid by Philip to the Persian Shahpuhr at the conclusion of the disastrous eastern expedition in 244.<sup>60</sup> Zosimus reports that Philip also gave an especially generous *donativum* to the troops to grease his way to the throne.<sup>61</sup> This was followed by a *congiarium* of 350 denarii for each household on the dole in Rome.<sup>62</sup> Next there was the celebration of the millennium of the Roman state which took place in 248. The lavish festivities surrounding this event, which featured the deaths of "innumerable" wild animals and three days and nights of theatrical presentations, must have been hugely expensive.<sup>63</sup> On Decius' accession in 249 a hefty donative was surely demanded by the Danubian troops who raised him to power. Decius also distributed the customary largess to the *plebs*, but this was reduced, significantly, to only 250 *denarii* per household.<sup>64</sup>

On top of all this we must take into account the costs of civil war. Philip had to deal with Jotapian in the East,<sup>65</sup> Marinus Pacatianus in Upper Moesia,<sup>66</sup> and finally Decius himself. Decius faced the revolts of Priscus in Thrace<sup>67</sup> and Julius Valens Licinianus.<sup>68</sup> Disastrously expensive to wage, the virtually continuous civil conflicts during the reigns of Philip and Decius also meant that tax revenues from the provinces occupied by usurpers were unavailable to the government in Rome. The income side of the imperial ledger was probably also affected by an agrarian crisis in Egypt, the result of the failure of the annual Nile flood.<sup>69</sup> The cumulative effect of all of these factors must have left the imperial treasury severely depleted during Decius' brief reign.

In La Follette's view, Decius' baths need not have been finished at the time of dedication in 250, since "the dedication of a building could occur at almost any time during its construction."<sup>70</sup> She bases this opinion on the evidence of the Baths of Caracalla, which, according to the *Historia Augusta*, were dedicated before completion:

. . . et lavacrum quidem Antoninus Caracallus dedicaverunt et lavando et populum admittendo, sed porticus defuerant, quae postea ab hoc subditicio Antonino exstructae sunt, ab Alexandro perfectae.

. . . and in fact, Antoninus Caracalla dedicated the bath, and bathed in it and opened it to the public, but the portico was left unbuilt. This was

added later by this counterfeit Antoninus [Elagabalus], and finished by Alexander.<sup>71</sup>

It is clear from this passage that the central block of Caracalla's baths must have been substantially complete when the emperor dedicated it, opened it to the public, and *bathed in it himself*. We cannot take this as evidence that dedication ceremonies were regularly performed over half-finished construction sites.

La Follette suggests that part of the impetus behind the bath project was Decius' desire to emulate his great predecessor and namesake, Trajan.<sup>72</sup> Certainly, an astute politician like Decius would not have been blind to the propaganda value of new public building in the capital. But Decius had other priorities: his campaign of religious revival, his transportation infrastructure program, and the defense of the empire against threats from usurpers and barbarians. The absence of evidence for other public construction projects during Decius' principate suggests that building was not high on his list of priorities. To summarize, Decius had neither the time, nor the resources, nor the inclination to begin a major public building project in Rome. However, if he had inherited a bath complex that was partly or nearly complete, it would have been natural for him to finish it and take credit.

#### **A hint from Pirro Ligorio**

The antiquarian and artist Pirro Ligorio (c. 1513-1583) has left us a tantalizing reference that may cast some light on the shady circumstances surrounding the completion of the Baths of Decius. In his *Libro . . . delle antichità di Roma* (1553) Pirro wrote:

. . . ma Spartiano dice che Decio Traiano Imperatore restaurà le Therme di Agrippa senza far menzione, che egli ne edificasse de nuove, le quali se pur egli avesse edificate. . .

. . . but Spartianus says that the emperor Trajan Decius restored the Baths of Agrippa without mentioning that he had not built them from the ground up, as if he [Decius] had really built them himself . . .<sup>73</sup>

This text is problematic in several ways. The source to whom Pirro refers is "Aelius Spartianus," one of the pseudonyms used by the author of the *Historia Augusta*, a collection of biographies of Roman emperors composed in the late 4th c.<sup>74</sup> The text of the *Historia Augusta* has come down to us incomplete: there is a *lacuna* from the reign of Philip until the end of the reign of Valerian, that is, from about 244 to 260. This *lacuna* is due to a physical loss in transmission; the original text undoubtedly contained the biographies of the missing emperors, including that of Decius.<sup>75</sup> The *Historia Augusta* biographies are a mixed bag, some providing authentic information that can be confirmed from other sources, others consisting mostly of fiction. The lost biography of Decius was probably one of the more reliable sort if, as Timothy Barnes has argued, the author's primary source for the period was the 3rd-c. Greek historian P. Herennius Dexippus.<sup>76</sup>

In the surviving portion of the *Historia Augusta* the accounts of the reigns from the

Philippi to Claudius Gothicus are credited not to "Aelius Spartianus" but to another pseudonym, "Trebellius Pollio."<sup>77</sup> This apparent contradiction is not especially troubling because in distributing the biographies among his six fictitious "authors," the real author of the *Historia Augusta* routinely mixed up his attributions.<sup>78</sup> If Pirro saw a copy of the now-lost biography of Decius, it may well have been attributed in the text to "Aelius Spartianus." Alternatively, if Pirro's Decius text was unattributed, he may have assumed that "Spartianus" was the author, because elsewhere "Spartianus" announces that he plans to write biographies of all the emperors and caesars.<sup>79</sup>

At first glance the anecdote Pirro attributes to "Spartianus" makes no sense at all. Built in the late 1st c. B.C.E. by Augustus' son-in-law, the *thermae Agrippae* was Rome's first public bath, one of the best-known buildings in the city.<sup>80</sup> If Decius had claimed to have built the Baths of Agrippa, it would have earned him only derision. However, we should consider the possibility that the original notice in the *Historia Augusta* referred not to the *thermae Agrippae* but to the *thermae Philippicae*. Since the "Baths of Philip" were unknown, a medieval copyist may have emended *Philippicae* to the more familiar *Agrippae*. Or it may have been Pirro himself, a scholar who took great delight in correcting the errors of others, who made the change. If Pirro were convinced that the correct reading was *thermae Agrippae*, it would have been logical for him to translate a verb such as *perficere* as Italian *ristaurare*. After all, in Decius' time the Baths of Agrippa had been *completed* for hundreds of years, but they would certainly have been in need of repair.

