From House Church to Tenement Church:
Domestic Space and the Development of Early Urban Christianity.

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Abstract

The thesis attempts to posit a solution to the widely attested gap in our current knowledge regarding the physical circumstances in which the first urban Christians met and established a tangible presence in their social world. Whilst the literary record points to the phenomena of the ‘house church’ in multiple localities across the Roman world, there is a paucity of archaeological evidence for houses large enough to accommodate the numbers involved, and no attested record of purpose-renovated or purpose-built meeting places until well into the third century. The application of a relatively new approach in the sociological investigation of ancient communities, known as social networking theory, is applied to understand the social circumstances under which communities were formed and cohered around a common cultic practice or figure in the ancient world. This sheds light on the manner in which such groups formed and adds to our knowledge of both the social and physical circumstances experienced by the first generations of Christians in the urban environments of the Graeco-Roman city during the critical stage of the development of the group’s architecture, occupying the period c. 50 -150 CE. The possibility that the *insula* or apartment block may provide a suitable locale on both physical and social grounds, is then discussed appealing to both literary and archaeological evidence.
Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters except where indicated
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used
(iii) the thesis is 32,000 words in length, inclusive of footnotes, but exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies, and appendices as approved by the Graduate School
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Introduction

Archaeology frequently relies on reconstruction, imagination, and hypothesis, albeit usually conducted scientifically and grounded in reliable methodology. Leaving aside the exceptional finds such as Pompeii, Herculaneum and Ostia, rarely can entire buildings, let alone whole cities, be excavated to reveal how they actually were in ancient times. For the most part, archaeological enquiry is assisted by informed reconstruction. The Temple of Artemis at Ephesus provides a ready example. We know, for instance, as the discoverer and first excavator John Turtle Wood knew, that the Temple existed because it is mentioned so frequently in our texts.1 Although, as visitors to the site will know, only a single broken column standing somewhat precariously in a marshy swamp exists today, the structure can be reliably reconstructed by the remains of the foundations, giving a floor plan and indication of the number of columns. Furthermore, the description of the number of columns and their height in sources such as Pliny, together with the ancient writers who marvel at the Temple's magnificently aesthetic façade, enable a reasonable reconstruction of what it must have been like in ancient times. As reliable as these might

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be, and we will never really know to what extent they are or are not, such reconstructions remain to some extent imaginary and visionary. Archaeology enables this imagining and envisaging to occur, but the fact remains it is at least a partly imaginary and visionary discipline, because the buildings, the streets, the taverns etc., of the ancient city so imagined, no longer exist as they were and are no longer, of course, populated by their ancient inhabitants. In the same way as we know the Artemision once stood near the ancient city of Ephesus, we know also that the urban poor existed in large numbers in the cities of the Graeco-Roman world. However their existence is largely invisible to us. We know they probably lived in large, multi-storey buildings (insula) such as those partially extant today in Italy (especially in Ostia Antica), and which also existed at one time across the Empire including Asia (according to textual evidence). However the buildings there no longer exist and cannot, then, be excavated. To understand how groups of peoples established a presence, and maintained it, in the urban environment of cities such as Rome, Ostia and Ephesus, we will need to reconstruct, using the available data, the landscape of those cities. The process by which groups of people, especially those making up the vast echelons of the lower socio-economic demographic, established and maintained a tangible presence in the urban environment of the Graeco-Roman city may then be illuminated by not only reconstruction of the probable physical conditions but also by application of sociological tools such as social network theory. In this respect, the early Christian community provide a suitable point of reference on a number of levels. During the first and second centuries CE they were a new social and cultic group, seeking to establish themselves in both the physical and social landscape of the urban area. They met in homes and continued to meet primarily in domestic space until at least such time
as the first buildings dedicated to Christian use begin to appear in the archaeological record during the course of the third century CE. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, their literature, principally the New Testament but also the vast corpus of apostolic and patristic writings, is substantially extant and was largely produced to and for adherents from across the social spectrum, making it arguably the best primary source for non-elite populations that has survived antiquity.

1. The Domestic Circumstances of Early Christianity

The importance of domestic space to the early Christian communities and of the role of the patron-householder in the Pauline mission is well attested and has acquired a voluminous literature. According to the biblical account of the community’s origins, the Acts of the Apostles, during the earliest stages of its development the first Christians met in each other’s homes, utilising domestic space owned by community members (Acts 1.3, 15-16; 2.46; 5.42; 12.12). Similarly, the practice during the Pauline mission was for the community to become established in a private home, usually that of a wealthy or influential convert (Acts 16.14-15, 17.1-9, 18.1-3; 1 Cor 1.11, 1.14-16, 16.15-18, 16.19; Rom 16.3-5, 23; Phil 4.22; Phlm 1, 22). Among those who acted as hosts and patrons to the Pauline communities were Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth (Acts 18.1-3), Ephesus (Acts 18.18; 1 Cor 16.19), and Rome (Acts 18.1-2; Rom 16.3-5); Lydia in Thyatira (Acts 16.14-15); Jason in Thessalonica (Acts 17.7); Gaius, and possibly Chloe, in Corinth (1 Cor 1.11; Rom 16.23). This period represents the ‘first stage’ in the development of Christian architecture and archaeology, the Oikos ecclesiae, indicating the initial means
by which Christianity not only established, but sustained, a physical presence in the urban
inge of the Graeco-Roman city.² We, furthermore, know through the aegis of
archaeological evidence, that as Christianity established itself and began to grow and
flourish, a transition was gradually made from meetings held in private domestic space to
meetings being held in a renovated or purpose built space (i.e. a church building).³ The
private residence uncovered at the Syrian garrison town of Dura-Europos, which was
converted for Christian usage c. 240 CE, represents the earliest archaeological evidence
for this second stage in the development of Christian architecture, the Domus ecclesiae,
whereby, having originally met in the private homes of its wealthier members (the ‘house
church’), the Christian community was now in a position to acquire and modify property

