

Balneology: A Concept of Public Health-Bath Houses in Arabian Life

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Summary

Although Hippocrates was famous for corpus, Aphorismi, de aere, aquis including balneology and Romans were practicing public health with the development of baths. Arabs have been given credit for the implementation of preventotherapeutic application of public bath houses in their life. This paper will put stress on preventive and therapeutic value of balneology, model of public health-bath houses in Arabs and role of bather and bathmen in regimential therapy and recommended advises related to bath.

Key words: Public Health, Bath house, Bathman, Hammam, Hararah, Hammam-hammat and mineral bath.

The Prevento-Therapeutic Value of the Hammam

Hammams were the public-health bath houses, commonly practiced for provision of several preventive and therapeutic values in different spectrum of health and diseases. Arabic medicine agree with the Greeks and Romans in the same manner that the deviation of the health spectrum from positive health to diseased condition and death largely depends on the equilibrium and ratio of four humours viz, phlegm, sanguine and melencholic humours, disturbance in original (genetic or congenital) temperament, change in bodily composition, size and putrifaction (taaffun) and the medicine is divided into its two branches viz: curative medicine and public health which includes correction in asbab-e-sitlah zarooriyah (six essential of life viz. air, water, food, rest and improvements of body, soul and mind, sleeping and awakening, retention and discharge of fluids, solids, gases and energy from the body) and implementation of asbab-e-ghair zarooriya (adoption of all healthy behaviors and life style including riyazat (special exercises), hammam (bath house), taleeq (leeching), venesection (phlebotomy), Mahajim, and so, on (1-5).

Bathmen: Bathmen were usually the doctors or skillfull health personnels who had been trained for the arrangement of the degree of heat required to suit the temperament or alter the deviated temperament.

Bather: Bathers might have been drawn as healthy cases for the preservation of different spectrum of health or the patient in whom the temperamental and homeostatic mechanism has to be changed.

The bather were allowed to enter into the hararah (central appartment of the principal bath house) wearing wooden shoes with thick wooden soles, a large napkin round the loins, a second turbun like napkin over the head, and the third napkin over the chest, and a fourth covering the back.

Attendent who accompanied the bather inside the hammam used to remove all towels of bather except the first (covering loin). He must had to start massage (Dalak e istedad-massage before exercise or bath), sometimes with the oils (Dalak e layyun-oil and herbal massage) and some times dalak ekhashin (sole of feet with a coarse earthen rasp and body with the woolen bag) as per requirement Bather then was used to be plunged himself into the water tank. He has thoroughly washed with soap and water, and fibers of

the palm tree, and shaved if wished it, in the fourth chamber. Then he used to be returned back to the antechamber (1-3).

Types of bath:

1. Cold water bath
2. Very hot water bath
3. Subtepid bath
4. Mineral bath and/or hammam hammat (spring bath) (3, 4, 6)

Infrastructure Components of Public Health Bath House

1. First apartment (disrobing room, maslakh or stripping-place; Burton): this apartment is consisting of fountain of cold water at the centre. Next to the walls were wide benches or platform encased with marbles and furnished with mattresses and cushions.

2. Principal bath house or inner division of the building. It was comprising of 5 chambers and occupied nearly a shape of square. Anti-chamber: first chamber of the bath house was occupied as a antechamber of hararah where the bather entered and generally returned back to reclined upon mattress, used to take massage (Dalak-e-istardad with oils) and also some light refreshment before resuming dress.

3. Chamber of the fire and boiler house-this chamber was consisting of fire and boiler or some times furnace with the regular supply of water. This chamber was the prime source of hot water and heat supply to whole apartments of hararah eg.hot water fountain, and taps etc.

4. Third chamber: It was containing of a warm water tank fed by a spout in to dome (calidarium).

5. Fourth chamber: It was having two taps side by side, one hot, one cold and seats before the taps (frigidarium)

6. Hararah or chief portion or central part of principal bath house: It was holding the shape of a cross containing all above described chambers on its respective four angles. Central part of hararah was comprising of hot water fountain, risen from the base, encased with the marble, which was serving as a seat.

Avicenna wrote that the four apartment of hammam represents four seasons –autumn, and summer, and winter and spring.

Recommended Model for Construction of Public Health Bath House for These Days

1. Rest rooms for men and women should be made separate with in the both side of the disrobing room.

2. Insulated chambers and balanced ventilation must be provided in bath houses and corrected effective temperature must not be extended beyond the comfortable zone of the country.