## Conclusion

The unfinished bath complex that Decius inherited was most likely begun by his predecessor, Philip the Arab. Though Philip has not previously been thought of as a builder, he had the opportunity in his five-year principate to plan and undertake municipal projects.<sup>81</sup> The highlight of Philip's reign was the secular celebration of 248. Could Philip have planned new imperial baths in conjunction with that event? It is certainly tempting to imagine that in April, 248, as Philip officiated at the magnificent games in the Circus Maximus, he could have drawn the crowd's attention to another example of his munificence, a new imperial bath complex rising just to the south on the Aventine.

Of course, Philip never saw his project completed. Construction was temporarily interrupted by the sudden death of the Augustus and the extinction of his dynasty. The Philippi suffered *damnatio memoriae* under the new regime, as attested by numerous inscriptions on which their names were erased.<sup>82</sup> As a successful usurper, Decius had an interest not only in promoting his own dynastic name, but also in expunging that of his predecessor. So after completing Philip's bath complex, the new emperor would naturally have dedicated it in his own name. We can cite one close parallel for this strategy, from the beginning of the next century. The great basilica begun by Maxentius beside the Via Sacra was left unfinished after his defeat and death in the civil war of 312. Construction was resumed by Constantine, and after its completion, the building was dedicated in Constantine's name:

Adhuc cuncta opera, quae magnifice construxerat, Urbis fanum atque

basilicam, Flavii meritis patres sacravere.<sup>83</sup>

Furthermore, all of the monuments which he [Maxentius] had proudly built--the temple of the City and the Basilica--the Senate dedicated in honor of Flavius.

Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40.

Large-scale architectural patronage was a rarity during the period of the "soldier-emperors." From the end of the Severan dynasty to the establishment of the first tetrarchy only two emperors, Gordian III and Aurelian, are known to have changed the cityscape of Rome to any significant extent.<sup>84</sup> To this short list we should perhaps now add the name of Philip--restoring to him the credit as a municipal benefactor that was denied to him by Trajan Decius.

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<sup>1</sup> La Follette (1994).

<sup>2</sup> La Follette (1994) 79.

<sup>3</sup> Nordh, ed. (1949). For discussion of the date, see Chastagnol 183-84 (arguing for a date between 337 and 357).

<sup>4</sup> The *thermae Suranae* are attested in literary sources (Cass. Dio. 68. 15. 3, Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 13. 8), on an inscription recording a repair under Gordian III (Paribeni 141-42), and on the marble plan of Rome (Carettoni et al. 79, 205, pl. 23). See also Platner-Ashby 532-33; Richardson 395-96; M. Andreussi, s. v. "Aventinus Mons" in Steinby 150.

<sup>5</sup> Mommsen, ed. (1892) 141-48. The *Chron. urb. Rom.* was appended to the compilation of the Chronographer of 354, probably at the time the latter was assembled or not long thereafter. In Mommsen's opinion, the *Chron. urb. Rom.* and the two other documents added to the *Chron. a. 354* appear close in time and place to the main collection: id tam apte explent et tempore locoque tam prope ad id accedunt, ut non magis pro alienus haberi debeant (ibid., 37). Henri Stern divides the materials on the *Chron. a. 354* into pagan and Christian components, but concludes that "*Cette différence considérable entre les deux parties de l'ouvrage n'empêche que l'appartenance de toutes deux à une seule et même édition soit évidente.*" (Stern 9).

<sup>6</sup> Mommsen, ed. (1892) 147, lines 34-35.

<sup>7</sup> The abbreviation must be completed as hoc imp(erante), not hoc imp(eratore) as in La Follette (1994) 83, app. I, no. 3. Compare in the same text: hoc imp. mula hominem comedit (!) (Mommsen, ed. [1892] 147, lines 30-31).

<sup>8</sup> *Chron. urb. Rom.*, Mommsen, ed. (1892) 147, lines 6-7. Commodus' bath complex

has never been located. See Platner-Ashby 525; Richardson 390. According to the *Notitia urbis Romae* (Nordh, ed. 73) it was in regio I, so identification with the Baths of Decius in regio XIII is out of the question.

<sup>9</sup> Mommsen (1892) 147, n. to line 34. The passage thus emended would follow the formula used for the other accounts of imperial baths in the same text: *Thermae Severianae dedicatae sunt* (ibid. line 11); *thermae Antonianae dedicatae sunt* (ibid. line 14); *thermae Alexandrinae dedicatae sunt* (ibid. line 24).

<sup>10</sup> The *Breviarum* includes events through the death of Jovian (364 C.E.). For the date of composition, see Syme (1973) 310.

<sup>11</sup> Lavacrum is a late term. It seems to refer to public baths on a scale less monumental than thermae. However, other possible uses of the term have been noted. See Yegül 491 and Nielsen I, 3, 139.

