

The Two Millennia of Varaždinske Toplice (Varaždin's Spa)

For more than two thousand years the sick and the infirm have sought comfort and healing at the hot springs of Varaždin's Spa (1). In Roman times, the place was known as *Aquae Iasae* (2). The name referred to the Iliric tribe Iasaen, who inhabited the Panonian region between the present-day cities of Maribor in Slovenia and Osijek in Eastern Croatia. The Iliric word "Iasaen" means "the owners of hot springs", of which there are a number in this region. The Iasaens may have known and taken advantage of the healing powers of hot springs, but there are no known archaeological remains to support this hypothesis.

The Roman period was the first golden age of Varaždinske Toplice. The archaeological investigations, carried out between 1953 and 1983, revealed that *Aquae Iasae* was an important Roman settlement. But, as it was built on precisely the same spot where the present-day Varaždinske Toplice is, the excavations could be carried out only in places where there were no buildings of the later periods. The architecture and urban organization of *Aquae Iasae* conformed to the land configuration and did not follow the usual organization of a Roman town. The public structures (*thermae* with basilica and temples) were built on the hillside around thermal springs, the residential area was beneath them on the slope of the hill, and tradesmen's area with craftsmen and merchants' houses and shops was in the valley.

The Roman *thermae* were found two meters below the ground level in the present-day spa park (cover page). After the fall of Roman Empire, the *thermae* were destroyed and hot sulfurous water flooded the remains and formed layers of calcium carbonate deposits. Thanks to that, the remains have been well conserved in a natural way.

The first Roman *thermae* were constructed in the 1st century AD. Their simple construction occupied an area of not more than 200 square meters. Hot water was brought to the two pools through a simple canal. There was no heating system in the rooms and basilica. The epigraphs on stone slabs found on the site testify that the *thermae* served for the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers (3).

In the 2nd century, during the reign of the emperors Hadrian (117-138) and Antoninus Pius (138-161), the *thermae* in *Aquae Iasae* were rebuilt into a monumental complex, consisting of a *basilica*, a bathhouse, and a *forum* with *capitolium*. The basilica and the bathhouse

were provided with hypocaust (hot air heating system). The rectangular *forum* had arcades on the two sides, and the *capitolium* in the foreground. The spring of thermal water with *nymphaeum*-well was in the centre. The marble slabs that remained from the *nymphaeum* bearing reliefs of three nymphs and various mythological scenes symbolizing the power of water are well preserved, and you can see them in the Museum of Varaždinske Toplice.

The *capitolium* consisted of three detached temples. The biggest in the middle was dedicated to Jupiter, and the side temples to Juno and Minerva. A larger-than-life marble statue of goddess Minerva was found in the temple. This statue of a beautiful woman bearing Minerva attributes is now in the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb (4).

Aquae Iasae thermae were destroyed in fire during one of Goth invasions in the late 3rd century. The *thermae* were reconstructed during the reign of emperor Constantine the Great (5). There is a stone slab bearing the epigraph: "Emperor...Constantine...restored *Aquae Iasae*, once destroyed by the force of fire, to its original appearance with portals and all decorations..." The general layout of the restored spa complex followed that of previous ones, but the structures were more monumental (Fig. 1).

Two vaults supporting a multi-facet roof arched the inside of the basilica, which also had an apse. The bathhouse consisted of two dressing rooms (*apodyterii*), a room heated by hot air (*tepidarium*), a room with cold bath (*frigidarium*), and two rooms with hot bath (*caldarium*) and compartments for sweating (*sudatorium*). Parts of the *hypocaust* system (external stoves and hot air pipes) are well preserved, and can be seen on the site. The forum was enclosed with arcades on all four sides. The *capitolium* temples were united in a single tripartite structure. An aqueduct supplied the Spa with fresh water from a neighboring hill to cool the hot thermal water.

The Roman *Aquae Iasae* was destroyed in the late 4th century, probably during the war between emperor Theodosius and the usurper Maximus.

The earliest written record of Varaždinske Toplice during the Middle Ages is the document signed by king Bela III in 1181, stating that Varaždinske Toplice was given to Zagreb bishopric as a gift from Croatian ban (vice king). It remained in the possession of Zagreb bishopric until 1946, when it became nationalized.