² See Robert Banks, Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting
(Sydney: Lancer, 1979); Bradley B. Blue, ‘Acts and the House Church’, in The Book of Acts in its Graeco-
Branick, The House Church in the Writings of Paul (Wilmington, DE: M. Glazier, 1989); Hans-Josef
Klauck, Hausgemeinde und Hauskirche im frühen Christentum (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1981);

³ A cross shaped mark found on the wall in an upper room of the ‘Bicentennial House’ in Herculaneum may
provide some archaeological evidence for the well established Christian practice of meeting in such rooms.
A piece of wooden furniture found beneath the cross mark may have served as an altar. Jack Finegan, The
Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church (Princeton:
in its own right and for its own purposes. To this end, three stages in the development of Christian archaeology and architecture are usually identified. Whilst in some ways too neat a distinction in that it is not capable of being applied uncritically from one city and region to the next, the ‘three stage theory’ has come to represent something approaching a ‘scholarly consensus’ on the subject.

(i) First stage (*Oikos ecclesiae*), c. 50-150 CE. Christian community meeting in private homes of members and benefactors.

(ii) Second stage (*Domus ecclesiae*), c. 150-250 CE. Private homes renovated for dedicated Christian usage.

(iii) Third stage (*Aula ecclesiae*), c. 250-313 CE. Larger buildings, both private homes and public halls etc. renovated for Christian usage.

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4 That the practice of renovating existing houses existed among the Christians of second and third century Rome was posited by J. Kirsch in 1918, in *Die römischen Titelkirchen in Altertum* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Scöningh, 1918).


6 Whilst not seeking to argue against the premise that second and third century Christians did modify extant houses for cultic purposes, in a recent essay Kristina Sessa demonstrates that the use and application of the term *domus ecclesiae* to describe such evidence is anachronistic. ‘*Domus Ecclesiae*: Rethinking a Category of Ante-Pacem Christian Space’, *JTS* 60 (2009), pp. 90-108.
The city of Ephesus, the self proclaimed 'first and greatest metropolis of Asia', provides a ready example of this process, whilst at the same time frustrating the neat distinctions inherent within it. According to the New Testament, Paul first established a physical presence in Ephesus through the agency of the loyal Priscilla and Aquila, who had taken up residence there in advance of his own arrival (Acts 18:18-19). Their home was used as a meeting place and this private domestic space almost certainly functioned as the physical base for Paul’s Ephesian mission during its early years (1 Cor 16:19). From the Acts of the Apostles we learn that, during the course of his approximately three year sojourn in Ephesus (Acts 20:31), Paul preached and argued first in the synagogue, as was his usual modus operandi, and then transferred his activities to the enigmatic ‘lecture

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7 This third stage and its attribution as Aula ecclesiae has come largely through the agency of L. Michael White.

8 What follows is largely indebted to Paul Trebilco, The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius (WUNT 166; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), pp. 95-99.

9 Of course, Christians were by no means the only group to perform their rituals in private homes. Synagogues were known to have been hosted in private homes. L. Michael White, The Social Origins of Christian Architecture, Vol. 1, p. 44. Some cults or groups might have originally commenced in domestic space, whilst in a great number of homes, of all size, the ancestral or patron gods of the householder were usually venerated. There is some, albeit unsatisfactory, evidence that Artemis may have been regarded and worshipped in a private and domestic manner in Ephesus, along the lines of the Roman lares. Principally Pausanias, Descr. 4.31.8 and Plautus, Mil. glor. 411-14, where an incense offering is made to Artemis in a private home.

hall of Tyrannus’ for a period of about two years (Acts 19:8-10). In his farewell address to the Ephesian elders at Miletus whilst en route to Jerusalem, Paul speaks of ‘proclaiming the message’ publicly (presumably in the ‘School of Tyrannus’) and from ‘house to house’ (Acts 20:20). In his Corinthian correspondence Paul refers in the plural to ‘the churches of Asia’ (1 Cor 16.19) indicating that several house churches had been established in the region of which Ephesus was the largest and most important city. The

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11 It is usually assumed that ἐν τῇ σχολῇ Τυραννοῦ means that Paul either rented or was provided with a lecture hall owned by a certain Tyrannus over a period of two years during his Ephesian ministry (Acts 19.10). However, as G. H. R. Horsley has argued (in NewDocs 1.129-130), the lexical grounds for assuming that σχολή must refer to a room or hall are not as compelling as they might first appear, neither does the preposition ἐν require that a physical place is intended. If not a physical place, the ‘School of Tyrannus’ might well have been a group or association gathered around the figure of Tyrannus, who was perhaps a philosopher, rhetor, or teacher of some description. Most such orators found an audience for their activities in public spaces, such as the gymnasia and baths etc. This situation would be roughly analogous to that at Athens with perhaps Tyrannus issuing an invitation comparable to the Athenian ‘we will hear you again about this’ and subsequently providing the place and opportunity (Acts 17.16-34). On the possibility suggested by E. A. Judge, Hans Conzelmann, and others, that Paul and his followers resembled a ‘philosophical school’ see Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 81-84.


