

The Golden Horde Baths

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Golden Horde (GUS); bathhouse-typology; hammam; mixture of classical and oriental building-traditions; medieval architecture

Bathhouses make up a substantial percentage of uninhabited premises in the Golden Horde cities. 25 baths have been excavated by now, of which 14 are communal and the rest are private. Such an abundance of public baths in the Golden Horde reinforces the view that the Golden Horde cities were built after oriental patterns. With the spread of Islam, prescribing compulsory ablutions, public bathhouses, the so-called *hammam*, became one of the main attributes of an oriental town. According to Celal Essad's description of the early twentieth-century Istanbul, "a Moslem needs bathhouses as much as he needs mosques; there are more than 300 public baths in the city, not counting private ones" (Essad 1919, 267). The data on Baghdad cited by Adam Metz are even more impressive. He states that in the 9th century no less than 5.000 baths could be counted in the eastern part of the city, while in the 10th century there were 10.000 baths and in the 12th century some 2.000 (Metz 1973, 311). Although these figures are clearly overestimated, they bear witness to the significance of bathhouses. Such popularity of public baths is due not only to their hygienic role in a warm climate and religious prescriptions, but also to the fact that in the Middle Ages they were a kind of club where customers spent a lot of time. Travellers never failed to describe bathhouses, since they were, in a way, city showpieces. Visits to bathhouses were among few diversions of oriental women. However, not everywhere in the East did women have a free access to public baths. Thus, in the Caliphate one was not supposed to give one's wife money for going to a bathhouse, since it would have meant encouraging reprehensible conduct (Metz 1973, 311). In Central Asia only sick and pregnant

women were allowed to visit public baths. But then again in Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan women spent the entire day in bathhouses putting on make-up, treating each other to sweets, and singing.

Medieval baths functioned also as medical institutions. Ibn Sina, in his "Canon of Medicine", devoted a whole chapter to the curative properties of the baths and the most health-giving kinds of baths (Ibn Sina 1954, 196). Decoctions and infusions of herbs, e.g. laurel and larkspur, as well as solutions of mineral substances, e.g. ash, vitriol, and sulphur, were used in baths to treat a wide variety of illnesses (ibid. 196).

Oriental baths are often compared with antique *thermae*. This is due to the similar system of heating whereby warm air from the furnace heats up the whole floor area. For this to happen, the floor slabs were supported with small pillars. The hollow space between the latter was heated with warm smoke later carried off through vertical intramural discharge flues. Such a system of hypocausts was invented by Sergius Orata in Rome. It is described by Vitruvius (Vitruvius 1936, 144–147) and Palladius (Architectura 1940, 213–214). Roman architects preferred the rectangular layout of heated compartments.

Baths with heated floor not only spread all over the immense territory of the Roman Empire but also became inseparable from the roman way of life. The *thermae* of imperial Rome were elaborated architectural complexes that included a great many institutions meeting the most diverse requirements of customers. Thus, in the famous *thermae* of Caracalla there were more than 60 kinds of compartments of different functions, such as libraries, lecture halls, etc. (Cameron 1939, 96).

Byzantine emperors, trying to imitate and develop all the luxury of Rome, continued the building of public baths. Byzantine *thermae* are mentioned by Procopius of Caesarea as places of resort and recreation (Procopius 1950, 438). Baths of this kind emerged in the East during Arab conquests. As early as in the 9th century every city ward had its own baths (Hilal al-Sabi 1983, 28–30). Unfortunately, no information on the layout and design of these baths has survived, yet palace-bathhouses of the Umayyad period, such as the famous Qusayr-Amra and Hammam al-Sarak of similar planning are well known (Creswell 1958, 85, 100).

Baths with heated floor, called *hammam* in Arabic, became very important public places in all Moslem countries. A whole chapter of the *Kabus-nama*, an Iranian didactic tract of the 11th century encompassing all sides of life of a nobleman, deals with the rules of behaviour in a bath (Kabus-nama 1953, 72 f.).