<sup>12</sup> Cass. Chron. 956. Mommsen, ed. (1894) 147. In this section a scribal error caused the consul list to fall out of synchronization with Cassiodorus' historical notes. As a result, the construction of the baths is placed in the year of Gallus and Volusian, who did not assume the consulship until after Decius' death (252 C.E.). However, it is clear that Cassiodorus does not mean to imply that the baths were completed posthumously, since his account of the deaths of Decius and Herrenius Etruscus follows his account of the construction of the baths.

<sup>13</sup> When describing the erection of public buildings, Cassiodorus leans heavily on two predictable verbal formulas, one active, one passive: *Titus amphitheatrum Romae aedificavit* (712); *Antoninus Romae thermas sui nominis aedificavit* (900); *Aurelianus templum soli aedificavit* (990); *templum Romae et Veneris factum est* (789); *thermae Commodianae Romae factae sunt* (857); *thermae Severianae . . . factae, et Septizodium instructum est* (879).

<sup>14</sup> Jerome does not mention the building of a bath under either Philip or Decius. On Cassiodorus' sources see Mommsen (1894) 111-13 and his marginal notes ibid. 120-61. Also, O'Donnell 37-38.

<sup>15</sup> CIL XV, 7181. Silveri Gentiloni 220. De Rossi and Gatti 293-96.

<sup>16</sup> PLRE I, 221 (Potitus 1).

<sup>17</sup> La Follette (1994) 15-22 and appendix 1, 83-85.

<sup>18</sup> La Follette (1994) 16, 83 (no. 7).

<sup>19</sup> PLRE II, 50-51 (Albinus 7).

<sup>20</sup> For two possible locations of the thermae Suranae--about 100 m north of the thermae Decianae or perhaps even closer--see Venditelli 163-66 and La Follette (1994) 11, frontispiece. The Cavalletti vineyard was on the NE slope of the

Aventine, thus closer to the *thermae Suranae* than to the *thermae Decianae*. See G. B. Nolli's 18th-c. plan reproduced in La Follette (1994) 40, fig. 6. The *thermae Suranae* were closer to the Tiber; the *thermae Decianae* closer to the SE slope of the hill.

<sup>21</sup> Lanciani (1897) 542.

<sup>22</sup> Caecina Decius Albinus, the urban prefect of 402 (*PLRE* I, 36 [Albinus 10]) was the first member of his family known to have borne the name Decius. His son, Caecina Decius Aginatus Albinus, was the urban prefect of 414 (*PLRE* II, 50-51 [Albinus 7] and 53 [Albinus 10]). For the stemma of the Ceionii Rufii see *PLRE* I, 1138, no. 13. The sudden extinction of the imperial family in the 3rd c. makes it extremely unlikely that Albinus could have been an actual descendant of the emperor Decius, though perhaps he could have claimed some kind of relationship through a collateral or female line.

<sup>23</sup> The pipe (*CIL* XV, 7420) is inscribed with the name Caecina Decius Maximus Basilius, *v(irum) i(n)lustrem*. Probably the grandson of Caecina Decius Aginatus Albinus, he was consul in 480. See *PLRE* II, 217 (Basilius 12) and the stemma, *ibid.* 1324, no. 26.

<sup>24</sup> La Follette (1994) 83, no. 6, fig. 1.

<sup>25</sup> La Follette (1994) 21.

<sup>26</sup> La Follette (1994) app. 1, nos. 8-11, 13, 14, 17, (= *CIL* VI, 1167, 1159, 1160, 1672, 1651, 1192, 1671).

<sup>27</sup> The plan is preserved in the Royal Institute of British Architects in London, catalogued as RIBA XV/11v. For the date see La Follette (1994) 33-34 and La Follette (1993) 196-98.

<sup>28</sup> Identical rotundas are found in the unheated area of the baths of Trajan: Nielsen I, 55.

<sup>29</sup> La Follette (1994) 34-36.

<sup>30</sup> La Follette (1994) 43-65.

<sup>31</sup> Palladio sketched the Baths of Decius as part of his projected book on Roman baths, a project he never completed. He may not have continued work on the Baths of Decius beyond this initial freehand sketch, as no more finished version survives. Palladio may have been discouraged by the nature of the surviving remains and decided not to attempt to produce a complete restored plan. For Palladio's working methods, see La Follette (1993) 189-90.

<sup>32</sup> Corridors under presumed location of projecting *caldarium*: La Follette (1993) 55-56 and color fig. 20. Extant brick arches: *ibid.* 57-63, figs. 4, 10, 17, 18.

Hypocaust and tubi: ibid. 55 n.160, 56 n.163.

<sup>33</sup> La Follette (1993) 37-38.

<sup>34</sup> Stein (1923).

<sup>35</sup> Salisbury and Mattingly (1924).

<sup>36</sup> More recent studies have done little to alter the armature erected by these scholars in the 1920s. The most radical change proposed is that of Schwartz (1977). Based on a conjectural emendation of the *Chron. a. 354*, he placed the death of Decius in March of 251 (Schwartz 172-73). Clarke's arguments against this view are convincing. Clarke (1980) 114-116.

<sup>37</sup> The sources are almost unanimous in agreeing that Philippus Arabs died in the battle. His son, Philip II, either died at Verona with his father or shortly thereafter at Rome. Slobodan Dusanic has proposed a short period of sole rule by Philip II in the fall of 249, and even a period of joint rule by Philip II and Decius (Dusanic 427-39). However, Hans Pohlsander's arguments against this interpretation seem decisive (Pohlsander [1982] 216-22). The considerable issue of Alexandrian coinage from the seventh year of Philip must have been minted after the last day of the Egyptian year, August 28, 249 (Stein 40). In *Pap. Harris* 80. 39-40 Philip is considered to be alive and ruling on September 22 (Rea 19). Thus, even allowing a full month for the news to reach Egypt, the Battle of Verona can hardly have occurred before the third week of August. Decius was acknowledged as Augustus in Rome by October 16, as a dated rescript (*Cod. Just.* 10. 16. 3) attests. Salisbury and Mattingly propose a probable date for the Battle of Verona in the latter half of September, allowing time for Decius to march to Rome and be recognized before October 16 (Salisbury and Mattingly 3-4). Lorient, who attempts to reconcile the papyrus and coin evidence with the reign length given in the *Chron. a. 354*, believes that Philip's death should not be placed later than September 11 (Lorient 791).