13 For the possibility that Romans 16 is a cover letter for an epistle (possible Romans itself) sent by Paul to Ephesus after his departure see Helmut Koester, ‘Ephesos in Early Christian Literature,’ in Ephesos Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture (ed. Helmut Koester; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 122-124. This would mean that the list of
plurality of ‘house churches’ and the frequently occurring references to domestic space, fall neatly within the ‘first stage’ (house church) parameters. However this is frustrated to some extent by the ‘lecture hall of Tyrannus’ which seems to have been the physical locus of Paul’s preaching activity in Ephesus, whilst the community continued to meet in domestic space. We know also that Ephesus was an important centre of Christianity throughout late antiquity and into the Byzantine period, as evidenced archaeologically by the nearby ruins of the basilica of St. John in present day Selçuk. What we do not know is how the early Christian communities sustained a physical presence in the city, from the time of the Pauline mission and up until the appearance of the first buildings that can be identified as permanent places of worship, which in the case of Ephesus are not until the fourth century and represent a gap of over two centuries. Or, to put the question another way, what came between the house churches described in the New Testament, that we know existed in cities such as Ephesus, and the first purpose built church buildings, such as the basilica of St. John, the ruins of which exist today?

The tendency in most research on the matter has been to assume that in each city in which Christianity was established there existed a network of small gatherings held in private homes (the 'house church') supplemented by occasional larger gatherings of the entire co-workers present, together with the abundant onomatic and prosopographical data compiled from it, relate to the early Christian community in Ephesus.

14 A church was built on the supposed site of the Apostle John's grave in the fourth century and the impressive basilica, the ruins of which exist as an archaeological preserve today, constructed during the sixth century under the patronage of Justinian. Scherrer, Ephesus: The New Guide, pp. 190-96; Ekrem Akurgal, Ancient Civilizations and Ruins of Turkey (Istanbul: Net, 10th edn, 2007), pp. 145-46.
Christian community in that city (i.e. all of the several 'house churches' in that city). The Corinthian evidence is usually appealed to as the model. At Corinth it seems that several 'house churches' existed throughout the city, presumably meeting under the aegis of distinct patron-householders, and that these came together for meetings of the 'whole church', possibly under the patronage of a certain Gaius who (presumably) owned a house large enough to accommodate such a gathering (Rom 16.23).\(^{15}\) Even if this did occur at Corinth during the years of the Pauline ministry, there is no compelling reason to impose this model on the multiple other contexts in which Christianity was established.\(^{16}\) It is, in fact, quite telling that the phrase 'the whole church comes together' is used only of the Christians in Corinth, and that nowhere in the Lukan literature (the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles) are the Christian community of any city ever portrayed as coming together in a single locale. It could be that the situation in Corinth was unique, perhaps through the presence of Gaius, who had the means and the domestic space large enough to provide hospitality for the 'whole church' there; as the situation at Ephesus, with the provision of the ‘lecture hall of Tyrannus’, was also an anomaly unique to that locale. It cannot be assumed that a Gaius or a Tyrannus existed in every place to which Paul writes in Romans 16.23, written from Corinth, 'Gaius, who is host to me and the whole church', recalling the language of 1 Corinthians 14.23, 'if, therefore, the whole church comes together'.

\(^{15}\) Houses excavated at the site of Corinth point to the extreme difficulty of accommodating the numbers involved, even in the first century when Christianity was a small and fledgling movement. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, 'House-Churches and the Eucharist', in Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church (ed. Edward Adams & David G. Horrell; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), pp. 129-38.
Paul carried the Christian message and in which a Christian presence was established.\(^{17}\) It is more consistent with the available evidence to view Paul as, essentially, an opportunist, whose practice and the subsequent practice of the community he left behind, varied from place to place depending on means and expedience. In Corinth, a convert (Gaius) with a house large enough to call the whole assembly together was perhaps present, and so this is what occurred. Similarly, according to the apocryphal Acts, Paul preached in Iconium in the house of Onesiphorus (*Acts of Paul and Thecla* 1.4-7). In Ephesus, a certain Tyrannus, perhaps a convert or sympathiser, owned a hall and made it available to the apostle, and so his preaching occurred here for a period of time at least. In Athens, Paul entered into dialogue in the synagogue and then in the agora, with whoever happened to be there, and was subsequently brought to the Aeropagus (Acts 17.16-34). According to the Acts of the Apostles (28.13-31) Paul reached Rome, the largest and greatest city of the Empire, and, although under house arrest, continued to preach from his house to all who came to him for at least two years, whilst in the apocryphal *Martyrdom of Paul* (1) the apostle hires a barn or warehouse (*horreum*) on the outskirts of Rome to accommodate the crowds coming to hear him preach.

