Since antiquity people have felt the beneficial and soothing effect on their pains and diseases of bathing in medicinal hot springs. From sources dating to the Second Temple period it emerges that the ancients knew the healing properties of these waters. The book of Enoch I (67, 8), which hints at the source of the thermal springs—‘they give off a smell of Sulphur from the hell-fire’, mentions who used them and for what purposes:

For the kings and the mighty and the exalted and those who dwell on the earth for the healing on the flesh and the spirit.

Public baths generally and medicinal baths in particular were considered by the Romans as centres of culture, education, sport and therapy. In Roman times sizable military resources were diverted to building facilities at the thermae, not out of concern for others but to promote their own interests. Among others, sick and wounded soldiers were sent to these places, which served as rest and recreation centres for healthy soldiers too. Most of the Sages approved of the Romans’ enterprise in introducing the baths into Palestine, because cleanliness and care of the body were greatly valued in their eyes. Many of the Sages used the baths, and Hillel the Elder was reported to have had a ready answer to the question, ‘Where are you going?’—‘To perform a religious duty, to fulfill the commandment of washing in the bathhouse’ (Leviticus Rabbah 34, 3). Despite the usual attitude that ‘the pleasure of human beings are pool and bathhouses’ (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 2, 8), rules for bathing were established. For example, when engaged in it one should not reflect on words of Torah (Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 24b);

---

1 See, for instance, Jackson (1990a); idem, (1999); This overview is based on Dvorjetski (1992a); idem, (1992b); idem, (1993a); idem, (1994a); idem, (1994b); idem, (1994c); idem, (1997a); idem, (1999a); idem, (2001–2002); idem, (2003); idem, (2004); idem, (2006–2007); idem, forthcoming [a].

2 Enoch, I, 67, 8.
one should not pray when at the baths, nor even ask after a person’s health (ibid., Shabbat 10b); if one’s father was old or ailing one entered and bathed him as this concerned his dignity (ibid., Pesahim 44b); a special prayer was composed for recital before going into the baths and a prayer of thanksgiving was offered after leaving (Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 9, 4 [14b]). In the world of the Sages hygiene was a matter of principle and of such importance that it was made a rule that a Torah scholars may not live in a city without a bathhouse (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 17b).

5.1 The Nature of Therapeutic Baths in Light of the Classical Literature

Classical writers too were acquainted with the healing baths of the Levant. Pliny the Elder in the first century CE writes in his masterpiece Historia Naturalis of Tiberias and the town’s unique feature:

ab occidente Tiberiade, aquis calidis salubri [= and Tiberias with its salubrious hot springs on the west].

The thermal springs of Hammat-Pella in Trans-Jordan—he calls:

Pellam aquis divitem [= Pella rich with its waters].

Pliny also mentions the remedial value of the Kallirrhoe thermal springs also in Trans-Jordan, and notes that,

prospicit cum ab oriente Arabia Nomadum, a meridic Machaerus, secunda quondam arx Iudaeae ab Hierosolymis. eodem latere est calidus fons medicae salubritatis Callirrhoe aquarum gloriam ipso nomine praeferebatur [= On the east it is faced by Arabia of the Nomands, and on the south by Machaerus, at one time next to Jerusalem the most important fortress in Judaea. On the same side there is a hot spring possessing medicinal value, the name of which Callirrhoe, itself proclaims the celebrity of its waters].

3 See especially the discussions in chapter 3 on The Healing Qualities and Spa Therapy and in chapter 6 on Daily Life at the Thermo-Mineral Baths according to Rabbinic Literature.

4 Pliny, Historia Naturalis 5.71; See also Smith (1922): 482; Stern (1974): 1: 469.

5 Pliny, Historia Naturalis 5.74.

6 Idem, ibid., 5.74; Dvorjetski (1992a): 73; Weber (1997): 333; Dvorjetski (2001–2002): 491; It seems that the name Kallirrhoe spelt with K instead of C, is more accurate; On this particular thing, see the explanation and the significance of the name in chapter 4.4 on The Historical-Archaeological Analysis and Healing Cults of the Therapeutic Site of Kallirrhoe.