<sup>38</sup> Salisbury and Mattingly 4-8.

<sup>39</sup> E. g., *CIL* II, 4809, 4812, 4813, 4823, 4833, 4835; *CIL* III, 3723, 4645, 4651, 10641, 12515, 14155, 1418440; *CIL* VII, 1163, 1171, 1174, 1180; *CIL* VIII, 10313, 10314, 10318, 10360, 10457. K. Wittig in *RE* 15, s. v. "Messius," col. 1276. Salisbury and Mattingly 5-7. The absence of the name of Herennius Caesar suggests that these date to 249 or the first half of 250. Salisbury and Mattingly argue that Herennius was created Caesar "soon after the end of August 250" (Salisbury and Mattingly 12). However, according to *Cod. Just.* 5. 12. 9 there was already a Decius Caesar (certainly Herennius, not his younger brother, Hostilian) on June 8, 250. Herennius, then, was probably elevated in preparation for the summer campaign of 250, rather than afterwards. For possible confirmation in the papyri, see Rea 20-21.

<sup>40</sup> Though we lack the text of this edict, its provisions can be inferred from the libelli, documents issued to individuals as records of their compliance with the law. See Knipfing 345-90.

<sup>41</sup> E. g., Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6. 39-42; Orosius *Hist. ad. pag.* 7. 21. 1; Lactantius *De mort. pers.* 4; Prosper Tiro *Epit. chron.* 843; Syncellus *Eccl. chron.* 684-704; Zonaras *Ann.* 12. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Pohlsander (1986) 1826-42. See also Lietzmann 521, Babcock 147-58, Marelli 52-56; Clarke (1969) 63-76.

<sup>43</sup> Pope Fabian, recognized by church historians as among the first martyrs of the Decian persecution, died on the 19th or 20th of January, 250. Cyprian *Ep.* 9, Clarke, ed. (1984-89) I, 70-71, 24, 132 n.119, 221-22 n.4. *Chron. a. 354*, Mommsen, ed. (1892) 71, 75. *Lib. pont.*, Duchesne, ed., I, 148-49. Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6. 39.

<sup>44</sup> Cyprian *Ep.* 39, Clarke, ed. (1984-89) II, 54-57, 188-89 n.8.

<sup>45</sup> *Caes.* 29. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Caes.* 29. 1. *Filium Etruscum nomine Caesarem facit; statimque, eo in Illyrios praemisso.* On Herennius' elevation, see n.39 above.

<sup>47</sup> *PIR* IV, 114 ("I" no. 48). *RIC* 4. 3, 66, 105. According to Aurelius Victor, Jotapian's head was sent to Rome by the soldiers "as is the custom." *Caes.* 29. 2. Isid. *Iun. Chron. epit.* 305a (Mommsen, ed. [1894] 463) places Jotapian's revolt in Galatia. Silvius Polemius puts him in Cappadocia: *Laterculus* I. 38 (Mommsen, ed. [1892] 521). Eutrop. *Brev. hist.* mentions civil war in Gallia, probably a garbled reference to Jotapian's usurpation in Galatia. The scarcity of his coins suggests that Jotapian did not remain in power long. Zosimus (*Hist. nov.* 1. 20. 2) and Silvius Polemius (loc. cit.) put his defeat in the reign of Philip. These reports may be reconciled with Aurelius Victor if, as DuFraigne suggested, Jotapian was defeated in Philip's lifetime but not captured and executed until Decius came to power (DuFraigne 151-52, n.5). It is unlikely that Jotapian survived long into Decius' reign, perhaps not later than the spring of 250.

<sup>48</sup> On Priscus: Silv. Polem. *Laterculus* I. 40; Jord. *Get.* 18. 103; *PIR* IV, 254 ("I" no. 489); Walser 5-6.

<sup>49</sup> *Caes.* 29. 3.

<sup>50</sup> For a review of the literature, see Scardigli 225-38.

<sup>51</sup> An inscription from Carlsburg styles Decius '*RESTITUTOR DACIARUM*' (*CIL* III, 1176; cf. *CIL* II, 4957, 4958, 4949). Decius' *antoninus* with reverse type *VICTORIA GERMANICA* may celebrate a victory over the Goths in 251, as Mattingly suggests: *RIC* 4.3, 113, 125 (no. 43), pl. 10 (no. 20).

<sup>52</sup> On the site of Decius' final battle, see Ivanov 48-53.

<sup>53</sup> An inscription from Rome dated June 9 still lists the Decii as *dd. nn.* (*CIL* VI, 31129) but in another dated June 24 they are already *divi* (*CIL* VI,

3743=31130=36760). The evidence of *Orac. Sibyl.* 13. 89-102 also puts Decius' death in June: Olmstead 399-400. The first Egyptian document of Decius' successor, Trebonianus Gallus, is an δοστροακον from Thebes dated August 13 (Rea 19).

<sup>54</sup> Caes. 29. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Here *moenia* certainly denotes a public building or buildings, not city walls. As Bryan Ward-Perkins notes, this was the normal meaning of the word in Late Antiquity, as distinct from *muri* (city walls or fortifications). Ward-Perkins 46 n. 39. *Instituto* here means to build or cause to be built, cf. Verg. *Aen.* 6.70 (*templum*) and Pliny *NH* 35.2.10 (*bibliothecas*).