Whilst the circumstances of Paul's preaching activity are only partially known, what does remain certain is that in every city and town and in every community to which the Christian message was brought and in which a Christian community was established, 

\(^{17}\) Contra. for example Bruce Winter: ‘even if the Acts account contained no references to people of status in the church in Thessalonica, the existence of a few wealthy members would need to be presupposed.’

domestic space played a vital role in establishing and maintaining a Christian presence.\textsuperscript{18} It seems further likely that, during the course of the first and second centuries and probably for a long time afterwards, the Christians of each locale met independently, in small groups, in the house churches described by the New Testament, and also came together on occasions in larger groups, whether this was of the 'whole church' in one place or combined gatherings of different house churches, or to attend and receive instruction from traveling leaders, teachers, or (later) bishops.\textsuperscript{19} Determining the numbers involved is an exercise fraught with difficulty and frustrated by the lack of any reliable evidence. However if the number of Christians in Rome had reached 30,000 by 250 CE,\textsuperscript{20} and if Asia Minor was 'sixty percent Christian' by the same year,\textsuperscript{21} the network of 'house churches' in the city required to accommodate them must have been immense, whilst any suggestion of the 'whole church' coming together is all but rendered impossible. Even in the second century the Christians of Rome are said by Justin Martyr to be too numerous

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\textsuperscript{18} The apocryphal Acts, usually dated to the second and third centuries, contain multiple instances of different Christian leaders preaching and teaching in private homes – of Peter in Rome (\textit{Acts of Peter} 7-8, 19); of Paul in Iconium (\textit{Acts of Paul and Thecla} 5-7); of Thomas in India (\textit{Acts of Thomas} 131).

\textsuperscript{19} The presence of multiple groups in a city, some of whom lay outside the bounds of orthodoxy, is clearly a matter of great concern in the early second century Ignatian correspondence (Ign. \textit{Eph.} 20.2; Ign. \textit{Magn.} 7.2; Ign. \textit{Smyrn.} 7.1), and is probably reflected also in the Johannine literature (e.g. 2 Jn 7-11; 3 Jn 9).


to meet together in one place. As the Christian community continued to grow and flourish during the course of the second and third centuries, the capacity of private homes to accommodate the number of adherents must have been greatly stretched, not just in Rome, but in other large cities such as Ephesus. Whilst the size of the homes owned by individual Christians in Rome, or any other city of the Empire, is unknown, even if the very largest and most spacious were available to the Christians, the number of private homes required to accommodate a community of this size meeting therein is enormous, if not prohibitive. Further problematic is the fact that only a tiny percentage of the population of a large Graeco-Roman city were domiciled in such houses, the vast majority being residents of multi-storey apartment blocks (insula). David Horrell notes the tendency of New Testament scholars (in particular the influential work of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor at Corinth) to repeat the mistakes of past scholarship in assuming that the larger homes known from the archaeological record were representative of the spaces in which the early Christians gathered and met:

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23 In the famous correspondence of the Younger Pliny with Trajan of the Christians of Bithynia (Ep. 10.96; c. 115 CE), the number of Christians in the region must have been already significant for Pliny reports that a result of the group's success is that the temples had been largely abandoned and the sacrificial meat left unsold. It is perhaps further significant that the Bithynian Christians appear to Pliny as a 'political society' and a 'degenerate cult', although Pliny does not say where they meet.

24 The Pseudo-Clementines 10.71.1-3 (third century, Syria), recognizing the difficulties presented by the fantastic conversion of 10,000 men within seven days at Antioch, solves this by having Theophilus dedicate the 'great basilica of his house' to Christian usage.
Both of the Corinthian houses to which Murphy-O'Connor refers... the villa at Anaploga and the Roman (Shear) villa - are, he suggests, 'sumptuous' villas, their quality indicated not least by the marvelous mosaic floors found within them. Similarly, the houses considered from Pompeii, Olynthus, and Ephesus are all, on Murphy-O'Connor's own view, upper-class homes belonging to the wealthy. They are thus unlikely to be 'typical', at least insofar as typical is taken to refer to the kind of dwellings in which the majority of the population might have lived.\(^{25}\)

This points to the widely recognized gap in our current knowledge regarding the physical circumstances in which the first generations of Christians met. Whilst the literary record, as described above, points to the phenomena of the ‘house church’ in multiple localities; there is a paucity of evidence that houses large enough to accommodate the numbers involved existed in adequate numbers across the vast geographical spaces concerned. The archaeological record is, furthermore, predominately silent until well into the third century when the first ‘purpose built’ or renovated physical spaces, dedicated as places of Christian worship, begin to appear. The application of a relatively new approach in the sociological investigation of ancient communities, known as social networking theory, may, however, be of considerable assistance in understanding the social circumstances under which communities were formed and cohered around a common cultic practice or

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figure. This will, in turn, shed light on the potential physical spaces in which such groups actually met, and in doing so add to our existing knowledge of both the social and physical circumstances experienced by the first generations of Christians in the urban environments of the Graeco-Roman city during the critical first and second stages of the three stage development of the group’s architecture, occupying the period between its emergence as a social phenomenon (c. 50 CE) and the construction of the first purpose built or renovated cultic space (c. 250 CE).

