

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Baths: Cicero's Use of the Senian Baths
in the *Pro Caelio*

In the *Pro Caelio*, the scene at the Senian Baths takes is the pivotal moment in the case. Many scholars have looked at the aspects of comedy that Cicero uses in the speech to discredit the testimony of Clodia (Geffcken 1973; Leigh 2004). Yet these studies focus on the comedic roles the characters in the speech and give little discussion to the Senian Baths. I propose these baths factor into Cicero's defense of Caelius in the way Cicero set the scene. I argue that Cicero uses the setting of the Senian Baths, populating it with characters that are acting in ways that do not belong there, in an attempt to convince the jury that the entire story is ridiculous.

Cicero's audience must have had a working knowledge of the baths, both how they look and how they function, in order for his description to transport them to the scene. Vasaly (1993) argues that Cicero often uses vivid description of scenes in his speeches to persuasive effect, so, in order for understand how Cicero is using this technique in this setting, I will describe what the Senian Baths may have looked like. Although they no longer exist, it is possible to use other Republican era baths, like the Stabian Baths from Pompeii (Kolosji-Ostrow 2007), to figure out contemporary trends in bath design in order to get a clearer picture of Cicero's scene. Because he does not say much about the design, it is safe to assume the jury would have had some knowledge of bath design and social customs, setting the stage for the farce Cicero is about to present.

Cicero populates the baths with characters that turns this mundane public space into a comedic setting. He describes Clodia's band of young men waiting in ambush and focuses on the fact they would have been out of place in the baths. Even if they found a

space to hide inside the baths proper, it is clear that toga clad men would have not belonged in that setting (Yegül 2010; sec. 62). Regular bathing customs of would have been familiar to the jury, and Cicero by inserting the absurd into the scene he has set, Cicero detracts from the prosecution's case.

The allusions to the dramatic and epic are many, from equating Clodia to Clytemnestra to comparing the ambush as a Trojan horse scenario (sec 67). I argue that Cicero capitalizes on the scenery of the baths in a similar way he uses Clodia's *domus* to deflate the prosecution's case (Leen 2001). He paints Clodia as a playwright who is attempting to bring her private drama into the public space of the baths. The build up of dramatic tension throughout the speech peaks as Cicero hits the climax of the baths scene. He takes on the role of playwright himself and presents the failure of Clodia's drama to reach the conclusion she would have wanted. He focuses on what is out of place and uses the scenery of the baths to make the entire story, and Clodia's testimony, seem silly.

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