

# The Turkish Baths Of Timisoara

## A Novel Archaeological Monument In the Context Of Rehabilitating the City's Historical Centre

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### 1. Introduction

**T**HE *DE facto* existence of Turkish baths in *Libertății* Square in Timișoara has long been a simple hypothesis in the world of historians; recent urban systematization works in the *Cetate* district facilitated the discovery of these baths, thus opening a new path for the exploration of Ottoman Timișoara.

Some information of the “urban legend” kind placed the Turkish baths under the building of the Old Town Hall of Timișoara, in the northern part of the square, as this building has an inscription in Old Turkish that, properly translated, makes no reference to the existence of a public Turkish bath in this area (it refers to a tower) (Fig. 1).

The reputed researcher Cristina Feneșan<sup>1</sup>, one of the few specialists in Ottoman civilization and an expert in Old Turkish, claims that the translation does not refer to a Turkish bath, which denies the existence of an Ottoman bath on the site of the Old Town Hall of Timișoara.

Other old documents, among which the accounts of the Turkish traveler Evliya Celebi<sup>2</sup>, who visited Timișoara in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, say that there were four Turkish baths in the town but do not mention their exact location. Henrik Ottendorf (Fig. 2) and Meimar Radogna<sup>3</sup>, who knew the town directly, drew maps of Timișoara but supplied no clue to locate the baths. A. Jancsó<sup>4</sup> claims that all the maps drawn up in the 17<sup>th</sup> century are incorrect and that we cannot rely on geo-references to find out the correct location of a site. Only Captain Francois Perrette<sup>5</sup>, who drew several maps of Timișoara (right before or after the Austrian conquest of the town) locates a rectangular building that he names “Town Baths”; however, the building cannot be identified with accuracy because the map is difficult to geo-reference in the absence of certain benchmarks in the field. Thus, these benchmarks could be identified only after the archaeological excavations in 2014, because the systematization works carried out by the Austrians in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries removed all Ottoman buildings and the street network.



FIGURE 1. Old Turkish inscription on the building of the Old Town Hall

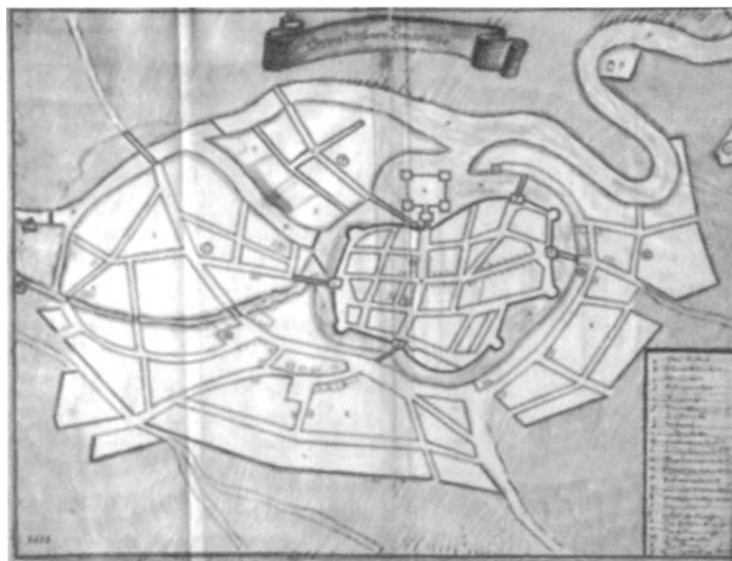


FIGURE 2. Plans of Timișoara by Henrik Ottendorf (1663)

In 2006, preservation archaeological excavations were carried out along the tramway rails crossing *Libertății* Square from the east to the west, through its northern side in the close vicinity of the Old Town Hall, but no major archaeological complex (walls or building structures) was identified—only wooden narrow streets and medieval tombs<sup>6</sup>.

