



ROMAN BATHS*

* structure partially disappeared

You can find this point of interest in Como – Path 7 - Stage 2

INFORMATION

Location: the remains of the Roman baths are located in the basement of the Autosilo Valduce in Como, in Viale Lecco

Access: a general view of the complex from above is possible through a pedestrian path (Passaggio Beata Giovannina Franchi) that connects Viale Lecco (entrance at number 9) with Via Dante. To access and visit the remains more closely, an additional route has been created with entrance through a metal door also in Viale Lecco, located immediately to the right of the panel indicating the spa. This route consists of the excavation floor, a series of reception rooms and two rooms for displaying the finds, joined by metal walkways

Flooring: the sidewalks along Viale Lecco and Via Dante are made of porphyry slabs. The elevated path is made of concrete. The accessible area of the excavations is on a defined route made of metal grating, gravel and compacted earth

Architectural barriers: elevator (?)

Services: Car park in Viale Lecco / via Dante (515 parking spaces), car park at the Arena del Teatro Sociale in via Bellini, car parks along via Lecco; urban and extra-urban bus stops available in the area; Trenord Como Lago railway station via Manzoni – Largo Leopardi; ATM in via Monti; Located in via Vittorio Emanuele; Valduce Hospital in via Dante; Pharmacies in via Dante, via Vittorio Emanuele; Municipality of Como in via Vittorio Emanuele

Leisure and Catering: bars, restaurants and shops of various kinds in Viale Lecco, via Dante, via Vittorio Emanuele; small garden with playground between Viale Lecco and via Dante, before arriving in Piazza del Popolo

Other information: to visit the museum itinerary you can call Museo Archeologico “Paolo Giovio”, Piazza Medaglie d'Oro 1, Como; Tel. 031.252550; musei.civici@comune.como.it, while the look from above is always possible from the pedestrian path connecting Viale Lecco to Via Dante.

DESCRIPTION

To the east of the walls of the Roman city, at a time when the Empire enjoyed a period of relative security, an imposing spa structure was built which exploited the waters of the nearby Valduce stream (now canalised and running underground), offering the ancient people of Como a recreational space.

The first structure was built starting from the mid-1st century AD, with rooms distributed symmetrically along a north-south axis, so as to offer the same range of services to both male and female members of the public in spaces reserved for them. Fragments of Pompeian-style frescoes and some objects relating to daily life have been recovered from this older phase. These finds also help us to understand the type of life that took place within the thermal baths, where people ate and drank and exercised while anointing their bodies with precious oil which was stored within amphoras, sometimes brought in from distant locations. A relative (great-uncle or grandfather) of Pliny the Younger, Lucius Caecilius Cilon, contributed generously to the spa activities in the middle of the first century AD with a substantial bequest, contributing his income to providing free oil (cosmetic ointments) every year, on the occasion of the summer festivals of Neptune, to all Como's spas, sports and bathing establishments (see C.I.L., V, 5279). These festivals were of great importance in Como, because the cult of Neptune was linked to the presence of the lake and of the related activities, being appreciated as a protector of internal waters rather than as a marine god.

Starting from the mid-2nd century, the Como thermal baths were renovated to improve their efficiency: the creation of two new underground corridors made it possible to speed up the passages between the different sections, making it easier, for example, to supply fuel to power the *praeefurnia* (ovens) which had to heat the rooms above.

Perhaps these are precisely the baths for which Pliny the Younger, maintaining the family tradition, provided an even richer bequest to finance the embellishment and maintenance of the structure (see C.I.L., V, n. 5262).

The remains of these baths were first discovered in the 1970s, but it was only in 2007, during the construction of the Valduce hospital car park, that it was possible to expand the excavations by putting the remains that had come to light into a museum.

In the display cases in the first room (located in the south-west corner of the complex and immediately below the entrance hall to the site), materials from the first (1st-2nd century) and second phase of the baths (2nd-3rd century) are shown: among the most ancient materials are fragments of amphorae, pottery and earthenware containers. There are also fragments of Pompeian-style frescoes.

In the second room (located near the south-east corner of the complex) the displays are mostly of findings related to the reuse of the area as a necropolis, as well as stone fragments coming from the ancient external decoration of the structure.