Hammam's in different countries differ somewhat in planning and the assemblage of compartments, yet they invariably have a central hall being a compositional centre of the building. The cruciform, polygonal or star-shaped hall that functioned as a massage compartment was adjoined to all the other premises of the baths. The *hammam* was usually rectangular in plan. A customer first entered the dressing-room situated in the part of the building opposite to that of the heating compartment and possessing no heated floor. In the dressing-room customers got undressed and relaxed after bathing treatments. Next to the cloakroom was the central hall. It was usually cruciform, with four square corner baths. The temperature in the massage compartment was gradually rising: the loggia that could be entered from the dressing-room was the coolest while the one adjoining the furnace was the warmest.

Thus, antique *thermae* and eastern *hammam's* have much in common yet also exhibit a number of distinctions pertaining to their social and hygienic functions. In Rome, where citizens spent the most part in public places, baths were intended to meet diverse requirements of customers, hence the complex assemblage of institutions making up a *therma*. Public functions of *hammam's* were not so diversified; hygienic procedures alternated there with relaxation, recreation, and personal contacts. The same is true of physical exercise. In Rome with its official cult of the human body, bathing usually

crowned a series of competitions and exercises. After a hot saunalike bath customers plunged into a pool with cool water in the *frigidarium*. It was believed to improve the body tone and raise one's spirits.

Meanwhile, all the treatments in oriental baths are aimed at complete relaxation. The customer takes but a passive part in the process of bathing, being completely in the power of the attendant who first gives him/her a relaxing massage and then a wash. In Turkic, Syrian, and Egyptian baths one drinks coffee and smokes a hookah before and after the wash, thus getting into perfect bliss.

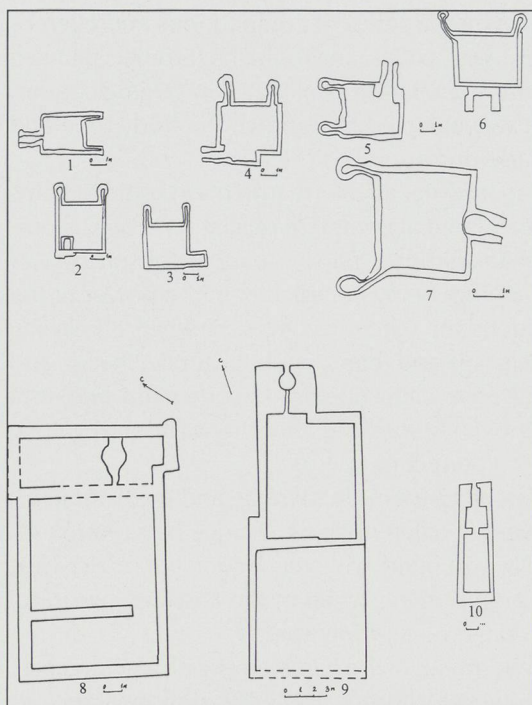
Sweating-rooms in *thermae* and the *hammam's* were of different kinds. Antique baths were usually equipped with the *laconicum*, a dry-heat compartment, while in the East wet sweating-rooms were widely spread.

The spread of the *hammam's* with a central hall, however, did not imply the disappearance of baths built following the classical pattern. In such areas of the Moslem Orient as Iran, Syria, North Africa, Central Asia, and Azerbaijan public baths had become by the 13th to the 14th century AD the true *hammam's* with a central hall (Voronina 1983; Bretanitsky 1966; Usseinov 1951). At the same time small private baths in these countries could consist of two or three rectangular compartments. In the countries influenced by Byzantium both private and public baths of classical design were built. Such baths are known from medieval Georgia



Fig. 1: The Golden Horde. ● Cities with bathhouses.

Fig. 2: Building of type I. Variety A: 1–6. baths of Mokhsha, 7. the baths at Azov. Variety B: 8. baths 1 at Bolgar, 9. the palace baths at Selitrennoe, 10. the baths at the Bolshaia Toiaba site.



(Muskhelishvili 1946, 262–272), Armenia (Khapakhchyan 1960), the Crimea, Greece, Cilicia (Jakobsohn 1950, 76–86), Kievan Russia, and Bulgaria (Georgiev 1981, 100–108).

Baths of the Golden Horde were also equipped with a system of sub-floor heating indicative of their generic relationship with oriental *hammam*'s and classical baths.