<sup>56</sup> In addition to the *thermae*, two other projects have been attributed to Decius, neither one convincingly: (1) A fragment of an inscribed epistyle (*CIL* VI, 1099), reportedly found in the foundations of a building between the Circus Flaminius and the Capitoline Hill, led some 19th-c. topographers to propose a "*porticus Decii*" in *regio* IX: Jordan I, pt. 3, 555; Lanciani (1893-1901) 21, pl. 2; Platner-Ashby 421. This idea can be traced to a highly conjectural editorial supplement to the inscription. (2) According to Isidorus *Chron.* ad a. mundi VCCCCXLIX (Mommsen, ed. [1894] 463) and Jerome *Chron.* ad Olymp. CCLVII (Helm, ed. 218) the Flavian Amphitheater suffered damage in a fire during Decius' reign. Platner and Ashby opined that the amphitheater was "presumably restored by Decius" (Platner-Ashby 6), but this is not actually stated in the sources. Decius may never have ordered repairs, especially if the fire occurred when he was away from Rome on campaign. Even if we assume that Decius initiated repairs promptly, this should be understood as an emergency measure necessary to ensure the continued presentation of games, rather a planned program of renovation.

<sup>57</sup> La Follette (1994) 15.

<sup>58</sup> The beginning of the project is dated by brick stamps with Geta's name ( Platner-Ashby 520). Dedication: Jerome *Chron.* ad. Olymp. CCXLVIII (Helm, ed. 213). The portico: SHA, *Elag.* 17. 8-9; SHA, *Alex.* 25. 6. That the portico was completed after Caracalla's reign is implied by the absence of brick stamps (the practice of stamping bricks went out of use between the reigns of Caracalla and Diocletian). Bloch 1, 303.

<sup>59</sup> Platner-Ashby 527.

<sup>60</sup> Olmstead 255-56. The figure is from the Kaaba inscription of Shahpuhr, of which Olmstead translates an excerpt on p. 255.

<sup>61</sup> Zos. Hist. nov. 1.19.1. The anonymous encomium to Philip the Arab also refers to "limitless donatives": Pseudo-Aristides *Orat.* XXXV, 30, Keil, ed. (1898) 261. Commentary: Swift 288.

<sup>62</sup> *Chron. urb. Rom.*, Mommsen, ed. (1892) 147, l. 32.

<sup>63</sup> SHA, *Gord.* 33.1: elephanti triginta et duo . . . alces decem, tigres decem, leones mansueti sexaginta, leopardi mansueti triginta, belbi, id est hyaenae, decem, gladiatorum fiscalium paria mille, hippopotami sex, rhinoceros unus, argoleontes decem, camelopardali decem, onagri viginti, equi feri quadraginta, et cetera huius modi animalium innumera et diversa; quae omnia Philippus ludis saecularibus vel dedit vel occidit. Jerome *Chron.* ad. Olymp. 256 (Helm, ed. 217): Ob quam sollemnitatem innumerabiles bestiae in circo magno interfectae ludique in campo Martio theatrales tribus diebus ac noctibus populo pervigilante celebrati. Cf. Eutr. *Brev. hist.* 9.3; Cass. *Chron.* 949; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 28.1. The impressive number of variety of animals slaughtered also is reflected in the coinage of Philip's dynasty: *RIC* 4.3, 62, 70, nos. 12-14, 17-23, pl. 6; Robertson 216, 218, nos. 31-33, 44-45, 47-48, pls. 67-68 and pp. 228-230, nos. 10-13, 27, pls. 72-73. See also Gagé 412-17.

<sup>64</sup> *Chron. urb. Rom.*, (Mommsen, ed. [1892] 147, l. 34).

<sup>65</sup> See n.47 above.

<sup>66</sup> Zos. *Hist. nov.* 1.20-21. For the coins of Pacatian: *RIC* 4. 3, 65, 105-106; Robertson 237, nos. 1-2; Mowat 193-204.

<sup>67</sup> See n.48 above.

<sup>68</sup> *PIR* 285-86 ("I" no. 610). Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 29.3. Silv. Polem. *Laterculus* (Mommsen, ed. [1894] 521, l. 40).

<sup>69</sup> This is suggested by the evidence of the Egyptian papyri: Bianchi 188.

<sup>70</sup> La Follette (1994) 15 n.33.

<sup>71</sup> SHA, *Elag.* 17. 8-9.

<sup>72</sup> La Follette (1994) 13-14, 79.

<sup>73</sup> *Libro di m. Pyrrho Ligorio . . . delle antichità di Roma* fol. 49v-50r. Quoted in La Follette (1994) 86.

<sup>74</sup> On the problem of the date and authorship of the *Historia Augusta*, see the summary of the arguments in Syme (1971) and Syme (1973). The consensus of contemporary scholars supports the thesis of single authorship and late 4th-c. date first put forward by Dessau.

<sup>75</sup> Syme (1971) 199-203.

<sup>76</sup> Barnes 109-11. A fragment of Dexippus' history of the reign of Decius is preserved in Michael Synkellos' chronicle: *FGrHist* IIA, 452-80 (no. 100).

<sup>77</sup> SHA, *Aur.* 2. 1.

<sup>78</sup> "Julius Capitolinus" states that he has written the life of Pescennius Niger, but in the text of that biography it is attributed to "Aelius Spartianus" (SHA, *Clod. Albin.* 1. 4). "Aelius Lampridius" says he wrote the life of Macrinus (SHA, *Diad.* 6. 1) but in the text it is credited to "Julius Capitolinus."

<sup>79</sup> SHA, *Ael.* 1. 7.

