



Archaeologists in Rome on the ruins of a recently discovered 2nd-century bath complex. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

## Archaeologists dig up 2nd-century bath complex in Rome

By **Marta Falconi** The Associated Press

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**ROME:** Archaeologists said Thursday they have partially dug up a 2nd-century bath complex believed to be part of the vast, luxurious residence of a wealthy Roman.

The two-story complex, which extends for at least 5 acres (2 hectares), includes exceptionally well-preserved decorated hot rooms, vaults, changing rooms, marble latrines and an underground room where slaves lit the fire to warm the baths.

Statues and water cascades decorated the interiors, American archaeologist Darius A. Arya, the head of the excavation, said during a tour of the digs offered to The Associated Press on Thursday. Only pedestals and fragments have been recovered.

Arya spoke as students and experts were brushing off earth and dust from ancient marbles, mosaic floors and a rudimentary heating system, made of pipes that channeled hot air throughout the complex.

"The Romans had more leisure time than other people, and it's here in the baths that they typically spent their time," Arya said. "Because you could eat well, you could get a massage, you could have sex, you could gossip, you could play your games, you could talk about politics - you could spend the whole day here."

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However, he added, "to have a bath complex of this size,

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this scale, it's very unusual."

The complex is believed to be part of a multiple-story villa that belonged to the Roman equivalent of a billionaire of today, a man called Quintus Servilius Pudens who was friends with Emperor Hadrian, Arya said. It is not clear if the baths were open to the public or reserved to distinguished guests of the owner.

"These people lived a magnificent existence and were able to provide entertainment," to others, said Arya, who is also a professor at the American Institute for Roman Culture.

Excavations at the Villa delle Vignacce park lasted a total of 10 weeks, and it is planned to continue, he said. Future decisions, including whether the site will be opened to the public, are still to be made.

Ancient Romans put a great deal of emphasis on bathing, turning the art of the soak into a ritual.

Meeting at communal bath houses, they would go through a series of rooms of alternating temperatures at a leisurely pace, dipping themselves in hot and cold baths. It was a social event, but also a way to purify their bodies of toxins and a form of relaxation.