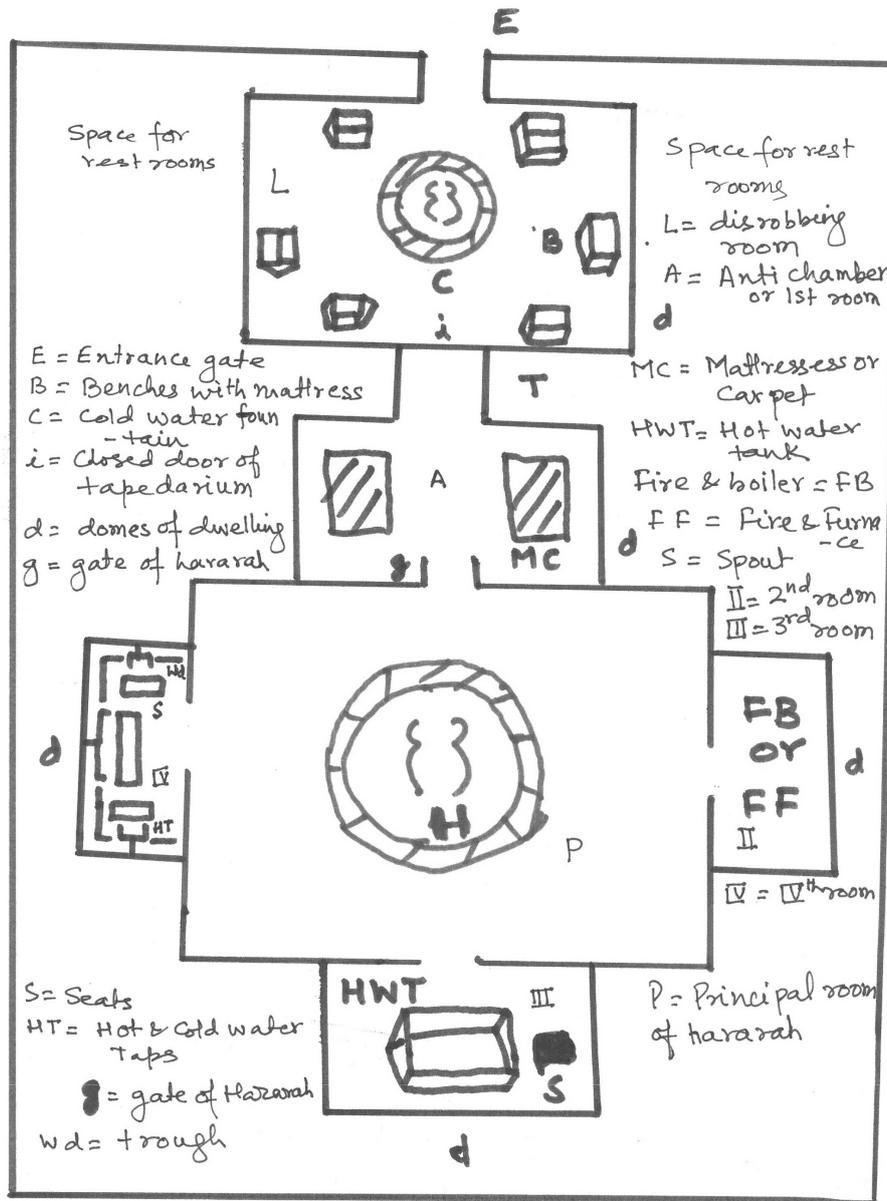
3. Electricity and lighting must be provided to public health bath houses.

Ideal bath houses-public bath houses must comprise of tessellated pavements, composed of white and black marble pieces of finered tiles. The inner compartment must be covered with domes, having a number of small, rounds, glazed aperture for the proper provision of light. Sir Thomas Arnold, in his published work, painting in Islam quotes that pictures showing great strength must be decorated for treating feebles and weak. Beautiful, bright and colourful scenarios refreshes the soul and dives away melancholic thoughts (6).

Necessary Advises for the Bather

Bather should enter each room gradually and not directly. As the disrobing room antechamber serves as transition room of modern days highly equipped dwellings which helps the person in getting acclimated by stages, to high, or low temperature and not exposed their suddenly to temperature variation, bather should stay in these rooms for the acclimatization of homeostatic changes produced in each chambers of hammam. As Avicenna stated that each chamber represents one season and bather has to pass each chamber within a limited duration of time. So, he is amenable to adopt the changes of every season.

Bather should not stay in each room for longer duration as it may cause excessive water and mineral loss from the body and may suffer vomiting nausea and giddiness, sexual weakness, a risk of syncope.



SKETCH DIAGRAM SHOWING ANCIENT HAMMAM (PUBLIC HEALTH BATH HOUSE OF ARABS)

Dry temperament bather must stay in take and use lot of water for longer duration. This may provide symptomatic relief in chronic bronchitis, emphysema, T.B. and other disease of lungs.

Bather of hectic fever should use more moist air of hammam and must use less water. Wet temperament bather must stay in tank and use less water for shorter duration and should sit over the marble seat of the

hot water fountain for longer period. This may be helpful in ascitis and dropsy.

Bather suffering from inflammatory condition, non healing ulcers and fever of putrefaction must not go for hammam. Lean, thin, feeble, and weak bather must go after the first digestion has ended (3-4 hrs after meal). This will increase strength and power in them. Obese bather must take bath with empty stomach.

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Duration of stay in the bath: One can stay into the bath house up to the moisturizing effect and should come out in antechamber for restoration of homeostatic balance in case of excessive fatigue and swelling.

For producing therapeutic effect of greekoarabic drug during bath, required drugs may be dissolved in fountain, taps and hot water tank (1-5).

Conclusion

Hamмам may provide the promised cure to countless diseases especially of chronic origin like hypertension, obesity etc. Paralysis may be cured if such type of bath are practiced with different oil mas-

sages, and cupping as stated by different Unani physicians. This increases the research need of interventional regime trials.

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