Bathhouses have been excavated in the majority of the Golden Horde areas, namely at Bolgar (6), at the Bolshaia Toiaba site (1), at Mokhsha (7), at the Vodianskoe site (1), at the Selitrennoe site (3), at the Majary site (1), at Kuchugury (1), at the town of Azov, and at the Staryi Orkhei site (3) (fig. 1). Their layout ranges from one-room private baths to huge public buildings with a number of compartments of various functions. Baths were popular with all the strata of urban population; it is worth noting that cruciform bath-houses were built for wealthy people while baths for commoners were of a simpler layout. Small private baths were often built in the Golden Horde cities. Public baths were frequented both by men and women. All the baths of Staryi Orkhei consist of two almost identical parts; the baths at the Vodianskoe site also seem to include compartments. The second section of the Bolgary site baths, the so-called Krasnaia Palata, was built later, probably in order to enable men and women to visit it at the same time. In other baths there were different visiting hours

for men and women. Large dimensions of dressing-rooms equipped with heated benches, the *sufa*'s, cellars for food-stuffs, fountains and decorative pools suggest that baths were place of resort and relaxation. Public houses were built in the fashionable parts of cities. The entrances to the Bolgar bathhouses faced squares and the public bath at Sarai is situated near the huge ward mosque.

Hypocaustic heating is almost identical in all the baths of the Golden Horde. To ensure it, a foundation pit some 0.5–1.0 m deep was excavated. Thick walls (some 0.8–1.8 m) were laid along the pit edges and floor supports were erected at the bottom of the pit.

Baths were heated by a huge furnace, usually round or oval in plan. It was placed at the centre of a big stone or brick structure that served as a foundation for water tanks. The furnace was connected to the sub-floor space by smoke flues.

All huge baths had several tanks for hot and cold water. The water was taken from wells or ponds, the so-called *haus*'s, and conducted through ceramic pipes to the baths compartments. It is worth noting, that different pipes were used to conduct hot and cold water. Then the water was poured into various receptacles installed in bathrooms with the aid of taps.

Baths ceilings have been encountered only at Bolgary. They can, however, be safely reconstructed since the design of baths was sufficiently similar all over the Middle East. In the baths of cruciform layout domes, with openings to let in light were invariably built over the middle of the central hall and the corner baths. Other compartments were vaulted, and a big dressing-room had a flat ceiling. Domes and vaults had to be present in the baths of different design as well. The former could be built over rooms square in plan while the latter over the rectangular ones. Walls, and occasionally also floors, in bathing-rooms and massage compartments were plastered. The plaster could be coloured. The walls of two rooms of the Selitrennoe baths were decorated with glazed tiles while their floors were paved with hexagonal bricks and triangular turquoise tiles.

The Golden Horde baths were characterized by the presence of fountains and decorative pools. At the Bolgary and Mokhsha sites these pools were situated in the middle of the central hall, and at Sarai in the dressing-room. In the majority of dressing-rooms there were large, often

heated benches, the *sufa*'s, on which customers were resting before and after bathing.

As to the layout, four types of baths can be distinguished all over the Golden Horde. The typology is based mainly on the form of rooms and their mutual arrangement.

Type I (fig. 2): Buildings with rectangular in plan rooms aligned in a single row. There are two varieties of the type, i. e.:

Variety A: buildings consisting of a single main building. It seems likely that they had a wooden framework dressing-room. Type IA includes estate baths of Mokhshi, the baths at Azov, and a private baths at the Selitrennoe site.

Variety B: buildings with several compartments and main walls. Type IB includes baths 1 at Bolgary, the baths at the Bolshaia Toiaba site and the palace baths at Selitrennoe.

Type II (fig. 2): Buildings with rectangular in plan rooms aligned in several rows. There are two varieties of the type, i. e.:

Variety A: a baths includes two practically identical parts, i. e. its layout results from the doubling of a IB building. The variety is represented by baths 1 and 3 at Staryi Orkhei.

Variety B: buildings of a more complex layout with compartments aligned in several rows. It includes baths 3 at Bolgary, the baths at the Vodianskoe site and, seemingly, at Majary.

