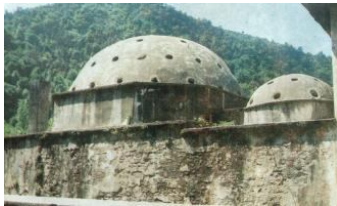


THE TURKISH BATH



The Turkish Bath House is a community bath, generally built as a part of a charitable foundation (vakif). They were built with emphasis on the interior rather than the exterior looks, with very few exceptions. Double Turkish baths had separate men/women sections whereas single baths would accommodate women on certain days and hours. In Istanbul, less than ten percent of the bath houses are operational today, with both operational and nonoperational ones in private ownership, in violation of their Vakif charter.

In their homeland in Central Asia, the Turks had steam baths which they called 'manchu'. Bringing their Asian tradition with them, they merged it with the Roman bath culture they found in Anatolia, and a new synthesis was born, the 'Turkish bath'. With their traditions, associated beliefs, and philosophy of life, baths became an institution, which spread all the way from Anatolia to Hungary in Europe.



Baths are communal, with men and women coming to bathe at separate times. Bathing was a form of social life, and women in particular celebrated certain important occasions at the bath, for example: the 'bridal bath ceremony', which was held one day before wedding festivities commenced; the 'forty-day bath', which marked the fortieth day following the birth of a child; the 'tear-drying bath', attended by all relatives and friends of the deceased twenty days after her death; the 'votary bath', held when a person's

wish was fulfilled; the 'guest bath', to which the hostess invited her friends and relatives to meet a special visitor; and the 'holiday bath' which was taken on the eve of religious holidays.

For women, baths were also beauty salons where facial, hair and body care was available all day long together with herbal treatment of certain conditions and therapy with various oils. A woman's body was beautified and her soul restored at the bath. The perspiring body was rubbed with hand mitts (kese) made of silk or linen to cleanse off all the old skin, and lathered up numerous times to purify it of toxins. Afterwards, a woman felt literally purged of all her cares. Children accompanied their mothers to the bath, but as the boys got older, other women would remark, "dear boy, tell your mother to bring your father next time!". Mothers chose brides for their sons at the baths. All the items used in the activities that went on in the bath were carefully prepared. Every woman had 13 or 14 different bathing accessories, examples of which are virtual works of art today, and an indication to us of how rich Turkish bath culture was. Let us look at some of the examples to hand in the light of this brief summary: Every family had a pair of 'bath bowls' in keeping with its taste and degree of wealth, the larger one for the men, the smaller for the women. Bath bowls came in several varieties: fat and round bowls of silver, bronze or copper, decorated with reliefs, inlays or fish. The soap dish was a lidded container with a handle on top, oval-shaped, with holes in the bottom like a sieve. Soap, combs, and rubbing and lathering mitts were placed inside it. There was also a metal container in the shape of a pumpkin for keeping jewelry after getting undressed in the bath. Bath mirrors meanwhile were oval or round with wooden or silver frames.



The bath clogs that were worn on the feet were carved out of wood in special shapes and decorated using various techniques. Being quite high off the floor, they ensured that the bather's feet never came into contact with the soapy water. Bath clogs with silver bells accompanied the sashaying bodies of the young women with a pleasing tinkle. The most sought-after combs, whether coarse- or fine-toothed, were those made of ivory, which were plated with silver and gold. Thin bath towels (pestamal) were woven in plaid designs. After women had undressed in the bath, they covered their bodies below the breasts with these towels. Bath towels were adorned with various types of embroidery. After bathing, women wrapped themselves in these towels, the biggest one around the waist, the middle-size one around the shoulders and the smallest around the head. The highest-quality towels were woven in Bursa. After the hair was toweled dry and combed, a gauze-like white 'tülbent' was wound round the head to absorb any remaining moisture. When one went to the bath, a bath mat was spread on the floor. This was a towel-type textile, with a red square on a white field and red stripes around the edge. Bundles were placed on it, and the bather stood on it to get undressed and dressed.

Public baths, where such occasions were celebrated as a group, were located in the cities and towns and in some villages and were open to everyone. The imperial palaces and pavilions, Istanbul's waterside residences, and the stately mansions in provincial cities and towns also had their own private baths, which were usually located at the end of a greenhouse-like passageway, filled with flowers, connecting the house and the garden. Bathers went to and from the bath through this flower-lined passage. It was traditional to consume fruit, lemonade and various fruit juices and sherbets in the bath.