Preventive diggings for archaeological discharge in *Libertății* Square partially uncovered phases I and II of the Turkish baths (the Great Turkish Bath of the town) as well

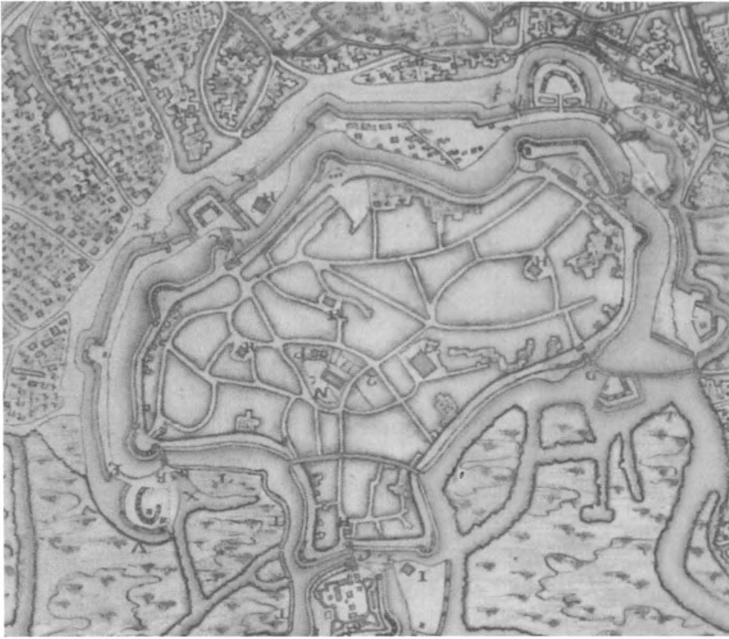


FIGURE 3. Map of Captain Fr. Perrette (detail). N stands for the baths

as part of the building that is supposed to have been the “Great Storeroom”. We identified the water supply system and the sewage system of these baths, as well as portions of the wooden streets delimitating this building sector in the north-east (*Lalelelor Lane*), in the north-west (*Poarta Cocoşului Lane*) and in the south-west (probably the junction between the *Lalelelor Lane* and the *Poarta Cocoşului Lane*). Equally spectacular is the water pipe identified north, from phase II of the Turkish baths, which seems to have been built when this public building was rebuilt, proving the systematization of the town during the Ottoman rule.

After the Habsburg conquest, the Austrians demolished all Ottoman buildings and re-systematized the town: it is then that *Libertăţii Square* became rectangular and got imposing buildings on all four sides. This is how 164 years of original history that mixed Oriental values and Western values were covered by debris.

Starting urban rehabilitation works in the *Cetate* district was an extraordinary chance for the town of Timișoara, because all the infrastructure works done so far (except for those in 2006) were without an archaeological discharge certificate; therefore, many remains of the past were forever lost because of ignorance or indifference as far as the heritage law is concerned. Given that the Ottoman period was the least known in the history of Timișoara, archaeological diggings in 2013-2014 successfully filled in a gap in the past of the town providing evidence of an astonishing, dynamic, cultivated, well-tended medieval metropolis with a flourishing commerce, with superb public buildings (baths, mosques,

etc.), with carefully maintained streets, with a community that highly valued both water (as indicated by the ceramic aqueducts), and spiritual purity.

## 2. Timișoara Under Ottoman Occupation

**I**N THE wider context of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire towards Central Europe, on 29 August 1526, the Hungarian army was defeated at Mohacs; after several years of wars, conflicts and inner treason, the Sultan Suleiman annexed central and southern Hungary making up the Buda Vilayet. After conquering Cenad and Lipova, in 1552 he occupied Timișoara where he organized a new military-administrative unit, the Timișoara Vilayet or Pashalik (*Demeşvar Vilayeti*), completely separated from the Buda Vilayet.