2. Social Network Theory and Group Formation

Social network theory is not an integrated theory of social dynamics but 'a method or tool for analyzing social relationships which are constituent parts of larger societal groupings'. The methodology is especially useful for interpreting and understanding the multiple relational structures between individuals and groups within highly diverse and highly mobile social environments, such as that of the Graeco-Roman city. The group in which an individual's identity and sense of belonging was most acute is usually characterised by a single individual described as the primary anchor, around whom other

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group members acquire their status and roles.\textsuperscript{27} For most in the Graeco-Roman world the *paterfamilias* performed this function and the *familia* constituted the wider group in which meaning and belonging was primarily acquired.\textsuperscript{28} The family was primarily defined by a relationship of dependence and encompassed all who depended on the husband (*dominus*) and wife (*domina*), whether biologically related or not.\textsuperscript{29} Beyond this, individuals belonged to multifarious other groups (religious, civil, commercial, political, etc.), each with its own social dynamics, and are in simultaneous contact with other individuals to whom they are linked by other social bonds such as kinship, trade,


\textsuperscript{28} Cicero, *Off.* 1.54; Ulpian, *Dig.* 50.16.195.1-41. For examples of the authority exerted by the *paterfamilias* over the members of his household, including his own children: Valerius Maximus 5.8; Seneca, *Clem.* 1.15; Suetonius, *Aug.* 67; Plutarch, *Cat. Maj.* 21.4.

ethnicity and friendship, etc. This is represented visually in the diagram below, whereby each of the circles represents a further individual linked to the primary individual through a social association of some description.

In some cases, a person other than the *paterfamilias* and a group other than the *familia* might become the primary anchor (e.g. the military, the Christian community). This might lead to a transference of allegiance resulting in social dislocation with attendant consequences such as ostracisation. In such cases, the primary anchor and the group in which identity was formed, assumed special importance. At all times, in social network theory, the attributes and actions of individuals are of less consequence and importance than the relationships that exist between the individual and the group. One consequence of a high incidence of density within a social network is a tendency toward consistency of behavior among the group members together with a diminished capacity for deviation.
from established behavioral norms.\textsuperscript{30} Conversely, where the relational bonds are weak, the group may dissipate through conflict, experience assimilation, or be consumed by another stronger group. As L. Michael White recognizes in his brief study, social network theory has been largely predicated on the examination of small, self contained groups experiencing little change over time: 'so what happens when a religious sect, largely of Jewish ethnic origins and highly committed to an apocalyptic worldview, finds itself living in and attempting to recruit from the population of a cosmopolitan Roman city'?\textsuperscript{31} Should we think, as has been the tendency in the past, of a process of conversion to Christian away from Graeco-Roman paganism, or is there a more fluid dynamic at work, one of multiple points of connection between those gathered around a primary anchor such as the patron of a house church (or perhaps earlier an apostle or other charismatic leader, and later a bishop), gradually extending the reach of the group and its ethos and message through the agency of its ever increasing contacts to other individuals and into other networks, with a symbiotic process of assimilation occurring over the course of the two centuries until the Edict of Milan?\textsuperscript{32} The very survival and eventual ascendancy of

\textsuperscript{30} White, 'Social Networks', p. 31.

\textsuperscript{31} White, 'Social Networks', p. 32.

\textsuperscript{32} Sociologist Rodney Stark develops the thesis that the Christian response to social conditions such as poverty, disease, and ostracism, greatly facilitated its eventual triumph. Christianity, he argues, became particularly attractive in the wake of large scale calamities such as plague, natural disasters, or military defeat, because its theodicy provided a theological structure for explaining and accounting for them, its eschatology provided hope at an individual level (thus Cyprian, Mort. 15-16: ‘pestilence and plague, an enemy to others, is to Christians a departure unto salvation’), whilst on a pragmatic level the Christian concern and care for the poor, sick, and helpless won sympathetic, support, and converts (a letter of Dionysius reports that, at a time of plague in Alexandria, many Christians tended to their sick neighbours, 'drawing on
Christianity over the course of nearly three centuries in the Graeco-Roman world, in itself, identifies the Christian group as a highly bonded social organism that, simultaneously, succeeded in using its multiple points of contact to those beyond the group to its own advantage whilst (in general terms and despite the well documented conflict between orthodoxy and various schismatic and 'heretical' groups) remaining intact. For this to occur, a high degree of commitment and loyalty to the primary anchor, whether a leader or the exalted Christ mediated by the leader, must have been active.

Groups gathered around a primary anchor, whether a person or something held in common, existed in every city of the ancient world and are well known from both the epigraphical and literary record.

Merchants, guilds, collegia, brotherhoods, and cults of all sorts flourished, especially in the major urban centers. There seems to have been a social need for people with a common bond to band together, and this need was most often expressed in organizations that had some sort of religious or cultic activity.33

Such groups were often highly bonded, with limited contact with those outside the group ensuring a high degree of commitment to established group norms. The sociological manifestation of this phenomenon was that, in most of the large cities of the empire, the

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population was fragmented into distinct communities, gathered around a familial or kinship bond, a common trade, or ethnicity.\textsuperscript{34}

There was in fact little communication between the various different communities within Roman society. Communities, which could take the form of social and professional groupings… as well as of great families in which free men and slaves lived together, might come and go between the country and the city, their members never meeting anyone outside a narrow circle.\textsuperscript{35}

