

Archaeological and Monumental Sites of Andalusia



↑ Warm room (*al-bayt al-wastani*) of the Baza Arab Baths.

HISTORY

The Baza or Marzuela Arab Baths date from the 13th century (Almohad period). At the end of the 19th century they were discovered by the historian Manuel Gómez Moreno.

They consist of three main rooms and are a fine example of urban baths associated with the former mosque, now the Church of Santiago. They were located in the former suburb of Marzuela, today the Santiago district.

In their restoration process carried out by the Junta de Andalucía in 2008, the *barid* (cold room), the *wastani* (warm room) and the *sajun* (hot room) were recovered, as well as other areas of the baths such as the *maslaj* (vestibule), the *furnak* (oven and boiler), the *woodshed*, the main entrance door, and even the water catchment and drainage system, making them one of the most intact examples of *hammam* or Arab baths in Spain. This project was awarded the Prize for Work on Spanish Architectural Heritage in 2009.



Agencia Andaluza de Instituciones Culturales
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← Details of the skylights. ↓ Warm room. ↓ Detail of the vaulted ceiling of the baths' warm room.



THE HAMMAN CULTURE

In Arab culture, water is a fundamental element, the beginning of the universe. Indeed, according to the Koran, God reigns from the water "He created the heavens and the earth in six days, and his throne is in the water" [Koran, XI, 7]. Water cleanses and purifies not only the body, but above all the spirit.

The Arabs did not invent the idea of public baths, which comes from the Roman baths. They standardised their floor plan and reduced the dimensions of these complexes in a model that replicates the structure of the three water rooms of the Roman baths (*caldarium*, *tepidarium* and *frigidarium*) and other architectural elements such as the vaulted ceilings.

Although private baths existed, the *hammam* (baths) were mostly public buildings owned by the mosques, through which funding was obtained for the upkeep of the religious community. They were used not only for bathing, but also for hair-cutting, hair removal, massages, etc.; but they were above all places for meeting and social interaction. Their construction and use spread throughout Al-Andalus reaching even the smallest towns.

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FREE ADMISSION

SEE AND UNDERSTAND THE BAZA ARAB BATHS

1 Ceilings

The ceilings of Arab baths consisted of barrel or semicircular vaults, although there were also ribbed or hemispherical vaults, built with a double brick course. They had this form to prevent the water vapour condensing on the ceiling and dripping down the walls. They were plastered with lime mortar, both inside and out, and in this case also painted, usually in reddish tones. They had a number of glass skylights (*madawi*) to let in the daylight while acting as regulators of temperature and steam accumulation by means of a mobile opening system. This skylights generally had the shape of six or eight pointed stars, or octagons.

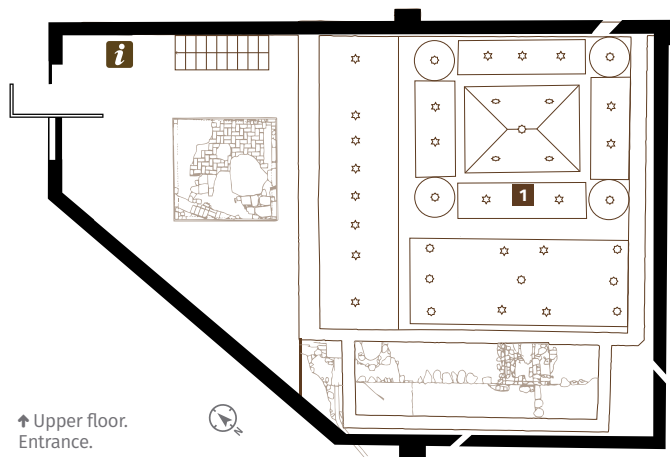
2 Vestibule (*al-bayt al-maslaj*)

The entrance to the baths was through this antechamber, which gave onto the street. This was a semi-covered space that housed other rooms such as the wardrobe, the latrines and the watchman's room. In the case of Baza, the vestibule consists of an open courtyard with covered spaces on its four sides in the manner of galleries with inward-sloping roofs.