The conquest of Banat and turning it into a pashalik changed fundamentally the historical evolution of the province and led to its integration in the Turkish military-administrative and economic system of the Ottoman Empire. Right after the conquest of Timișoara, Ottoman authorities turned Orthodox churches into mosques or *djami*; later, they built new buildings reflecting the Ottoman culture. A *hammam* was a necessity in a newly conquered town and the fact that Timișoara had no public baths until the arrival of the Turks made the latter build one from scratch. The location chosen was the current *Libertății* Square due to its proximity to the *Cocoșului* Gate and to the Mosque.

The changes in the urban structure of the town of Timișoara after the Ottoman conquest observed the geographical conditions of the surrounding area and the poly-nuclear character of the town. We need to mention that Timișoara was surrounded, at the time, by marshes and that access to the Citadel was only possible via bridges. The Ottomans practically split the town into three areas<sup>7</sup>: the center was represented by the citadel, the town (called a “rascian town”) was the area inhabited by the Turks or the followers of Islam, and the two suburbs, *Palanca Mică* and *Palanca Mare*, were inhabited by Christians.

## 3. The Cultural and Social Context Of Public Baths In Timișoara

**T**HE MUSLIMS were compelled by the Quran to be clean both physically and spiritually: thus, it recommends total ablution or *gusül*<sup>8</sup> to every Muslim before the daily prayers. This was, maybe, the main reason why the Ottomans adopted so quickly the prototype of the Roman baths and integrated them in the famous *külliye*<sup>9</sup>, i.e. a complex of buildings containing mosques, libraries and schools, kitchens for the poor and, of course, *public baths*. Islam also required the observance of certain rules of conduct in public, rules that also established the position of women and men in society:



FIGURE 4. Plan of the preservation digging in Libertății Square, Timișoara, with details of the building C7 – Turkish Baths, phase II

While, in Western Europe, the Christian clergy propagated rules forbidding the regular bathing of the body, in the Arab world the culture of public baths and of physical and spiritual purification was in constant material and customary evolution, as shown by the hundreds of public baths built by the Muslims and by the attention paid to these buildings.

As a building submitted to Islamic rigors, the *hammam* was built after a classical model, standardized in the entire Ottoman Empire<sup>10</sup>; the only differences are related to planimetry; to the distribution of the annexes and, of course, to the regional character of the baths themselves. The distribution of the rooms within a *hammam*, its location downtown, the heating system, as well as the presence of a certain ritual carried out in a pre-established order make of the *hammam* more than a simple sauna. As it was an almost sacred institution, architects were compelled to observe certain architectural norms that limited their innovative initiatives.

#### 4. Turkish Baths (Phase II) In Timișoara, Libertății Square

**I**N THE northeast part of *Libertății* Square, almost parallel with *Lucian Blaga* Street, the need of the contractor to reach the depth quota stipulated in the contract led to the stripping and mechanical excavation of the land. These interventions uncovered part of a network of walls. This stopped the contractor's works and we started to investigate archaeologically a building that we named C7. This building made of bricks and mortar proved to be a large, imposing one.

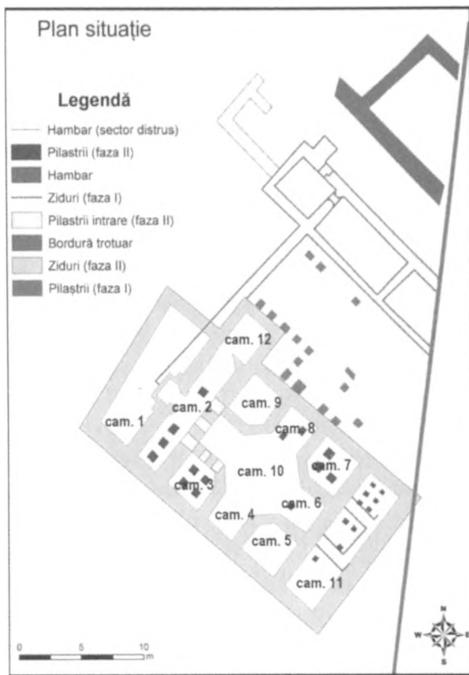


FIGURE 5. Plan of the building C7, Turkish Baths, phase II



FIGURE 6. General view of the Turkish Baths, phase II

The building was 39 m long and 13 m wide. The outer walls were over 1 m thick. Unfortunately, the building had been crossed and destroyed by 12 previous interventions: from the Austrian pipe to the cast iron pipes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century or the sewage system of Stan Vidrighin (1902), all these works broke down the walls of the C7 building and made the archaeological situation rather difficult. Besides the outer walls, there were also several inner walls that delimitate several rooms. The sectors within the building were named conventionally in the order of their appearance.