Type III (fig. 4): Buildings with a single cruciform central hall, i. e., consisting of a single part. This type includes the majority of public baths of the Golden Horde period, i. e. baths 2 and 6, the Krasnaia Palata (during the first building period) and Belaia Palata at Bolgary, public baths at Selitrennoe, at Mokhshi and on the Lower Dnieper.

Type IV (fig. 4): Buildings with two cruciform halls, i. e., consisting of two parts.

The type is represented only by baths 2 at Staryi Orkhei. The Krasnaia Palata baths might have the same layout during the second building period.

Baths of types I and II belong to the classical building tradition. Baths of type III are typical *hammam*'s of the oriental tradition. The layout of baths 2 at Staryi Orkhei is highly original. It consists of two parts, each of which has a cruciform hall, and thus belongs to the oriental tradition. However, in the majority of oriental baths the cruciform hall is the main compartment situated at the centre of the building around which the other rooms are centred. In the baths in question, big square halls with adjoining rooms are situated in front of cruciform halls. As a result, the latter become lost in such an abundance of rooms and cease to be the dominant of the layout. It seems likely that such a pattern emerged owing to the mixture of classical and oriental building traditions.

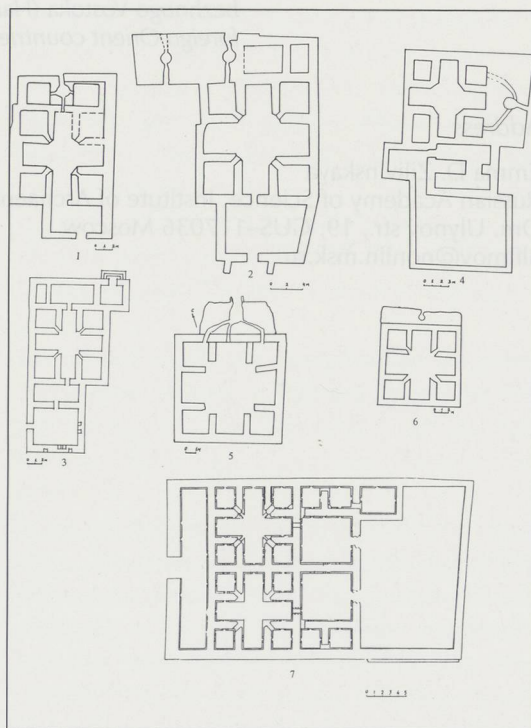
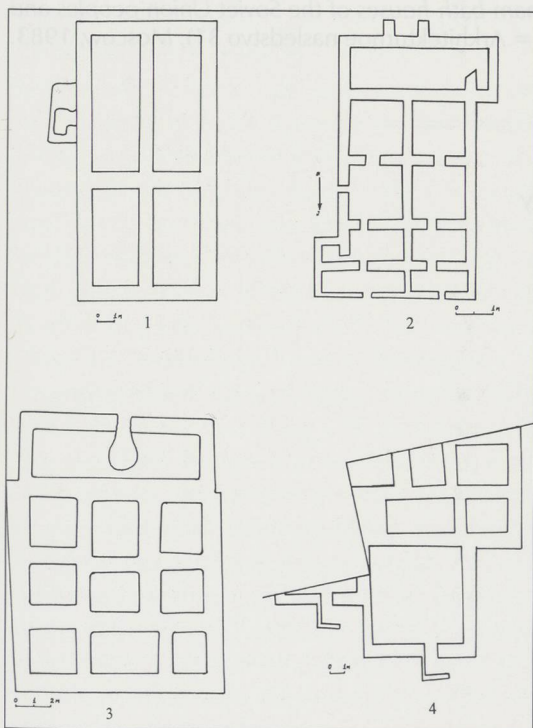


Fig. 3 (left): Building of type II. Variety A: 1.2. baths 1 and 3 at Staryi Orkhei; variety B: 3. baths 3 at Bolgar, 4. the baths at the Vodianskoe site.

Fig. 4 (right): Building of type III: 1-3. baths 2 of the Krasnaia Palata and Belaia Palata at Bolgar, 4. public baths at Sarai (Selitrennoe), 5. the baths at Mokhsha. Buildings of type IV: 7. baths 2 at Staryi Orkhei.

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