Again, the city of Ephesus provides a ready example and template for application of the social networking theory. Ephesus was a ‘working city’ in which the harbour and associated industry made it a centre for trade, the Artemision made it a financial centre, whilst the presence of the proconsul conferred political importance and the associated activity.\textsuperscript{36} Groups formed around a common trade (guilds and other associations) were


part of the social fabric of most Roman cities. In Ephesus the existence of such groups is attested by some 3,500 inscriptions relating to all manner of associations: silversmiths (Acts 19.25), doctors, bakers, wine dealers, wool and garment sellers, weavers, hemp dealers, cobblers, temple builders, carpenters, sawyers, surveyors, and workers in baths.37 An example of one such group is found in the well known if ‘undeservedly neglected’ inscription (I.Eph. 1a.20)38 recovered from the south eastern corner of the harbour region at Ephesus, of Neronian date (ca. 54-59 CE), which provides evidence of an association of fisherman and fishmongers who effectively operated as a cartel in the city. This inscription, from a stele, states that the fishermen and fishmongers of the cartel received land from the demos of both the Romans and the Ephesians, and constructed on it a toll house for the purposes of collecting the fishery tax essential to their business. Whilst numerous such commercial guilds existed, groups were also formed on the basis of ethnicity, one of the best attested such groups in antiquity being the Jews. Most cities had a ‘Jewish quarter’ or district,39 and it seems certain that there was a significant Jewish population in Ephesus, as in other cities of Asia Minor, although the inscriptive and literary evidence is largely silent.40 Even so, according to the Acts of the Apostles (18.19) there was at least one synagogue in Ephesus, and Josephus speaks generally of large


38 Horsley, NewDocs 5.95.


40 Horsley laments this. ‘The Inscriptions of Ephesos’, pp. 121-27.
numbers of Jews living in Asia and its leading city. Such synagogues might well have met in extant household space or in slightly modified rooms within the larger homes of community members, dedicated for that purpose. Whether organised around a trade, commercial venture, religious allegiance, or ethnicity, the recurring feature of such groups is that the pattern of association tends strongly towards ‘social homogeneity’. Some groups might share more than one primary anchor and experience an even more highly pronounced sense of shared identity and allegiance. The Tyrian merchants of Puteoli, known from an inscription dated 79 CE, are one example of a group living in a foreign city who established a physical presence through rented quarters in which those sharing a common ethnicity (being originally from Tyre on the Phoenician coast) also operated as a cultic group with a sanctuary within their rental property dedicated to a Tyrian deity and as a commercial enterprise engaged in importing Phoenician goods.

Even so, groups composed of a more mixed or diverse social membership were present, especially in the form of the collegia, or burial societies, which comprised a major way in which the urban poor in particular found space and community in the city. In a well known inscription from Lanuvium near Rome (133 CE) the rules of one such

\[\text{C. Ap. 2.39; Ant. 11.133, 12.125-26, 12.166-68, 12.172-72, 16.27. Philo, Leg. 315.}\]
\[\text{As occurred at Dura-Europos: White, The Social Origins of Christian Architecture, Vol. 1, p. 44.}\]
\[\text{The importance of burial societies increased throughout late antiquity: Valerie Hope, ‘A Roof over the Dead: Communal Tombs and Family Structure,’ in Domestic Space in the Roman World, p. 88.}\]
\[\text{ILS 7212. Cf. ILS 1577, 3547, 3816, 4966, 7293.}\]
association or burial society (*collegium*) are described, providing a valuable insight into one of the primary ways in which the urban ‘lower classes’ found space and community in the midst of large cities like Rome, Alexandria, and Ephesus. Such societies, ostensibly formed to ensure the burial of the poor in common graves, functioned as communities in miniature within the broader social landscape of the city, being open to men and women, slaves and free, and having their own charter and patron deity. Often a man of means or aristocrat acted as patron, endowing the group with funds that might be used to erect monuments and, in some cases, to provide a place of assembly. A second century CE inscription from Ephesus records the ‘donation’ of a hall or meeting room to an unnamed group by T. Flavius Damianus, a sophist philosopher and generous benefactor of Ephesus well known from both the epigraphical record and the references to him by his pupil Philostratus (*Vit. soph.* 605). In the two inscriptions, both recovered from the plinths of statues, which refer to this benefaction, the room or meeting place is (interestingly and perhaps significantly) called *oikos*, the Greek equivalent of the Roman *domus*, which in ‘numerous inscriptions’ carries the meaning of the physical place in which groups and associations meet as well as the group or family who met therein. Despite the example

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47 Damianus was also responsible for roofing the processional way linking the city to the Artemision (*I.Eph.* 3.811, *I.Eph.* 7.3080; Philostratus, *Vit. soph.* 605).

48 *I.Eph.* 1a.672 and *I.Eph.* 1a.3080. Kalinowski suggests that the association here is a group of merchants and workers whose livelihoods were focused on the Tetragonos Agora. ‘Toponyms in IvE 672 and IvE 3080: Interpreting Collective Action in Honorific Inscriptions from Ephesos,’ *Öjh* 75 (2006), pp. 127-127.

of the generosity of Damianus, most groups and associations, whether commercial, voluntary, or cultic, had limited means to procure space in the city, and often used domestic space for their purposes. A possibility for acquiring something more permanent was, for a select few, procuring a benefactor, such as Damianus, or the influential Julia Severa who built a synagogue for the Jews of Akmoneia (CIL 766). For other groups such as the Ephesian fishmongers (I.Eph. 1a.20), if their existence benefited the city, the authorities might provide the necessary land. For most groups, however, the ability to find and procure physical space was dependent on the benevolence of those to whom they were bonded, or on the volatile rental market. Finding space, a home, and community, within the city, was, for the majority of the inhabitants, dependent then on finding a group to identify with and belong to. This is, precisely the pattern pursued by the Christian apostle Paul who, upon arriving in Corinth, found community among his fellow Jews there and then among those engaged in the same trade (Acts 18.2). When resident in Ephesus for three years, the longest single sojourn of his itinerant ministry, Paul followed the same pattern in that city, seeking out those with a common trade and / or ethnicity (Acts 19.1-41, 20.17-38).