<sup>80</sup> The Baths were endowed and willed to the Roman people for their free use after Agrippa's death. Cass. Dio 54.29.4. They were restored by Hadrian (SHA, *Hadr.* 19. 10).

<sup>81</sup> One construction project in Rome is solidly attributed to Philip: Aurelius Victor records that he erected a public reservoir trans Tiberim (*Caes.* 28. 1).

<sup>82</sup> *CIL* III, 2706, 3161, 8269, 10436; *CIL* VI, 793 (= *CIL* XIV, 2258); *CIL* VIII, 814; *ILS* I, 508.

<sup>83</sup> Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40. 26. The *fanum Urbis* is Hadrian's Temple of Venus and Rome, restored by Maxentius after a fire in 307.

<sup>84</sup> For the younger Gordian's building activities see Platner-Ashby, s. v. "Amphitheatrum Flavium," "Castra Praetoria," "Porticus Gordiani," and "Thermae Suranae." For Aurelian, ibid. s. v. "Castra (Urbana)," "Muri Aureliani," "Sol, Templum" and *CAH* XII, 308.

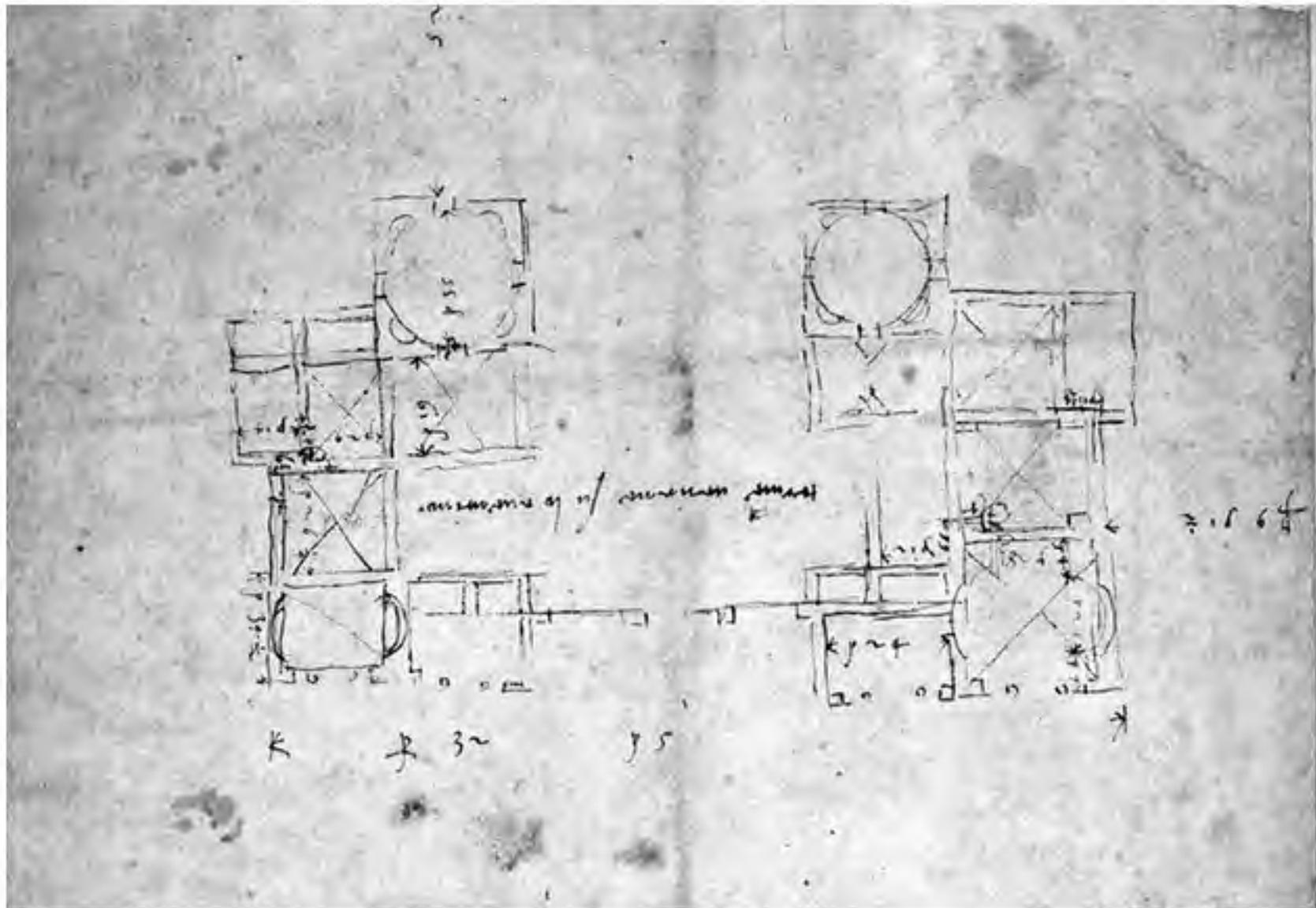


Fig. 1. Palladio's sketch plan of the Baths of Decius on the Aventine (1554?). RIBA fol. XV/11v.