Thus, we identified and documented 12 rooms, of which four booths called *havlet* measuring 3.10 x 3.20 m (rooms 3, 5, 7, 9) and four rooms of the *inwan* type measuring 2.70 x 2.20 m (rooms 4, 6, 8, 10), all paved with bricks. At the intersection of the four *inwan* rooms, there was a central octagonal area where there was, most probably, a massage table or a heightened basin of which we found only a large number of marble tiles covering the “piece of furniture”.

Room 1 proved to be an outer curtain of the entire structure paved with large stone slabs. One could enter it from the bath building through a door at the middle of the wall closing the eastern side of the curtain. The curtain measured 11 x 3.5 m.

The northern part of Room 2, measuring 11 x 2 m, had been destroyed by the Austrian pipe. The floor of the room was made of rectangular bricks measuring 30 x 15 x 5 cm.

Inside the room we could see the bases of three brick pillars in the southern part of the room, set 60 cm apart one from another, and measuring about 70 x 60 cm.

Room 11 was on the eastern side of the Turkish baths. It was rectangular and structurally singular. The floor (which no longer existed at the time of the diggings) must have been suspended on pillars of wrought tiles marked by burn marks and soot on all sides. We believe this must have been the hot room with a *hypocaust* type heating.

Room 12 had three of its walls in the northern side of the building, like some kind of niche in the outer wall of the Turkish baths. It was a rectangle measuring 2.5 x 3.10 m. The walls separating this room were 80 cm thick and were covered in a thin layer of white mortar; the floor also was covered with mortar. Most probably, this room was a hall or a staircase (if the building had an upper floor) or a locker room for the women.

The building named C7 seemed to be an important building for the Ottoman community of Timișoara and for the occupying troops that were stationed there for 164 years. These Turkish baths were part of the everyday life of the town; in Islamic societies, baths (*hammam*) play a triple role: physical cleansing before the Friday mass, spiritual cleansing and socialization. Evliya Celebi's writings mention that there were two beautiful baths in the town; the bath in *Libertații* Square is one of them, located close to one of the town's mosques now identified in St. George's Square.

Although the Habsburgs did not destroy them completely after conquering the town, the walls of the building were unfortunately crossed by a number of pipes, basins, cables and other utilities of the centuries that followed. This made archaeological research difficult and certain elements characteristic to Turkish baths were lost forever. Though we did not identify *in situ* the place where water entered the *hammam* building, we identified, about 40 m far from the southern-eastern corner of the C7 building, a system of water supply with clay pipes fixed with mortar; after an analysis of depth quotas and route, we concluded that they were part of the baths' water supply system. Under this system of water supply, we identified a system for the discharge of sewage water made of brick troughs.

Unfortunately, the southern-eastern corner of the Turkish baths close to *General Praporgescu* Street was completely destroyed in the course of time and there is nothing we can say about it. All that was left is a few foundation traces with the same system of ties.

Baths, due to their character and the thermal and humidity conditions that accompany the use of fire and water, are buildings that degrade easily; hence, the need for maintenance and repair. In the Turkish Baths in Timișoara, there are traces of later remodeling and re-organization that we could identify archaeologically.

## 5. The Typology Of Muslim Baths

**A** *HAMMAM* combines the functionality and the structural elements of Roman baths in Anatolia and the Central Asian traditions, i.e. steam bath, ritual cleansing and respect for the water. The Ottomans were very interested in such structures and built an impressive number of baths, particularly in Constantinople, after it became their capital in 1453.