51 Despite being initially well received at the synagogue (Acts 18.18-21), and although some of the town officials (Asiarchs) were ‘friendly’ (Acts 19.31), there is some evidence to suggest that Paul’s Ephesian ministry was characterized by difficulties and that establishing a durable presence in the ‘city of Artemis’ proved more arduous than elsewhere (this could explain the extended stay of three years compared to the much shorter stays in other cities). Paul seems to have been compelled to sustain himself during the three years in Ephesus through practicing his trade (Acts 20.33-35; 1 Cor 4.12; 1 Thess 2.9), either in the absence of procuring a patron / benefactor, or possibly eschewing one intentionally. This is in contrast, for instance,
Whilst groups organised around trade, ethnicity, and religion were present in most cities of the empire, the Roman authorities were often deeply suspicious of any association that was perceived to operate outside of their control and so potentially threaten the social and political order. Philo describes the suspicions that accumulated around such groups in Bacchanalian terms: ‘there exist in the city associations with numerous numbers, and there is nothing healthy in their fellowship, which is based on unmixed wine, drunkenness, feasts and the unbridled conduct which results from these’ (Flacc. 136).

The first urban Christians were especially open to such suspicions. Robert L. Wilken begins an essay on the social experience of early Christianity by drawing attention to the

to his ministry at Corinth which was supported by the Macedonian churches (2 Cor 11.7-11. Cf. Phil 4.15-16; Rom 16.1-2,23). The religious experience of the Ephesians, in regards to Christianity, was syncretic and at times highly problematic for Paul and his successors. See Acts 18.24-26, 19.1-7, 19.11-16, 19.18-20, 19.21-41; 1 Tim 1.3-11, 4.1-5, 6.3-10; Rev 2.1-7; Ign. Eph. 6.2, 9.1. It is probable that Paul was imprisoned during his time at Ephesus: shortly after departing the city, if the chronology is right, he speaks of frequent incarcerations with numerous floggings and of even being near death (2 Cor 11.23). This would concord with the ‘many hardships’ Paul says he faced in Asia (2 Cor 1.8), the many ‘trials and plots’ against him (Acts 20.19), and possibly the enigmatic ‘wild beasts’ (1 Cor 15.32).

52 During his period as a governor in Bithynia the Younger Pliny sought permission from Trajan to form an association of fire fighters, stating in his correspondence that he would limit the number to 150 so as to ensure they could be kept under observation (see Ep. 10.33). Cf. also Ep. 10.93 in which Pliny asks Trajan for permission for the self governing citizens of Amisus to establish a benefit society, adding that contributions will be used for charitable purposes and not to finance ‘riotous and unlawful assemblies’. Pliny goes on to note that, in cities administered under Roman law, such institutions are rightly forbidden. This is consistent with other extant regulations – e.g. Justinian, Digest 47.22.1
'inflated view' of the history of Christianity that has developed over the long hegemony of the faith in the West. The historical reality is rather less grandiose. For the first century of its life Christianity was largely ignored by the literature of the Roman world. Apart from the disputed passage in Josephus (Ant. 18:63-64), who was of course in any case a ‘Romanised’ Jew, the life and ministry of Jesus and the existence of his followers is attested to among the extant literature of the Graeco-Roman world only by the brief references of Suetonius (Nero. 16) and Tacitus (Ann. 15:44) until the famous correspondence with Trajan of Pliny the Younger (Ep. 10.96-97; ca. 112 CE). The evidence provided by all three of Suetonius, Tacitus, and Pliny indicates that, from the perspective of educated Romans, Christianity is at the turn of the second-century CE, a small, crude, degenerate and anti-social superstitio unworthy of prolonged attention and of little influence outside of the lower strata of the social spectrum. This negative

54 In his section on Palestine the Elder Pliny makes no reference at all to the Christians although he does mention other sectarian Jewish groups such as the Essenes. Nat. 5.70-73.
55 That the early Christians were seen as a movement which drew its members from among the poor and lower classes: 1 Cor 1.26-28; Minucius Felix, Oct. 36; Origen, Cels. 3.44. The extent to which the first century church actually was a predominately lower class movement has been seriously challenged by modern commentators with a consensus emerging to the effect that the Christian community of the time was a socially mixed group that comprised all strata of the society. So E. A. Judge, The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century: Some Prolegomena to the Study of New Testament Ideas of Social Obligation (London: Tyndale, 1960), pp. 52-60; Abraham Malherbe, Social Aspects of Early Christianity, p. 29; Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries (New Jersey: Princeton
summation, and the wall of silence beyond it, is not altogether surprising given that the 
social experience of the very first Christian community in Jerusalem was, in its earliest 
and most formative years, dominated and largely shaped by its ejection from the 
synagogue and dislocation from the Jewish milieu in which it had been formed and from 
which it had sprang. This was an experience repeated throughout the Jewish communities 
of the Diaspora as 'the way' spread beyond Palestine, largely by the instrument of 
Jewish opposition and persecution. As influential and important as this was for the first 
Christians, warring factions within Judaism were nothing new and attracted the attention 
of the authorities only insofar as they threatened the Roman social institutions or 
structures. It is only when Christianity becomes recognized as a missionary religion to 
both Jews and Gentiles, largely of course through the impetus of its greatest missionary 
Paul, that the new social phenomena of Christians as a 'third race' (tertium genus) arises 
and begins to (albeit slowly) attract the attention of the Roman world.