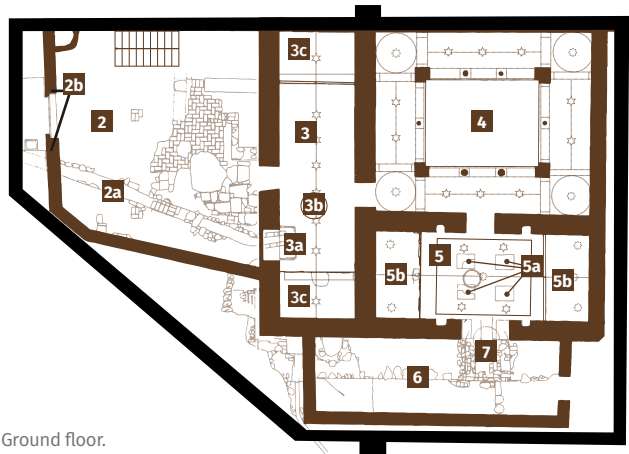
Here bathers undressed and were given towels, soap, sponge, wooden stilts so as not to burn their feet and a couple of wooden buckets. On the current floor you can see remains of the original brick and stone flooring (*jabaluna*), as well as of the *darro* **2a** or *atarjea* that drained the dirty water from the inside of the baths to the gully that ran alongside the building (now Calle del Agua). Also preserved are the brick jambs **2b** of the original door that gave onto the street, from the time the baths were in use, between the 13th and 16th centuries.



↑ Entrance hall (vestibule) to the Baths.



↑ Upper floor. Entrance.



↑ Ground floor.



↑ Cold room.

3 Cold room (*al-bayt al-barid*)

This was equivalent to the Roman baths' *frigidarium*, a model that was later followed by the Arab baths or *hammam*. This room was used to re-acclimatise bathers before leaving the building, and also, in some cases, for them to douse themselves with cold water, which they scooped from the basin that can be seen to the right of the entrance **3a**. Opposite the door you can see a large jar of wine **3b**, embedded in the floor, the remains of what was a wine cellar once the baths were closed for their original use. There were two small spaces at each end of the room which were used as

small alcoves or private areas, separated from the room by a twin arch supported by a central marble column and with brick pilasters on the sides.

4 Warm room (*al-bayt al-wastani*)

This was equivalent to the Roman baths' *tepidarium* or warm room. It was the main room of the baths, a meeting place, and it was here where bathers spent most of their time. It was the steam room, where massages were given, ointments and perfumes applied, or where women received beauty treatments. People even ate here or smoked hookahs. Architecturally it is the most complex room. The central space, surrounded by columns of different forms and materials, is crowned by a ribbed vault (like an upside-down boat). This central area is surrounded by four small areas covered by barrel vaults, while its corners are rounded off by small semicircular vaults.

5 Hot room (*al-bayt al-sajun*)

As in the Roman *caldarium*, this room served as a hot bath or sauna. The heat was obtained through a radiant floor — today replaced by glass — under which there is a combustion chamber where four brick pillars that supported the floor can be seen. This combustion chamber was reached by the flames

of the fire from the adjoining furnace, the smoke produced by the burning of fuel being evacuated by means of four chimneys **5a** whose openings were in the corners under the floor. The room had two alcoves at the ends **5b** similar to the ones in the cold room. The bathers scooped up the almost boiling water from the boiler and poured it over their body, producing large amounts of steam. They then splashed themselves with cold water on an alternating basis, which was the whole point of the bath. They would be assisted by a servant or bathsmen (*kiyassa* for men and *tayabaste* for women) who would lather and scrub them vigorously.



↑ Hot room.

6 Furnace and boiler

To the left, through the glass, you can see the brick structure of the furnace with its opening at the bottom, as well as the *prae-furnium* or small corridor that communicated with the combustion chamber or hypocaust. Above this brick structure would be found the copper boiler for heating the bathers' water, which was channelled to the interior of the room through a pipe and tap that have now disappeared.

7 Woodshed

The furnace (*al-furn*) and the copper boiler (*al-burma*) where the water was heated were in this room at a lower level. This space was an auxiliary area closed to bathers. It also served as a woodshed. On the right you can see a small corridor that provided access to the opening of the furnace for stoking purposes. It was covered by a mono-pitched roof. You can still see the remains of the putlog holes in the wall for supporting the roof beams. Under your feet you can see the small brickwork conduit that channelled the water to the interior of the baths from the ditch that runs along the current Calle Acequita street.