During the Ottoman period, baths usually had four main sections: *soyunmalık* (*frigidarium*—the cold room, the first one to be entered), *ılıkık* (*tepidarium*—the transition room), *sıcaklık* (*caldarium*—the hot room, the last room of the bath where one could enjoy the steam bath) and *külhan* (the oven). The *külhan* was entered from outside the *hammam*. The *soyunmalık* was usually the largest room of the *hammam*, most often quadrilateral. In the middle of the room, there was a fountain and, around the fountain, there were wooden tables and benches. This area also contained a place where tea, fruits, and sweets were served. All these facilities prove the social character of the *hammam*. People could debate daily issues and do business there; for many members of the Muslim community, this area was not only a space for spiritual purification, but also a space for relaxation and revitalization. The locker room or *camekân* had the shape of a domed room; in its middle, there was a marble basin named *şadırvan* and, around it, by the walls, marble benches and wooden cabinets for the changing and storage of the clothes.

Some *camekâns* also had a wooden storey specific to larger *hammams*<sup>11</sup>, they were called *şırvan*. In the spatial organization of the first *hammams* built by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there was also a transition room between *camekân* and *ılıkık*, a room called *aralık*<sup>12</sup>. Its form varied: it was either domed or ceiled and small. Initially, it was one of the most important rooms of the *hammam*, but at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, bath planimetry started to fade to completely disappear by the end of the century.

The *ılıkık* or *tepidarium* preceded the steam bath. It played the role of a transition area, preparing the client for the high temperature in the *sıcaklık*. The temperature in this room usually reached 23-28<sup>o</sup>C, a pleasant environment for those who wanted to socialize. It was rectangular in shape and has support vaults and a gable roof. The room contained toilets and, in the baths for women, the *ılıkık* also contained smaller rooms where women could shave.

The *sıcaklık* was the most important room of the *hammam*: the steam bath and the massage took place there. In the middle of each *sıcaklık* there was an octagonal or square table of marble called *göbektaş*. On this table, the client could relax and enjoy the different types of massage specific to Muslim culture. The *sıcaklık* consisted of private compartments called *halvet*, and of open areas called *invan*. A *halvet*<sup>13</sup> was a private compartment with a water basin where clients could relax and enjoy privacy, and change steam and temperature intensity. *Halvets* had no door and, if a client wished to occupy it, he should hang at the entrance a special bath towel called *peştamal*. This ritual is a proof of the rigid conception of Islam on nudity in public.

An element specific to the Ottomans and which can be found in all *sıcaklıks* is the water basin or *kurna*. The *kurna* was made of best quality marble and set under two taps—one for cold water and one for hot water. It was used mainly for ritual cleansing: in this case, they used only running water, not the stored water that was considered impure. These basins were true works of art: the interior was finished and colored in the most strident colors possible, while the exterior was decorated with reliefs. Another invention of the Ottomans were the so-called “elephant eyes”<sup>14</sup>. They were lights measuring 15-20 cm in diameter installed all over the roof. They resembled bells and were made of thick glass. Due to their shape, they could capture the light at any time of the day.





FIGURE 7. Turkish baths, Category A, with a cross plan

In the Ottoman world, there were two types of baths: the so-called *çifte* or double baths and simple baths. Double baths were destined to both women and men, symmetrical and next to each other. In the classification of the *hammam*, we take into account the planimetry of the *sıcaklık*, as well as the distribution of the *havlets* and *inwans*.

The *hammam* in *Libertaşii* Square, Timișoara, belongs, typologically, to the type A described by E. Kanetaki<sup>15</sup>. This category covers the *hammams* whose *sıcaklık* have the shape of a cross with four *inwans* and four *havlets* in each corner. A semi-spherical dome is supported by the intersection of two axes. To ease the weight carried by the walls, the Ottomans installed vaults, pendants or Turkish triangles. This type of bath supposedly has its origins in Central Asia. Baths similar to those discovered in Timișoara are found in Greece (at *Bey Hammam*, *Thessaloniki*, and at *Hüseyin Paşa Hammam*, *Nafpaktos*), and in Hungary (the *Hammam in Pest* and the *Hammam Császár*, both in Budapest).

