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Health, Bathing, and Site-specificity in the Illuminated De balneis Puteolanis

This project focuses on the use of therapeutic bathing on the Italian peninsula to explore the relationship between art and early Renaissance experience of the body between health and disease. Therapeutic natural springs were intersectional sites of healing embedded in the landscape, and catered to a host of people from diverse social spheres throughout the medieval and Renaissance periods. The volcanic baths at Pozzuoli, near Naples, were the best known on the peninsula, in large part due to the early thirteenth-century poem *De balneis Puteolanis*. Likely written by Peter of Eboli for the imperial court, the text survives in several illuminated manuscripts. The images show therapeutic bathing practices described in later texts and are remarkable for their clarity of composition, bold coloring, and depiction of nudity in a secular context.

This study will consider these illuminations from an art historical perspective informed by the history of medicine, paying special attention to the significance of site, or place, for bathing's perceived therapeutic efficacy. Like human bodies, springs could be understood in relation to the mineral composition and astrological properties associated with their location, and, like people, they were understood as having individual profiles. Several depictions of baths in *De balneis* manuscripts emphasize bathers' physical encounters with the landscape and architectural ruins and orient us toward social and experiential information about bathing. The emphasis on place in the images as well as in the poem foreshadows what would become a hot debate during the Renaissance: did spring water retain its healing properties when taken from the source? Could it be bottled, transported, and sold? Or was there something about the water's purported power that was intimately tied to its unique physical source?

From antiquity through the Renaissance, bathing brought people into intimate contact with the landscape. A deeper understanding of these relationships between people, place and the body achieved through study of paintings as well as archival materials has implications for how we view medieval and Renaissance images of the human body and depictions of miraculous healing.