

Xylospongium

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **xylospongium**, also known as *sponge on a stick*, is the ancient precursor of the modern toilet brush. It consists of a wooden stick (Greek: ξύλον, *Xylon*) with a sponge (Greek: Σπόγγος, *Spongos*) fixed at one end.

In the classical antiquity a *xylospongium* might be used in the same way as we use a toilet brush.^[1] All primary sources implicate the use of a *xylospongium* in the context of ancient latrines, but none clarifies the handling exactly.

In the *baths of the seven sages* in Ostia, a fresco from the 2nd century contains the Inscription *(u)taris xylosphongio*^[2] which is the first known mention of the term. Also in the early second century a papyrus letter of Claudius Terentianus to his father Claudius Tiberianus uses the term *xylospongium* in a phrase.^[3]

In the middle of the first century Seneca reported that a Germanic gladiator had committed suicide with a sponge on a stick. The German hid himself in the latrine of an amphitheater and pushed the wooden stick into his gullet and choked to death.^[4]

References

- Wiplinger 2012, S. 300-301.
- L'Année épigraphique* 1941, 5.
- (29)...*Non magis curavit me pro xylosphongium meo. Non magis curavit me quam xylosphongium (30) sed siam negotium et circa res suas.* – Translation: (29)...He did not care for me more than for a xylospongium, (30) even for his own things. (Michigan Papyri VIII, 29-30)
- Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 8, 70, 20. ...*lignum id, quod ad emundanda obscena adhaerente spongia positum est...*

Primary sources

- Claudius Terentianus, Michigan Papyri VIII, 29-30.
- Seneca, *Epistulae morales* Liber 8, 70, 20.
- Martial, *Epigrammata*, Liber 12,48,7.

Bibliography

- Richard Neudecker: *Die Pracht der Latrine. Zum Wandel öffentlicher Bedürfnisanstalten in der kaiserzeitlichen Stadt.* Pfeil-Verlag, München 1994 (Studien zur antiken Stadt, Bd. 1) ISBN 3-923871-86-4, pp. 36f.
- Gilbert Wiplinger: *Der Gebrauch des Xylospongiums – eine neue Theorie zu den hygienischen Verhältnissen in römischen Latrinen.* In: *SPA . SANITAS PER AQUAM.* Tagungsband des Internationalen Frontinus-Symposiums zur Technik – und Kulturgeschichte der antiken Thermen Aachen, 18. – 22. März



A replica xylospongium (sponge on a stick)



Ancient Roman latrines in Ostia Antica

2009. Frontinus-Gesellschaft e.V. & Peeters, Leiden 2012. ISBN 978-90-429-2661-5. pp. 295–304.

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Xylopongium&oldid=744840784>"

Categories: [Sanitation](#) | [Ancient Greek culture](#) | [Ancient Roman culture](#)

- This page was last modified on 17 October 2016, at 19:27.
- Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). **Wikipedia®** is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.