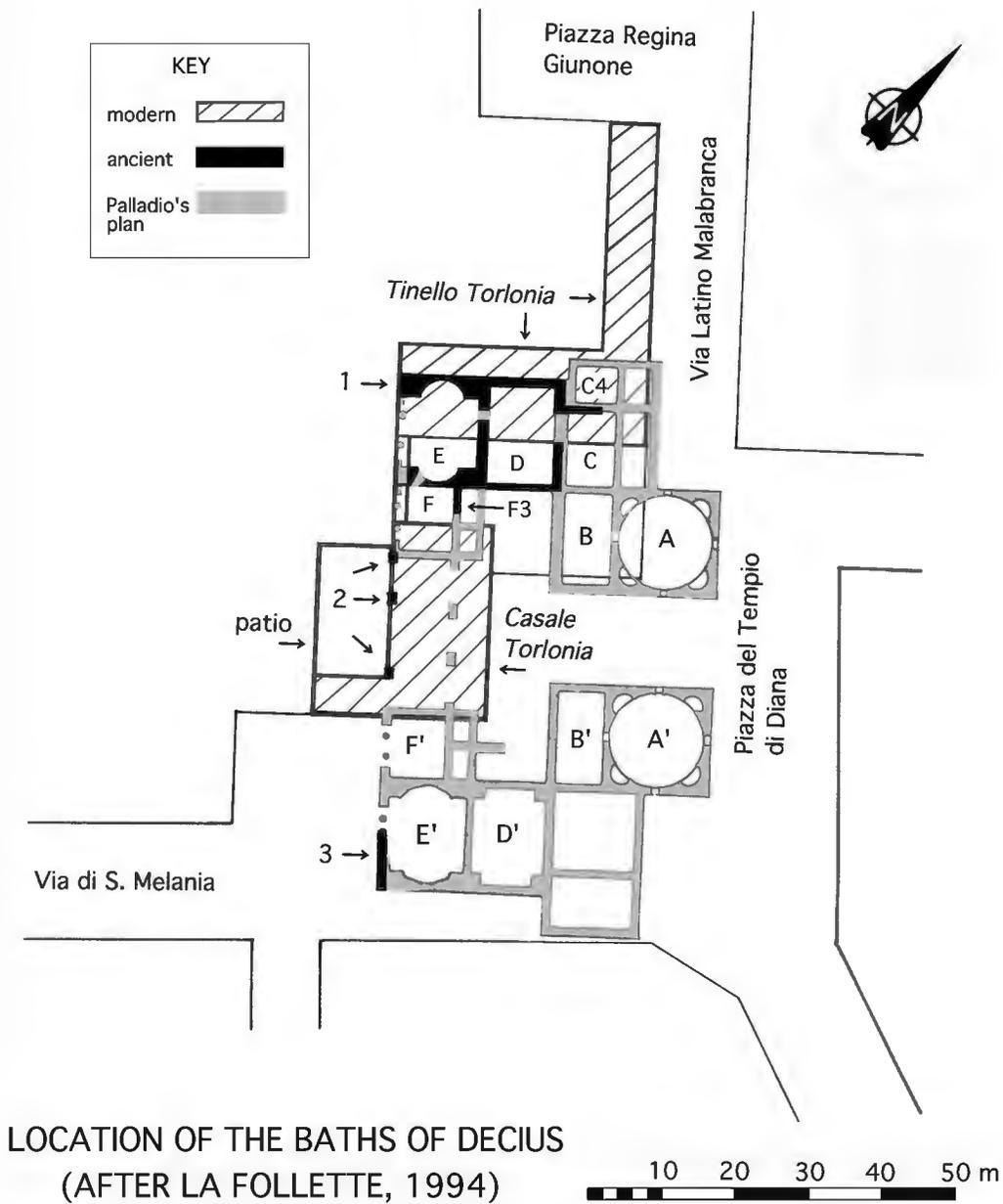
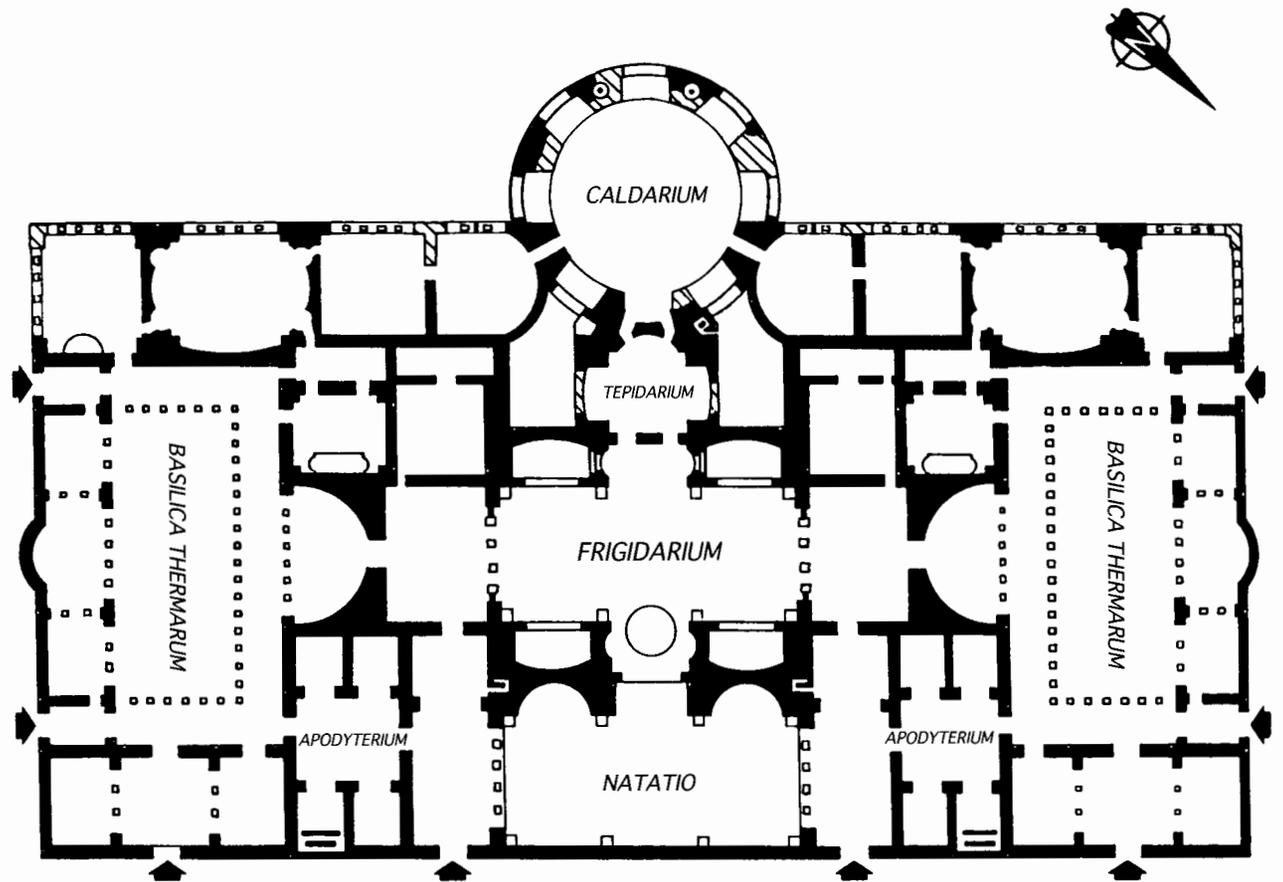