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## 6. The Role and Place of Baths In Islam

IN ISLAM and, implicitly, in the Ottoman world, a *hammam* is an “annex of a mosque” as mentioned by William Marçais<sup>16</sup> in 1928. Starting from this point, a bath is the place of the most important ablution of those who, the next day, Friday, will enter a mosque. We deal here with a strong relationship between a *mosque* and a *hammam* or, in other words, between the sacred and the profane. Once in the baths, both women and men participate, in a profane area, to a ritual purification requested by the sacred texts. The sacred texts of Islam present in detail the ritual of the bathing through Maymūna and Aisha, the Prophet’s women. The essence of ablution is a ritual of cleansing of the hands and head and then of the rest of the body<sup>17</sup>. Good Muslims must face the Prophet clean and cleansed and attend the mass on Friday.

More populated towns and communities have a Great Mosque (Turkish *Ğmii*) and a neighborhood mosque (Turkish *masjid*). The Turkish Baths of Timișoara were close to the Great Mosque because it could receive large numbers of people that also attended the mass on Friday. Hence the importance of these baths for Timișoara.

It is well known that most European towns, including Timișoara, under Turkish rule, had few stone or brick buildings: these were the mosque, the baths and the residence of the Sultan's representative.

The Turkish baths of Timișoara prove the existence of a bridge between Orient and Occident, between Islam and Christianity, pointing out the extraordinary role of this town as a gateway to Europe for Islamic civilization and also to the Orient for European values.

The presence of the baths in Turkish towns also has an economic, pragmatic aspect, and not only a religious one, related to the Muslims' physical and spiritual cleanness. In both urban and rural settlements, one had to pay a fee for using the bath. Finally, it was about recovering an investment and supplying money to those who worked in the baths and made sure one had a good time there<sup>18</sup>. Baths degraded rapidly, and they needed to be maintained and rebuilt partially. All this needed money.

In Europe, there are other similar buildings that we can see in Hungary (Budapest, Pecs)<sup>19</sup>, Bulgaria, Kosovo (Prishtina), the former Yugoslavia<sup>20</sup>, Cyprus or Greece. They have all been conserved and restored, and some of them were turned into cultural or even artistic areas.

Playing a defining role in the past, baths are nowadays valorized and subjected to the community depending on their needs and demands and are visited by large numbers of tourists. Some of these baths, particularly double ones, have become strong cultural centers and are part of the U.N.E.S.C.O. Heritage.

The Turkish Baths of Timișoara, located in *Libertații* Square, are an extremely valuable archaeological and architectural monument, a fragment of the tormented history of the area, and also a proof of the original culture and civilization, of the respect for the cleanness of body and soul of its inhabitants during the 164 years of life of both Christians and Muslims under Ottoman rule.



## Notes

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### **Abstract**

The Turkish Baths of Timișoara: A novel archaeological monument in the context of rehabilitating the City's Historical Centre

The Mayoralty of Timișoara carried out, between 2013 and 2015, vast rehabilitation works of the infrastructure in the *Cetate* district; on this occasion, we identified and archaeologically investigated a number of sites from the Late Middle Ages. Timișoara was occupied by the Ottomans from 1552 to 1716 (when the Austrians conquered the town). During the Ottoman occupation, the town changed its street network (a sinuous one, according to the Oriental standards), streets that harbored wooden and adobe houses and public-interest buildings among which the Great Mosque and the Great Baths. Preventive archaeological excavations started in December 2013 and uncovered, in *Libertății* Square, a public building of large size, impressive due to its building technique and distribution of the rooms. Together with the Great Mosque discovered in St. George Square, the Turkish Baths excavated by our team represented the core of the urban life of Timișoara during the Ottoman rule.

### **Keywords**

Ottoman civilization, hammam, archaeological research, Ottoman Timișoara