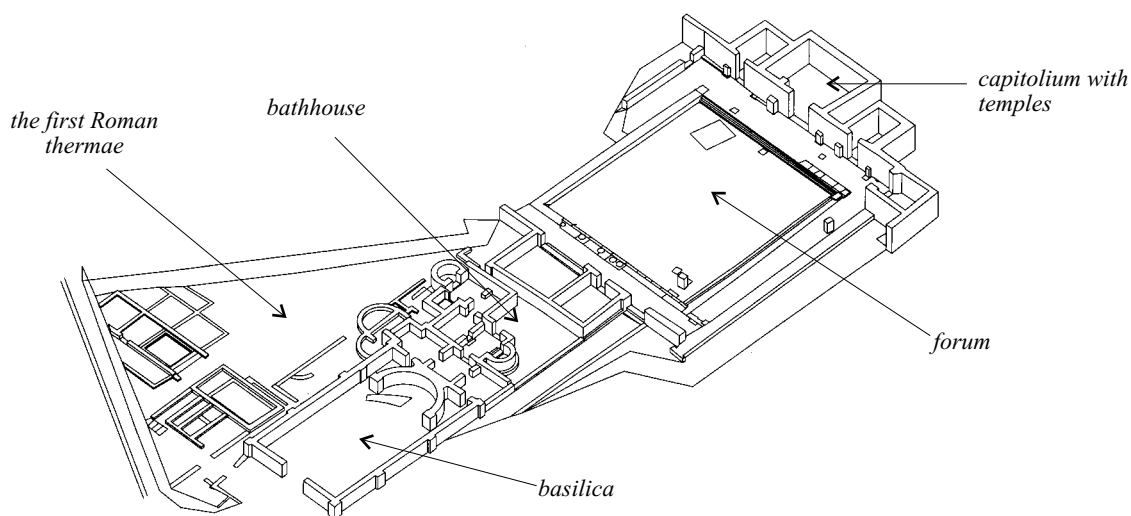


Fig. 1. Axonometric drawing of excavated *Aquae Iasae thermae* (ref. 5).

In the course of time, Varaždinske Toplice grew into an important market town. The citizens were the tenants of the Zagreb bishop, they paid him rent, and owed him the service of repairing and maintaining the baths. The baths at that time were a very simple and crude affair: a wooden structure with a roof was open on all sides, and underneath, in the pools of steaming hot water, naked men and women bathed together. From the late Middle Ages to the 17th century, Varaždinske Toplice was constantly attacked by Turkish hordes, ruined on the battles between noblemen, and ravaged by epidemics. In 1540, a Turkish horde burned the place down and took away 500 people as slaves.

In the Middle Ages, the barbers were in charge of the treatment of patients (6). The main therapy for all was bloodletting, done in a very rough and primitive manner. The barber, using a homemade scarificator, first scarified the patient's skin and applied a cow horn (instead of cupping glass). Then he sucked the air out of the horn through the hole in the top and sealed it. The patient then proceeded to take the bath with a number of horns attached to his skin. When the horns were filled with blood, they fell off – blood spilling into the bath. So, the baths were literally bloodbaths.

The barbers practised bloodletting on a large scale until the Second World War. In 1914, 50,000 people underwent bloodletting. At fairs and patrons' days as many as 1000 people were treated daily. The last barber of Varaždinske Toplice practiced bloodletting illegally until the end of 1964.

An important period for the improvement of public health began in 1772, when Dr Jean Baptiste Lalangue (7) was appointed the town physician in Varaždin, at that time the capital of Croatia, which was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Varaždin is 20 km away from Varaždinske Toplice and Dr Lalangue was responsible for the town and the county of Varaždin. He was born in Luxembourg and had graduated medicine in Vienna. Dr Lalangue was a kind man and dedicated physician, whose untiring efforts produced good results in the field of health care. His three books dedicated to medical education of

common people were the first medical books published in Croatian.

He was shocked when he saw the poverty, deplorable health conditions under which the poor lived, and horrible methods of treatment the local barbers subjected them to. He succeeded in acquiring a degree of authority over the barbers, and imposed some rules they were obliged to follow. These rules referred mostly to the performance and indications of bloodletting. When the old wooden bathhouse was destroyed in fire, a new stone bathhouse – Constantine's Bath, was erected. The merit for that goes to Dr Lalangue, his initiative and perseverance. He also introduced a number of sanitary and medical regulations on proper use and maintenance of the quality of the water and the baths.

Varaždinske Toplice flourished in the 19th century. Several new bathhouses were built, and from 1836 onward, a physician was permanently employed.

The second golden age of Varaždinske Toplice started at the beginning of the last century. The bathhouses and bath facilities were renovated, the new waterworks were constructed, and a luxurious new hotel, a fine example of the secessionist (art Nouveau) architecture, was built. The rules of social behavior in bath facilities and their proper use were issued. A grand new park was laid out (8), where an orchestra played daily in the park's bandstand or in the assembly hall. Varaždinske Toplice developed into a fashionable resort where wealthy people gathered, seeking entertainment and cure for their disease.

After the breakdown of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a new type of guests patronized Varaždinske Toplice. Instead of Hungarian aristocracy, members of the new prosperous class of merchants in the newly formed Kingdom of Yugoslavia were regular visitors.

During the World War II Varaždinske Toplice suffered heavily. The luxurious hotel was destroyed by fire and bathhouses were damaged.

After the war, the spa becomes a big and well-organized rehabilitation centre. At present, the Special Hospital for Medical Rehabilitation has 1,100 beds for pa-

tients, employs 32 physicians and numerous physiotherapists. It comprises departments for neurology, pediatrics, traumatology, spinal diseases and injuries, rheumatology, orthopaedics and sport injuries, physiotherapy, and a polyclinic. A fine hotel with excellent catering based on local traditional dishes is part of the hospital complex, offering first class medical rehabilitation and recreation facilities. Next to the hospital complex is the park, where once the bandstand was and the orchestra played for daily entertainment of bath guests. Fifty years ago, the remains of *Aquae Isae* were uncovered under the layers of earth, and the archaeological investigation is still being carried out.

Hiking on the hills around the spa through the woods, between vineyards and through villages provides an enjoyable recreation and the opportunity to meet local people and to learn about the country.

Stjepan Gamulin

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