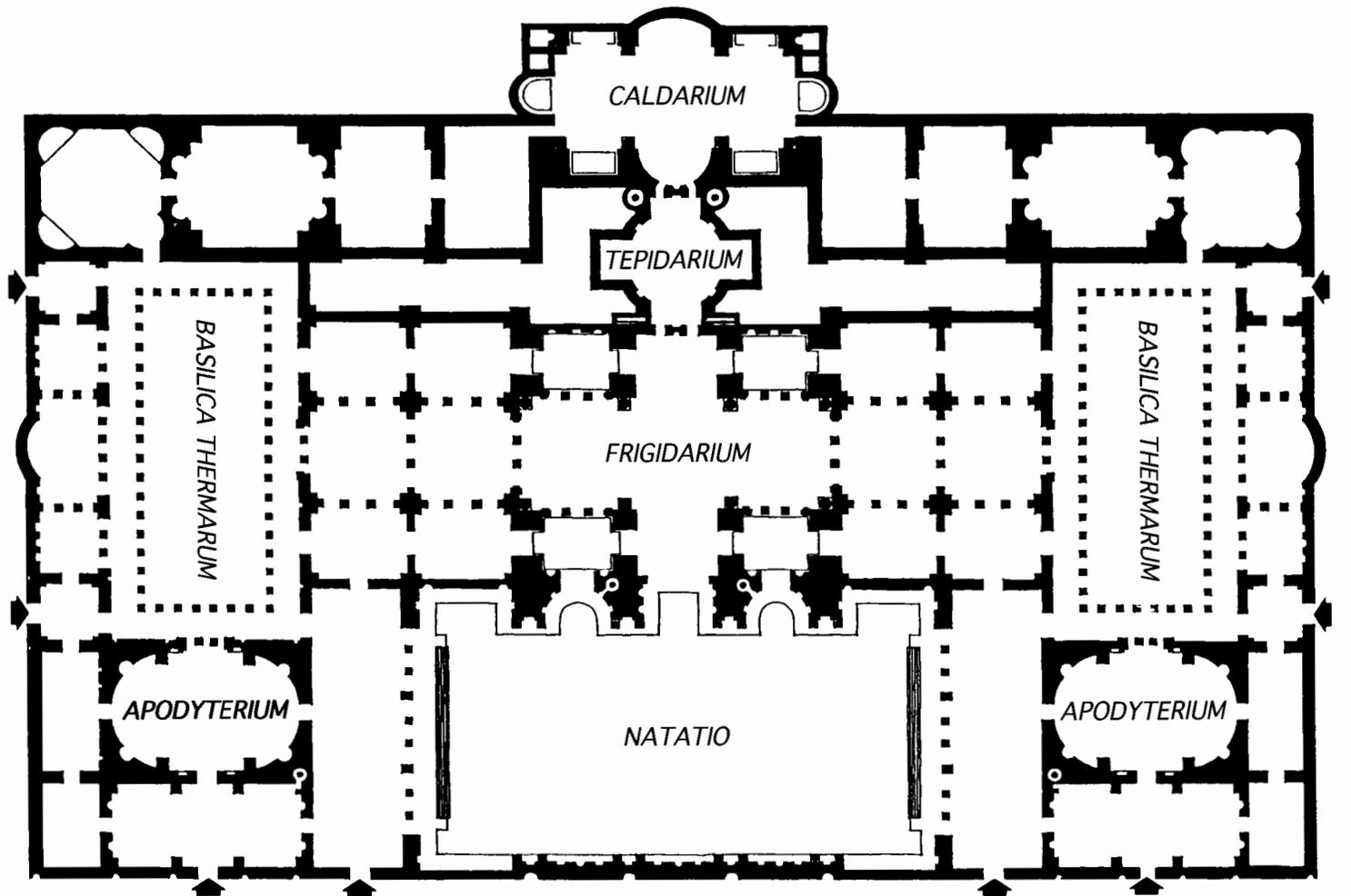
Fig. 2. Extant remains of the Baths of Decius superimposed on the Palladio plan and modern buildings and streets. After La Follette (1994)



BATHS OF CARACALLA, MAIN BUILDING  
(AFTER NIELSEN, 1993)

10 20 30 40 50 m

Fig. 3. Plan of the Baths of Caracalla, Rome (211/2-216 C.E.)  
After Nielsen (1993).



BATHS OF DIOCLETIAN, MAIN BUILDING  
(AFTER NIELSEN, 1993)

Fig. 4. Plan of the Baths of Diocletian, Rome (298-305/6 C.E.).  
After Nielsen (1993).