57 Conflict between the early Christian community and adherents to Judaism, and to ‘Judaisers’ within its 
own ranks, is pervasive throughout the New Testament: Acts 5.17-42; 6.7-7.60; 8.1-3; 11.19; 12.1-5; 17.1- 
9; 18.12-17; 21.27-31; 23.12; 26.11; Gal 1.13; 2.11-14; Phil 3.2.

58 E.g. Acts 16.19-23 and Acts 19.21-34, although even in both of these instances Paul and his supporters 
are expressly identified as Jews.

59 The description of Christianity as a tertium genus is supplied by Tertullian, Scorp. 10, but is located in 
the preaching of Peter by Clement of Alexandria (Strom. 6.5). C.f. also the similar phrase in the Epistle to 
Diognetus 1. The subsequent use of tertium genus as both a self description by Christians and as a term of 
abuse against them by pagans is traced by Adolph von Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity
between Christians and the wider social world of the Roman Empire escalates only in the later second century wherein the extended contact and engagement with the syncretic ‘melting pot’ of spirituality, philosophy and ideas that characterised the ‘spirit of the age’ is occasion for an increasingly elaborate and verbose body of Christian apologetic and heresiologic literature.

The pre-Nicene Christian communities, as a 'third race' distinct from both Judaism and Graeco-Roman paganism, were conscious of their own socialisation as ‘resident aliens’ from a very early time. John H. Elliott’s sociological exegesis of 1 Peter has demonstrated this by setting that epistle into its social, cultural, political, and liturgical context in a manner that is yet to be achieved for any other part of the New Testament.  

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in the First Three Centuries (New York: Williams and Norgate, 1908), Vol. 1., pp. 273-75. cf. R. A. Markus, Christianity in the Roman World (London: Thames and Hudson, 1974), p. 3. Both Clement and Tertullian use the term in the sense that Christians are a 'third race' because they have broken decisively both with Judaism and the pagan religions of the Graeco-Roman world. W. C. Van Unnik evokes, in the same way, the Petrine use of ἀναστροφή: Christianity as a 'way of life' marked, and entered into, by baptism. 'Christianity According to 1 Peter', ExpTim 68 (1957), p. 81.

Written from Rome (Bαβυλῶν: 1 Pet. 5.13), 1 Peter draws extensively on the Gospel traditions and exhibits a thoroughly Pauline theology that, contrary to the conclusions of the earlier form-critics, need not constitute literary dependence but a common Vorlage: that of the 'catechetical and liturgical sources... that underlie most of the epistles of the New Testament'. In terms of the sociology of the epistle, Elliott predicated his exegesis on the opening description of the recipients of the epistle as the ‘strangers’ (παραδιδήμου) and ‘aliens’ (παροίκος) of the dispersion (here the Roman administrative region of Asia). For Elliott, these are terms that describe the 'social strangeness' of the Christians in the new Diaspora of the Roman Empire and, consequently, function as more than theological markers but constitute descriptions of the actual social experience of the community. The motif of suffering that permeates the epistle might be understood as consequential of baptism, another important topic within the epistle. Participation in the


62 A Home for the Homeless, p. 38. In contrast to the Pauline usage of παροίκος (and the closely related ξενός) in Eph 2.11-15, which is clearly theological.

Christian community through baptism produces (theologically) a communal distinctiveness that marks the Christian as Christ’s own and a citizen of heaven, but at the same time (sociologically) incorporates him/her into a highly bonded visible community that is alienated and ethically distinct, and which results in the isolation of the convert from their ethnic, familial, and religious roots. The Christian community was, in its earliest years, a small cult open to people of all social class, much like many other highly bonded groups that flourished in the cities of the Graeco-Roman world, often operating under the protection and aegis of a patron-householder and being dedicated to a chosen protective deity. Hence, the broad consensus of early twentieth and nineteenth century scholarship was that Christianity during the first few decades of its existence was a rejected or at least doubted by some recent scholarship: prominently by David Hill, 'To Offer Spiritual Sacrifices… (1 Peter 2:5): Liturgical Formulations and Christian Paraenesis in 1 Peter', *JSNT* 16 (1982), pp. 45-63. An alternative is to view the epistle as a circular letter in the form of an exhortative paraenesis necessitated by the *Sitz im Leben* of the addressees who are suffering sociological persecution due to their baptism and incorporation into the Christian sect. So Norman Hillyer, 'First Peter and the Feast of Tabernacles', *TynBul* 21 (1970), p. 56.

64 The social implications were serious and far reaching. Though speaking of conversion to Judaism, Tacitus warns his readers that the convert to a foreign cult learns at the earliest opportunity 'to despise the gods, to disown their country, and to regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account'. *Hist.* 5.5. The anonymous *Epistle to Diognetus* 5.5 says of the Christians – 'they live in their own countries, but only as aliens; they participate in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners'. Conversion to such a group constituted sin occasioning divine vengeance according to Horace, *Carm.* 3.16.15. Hence, as Earl Richard realises, '1 Peter focuses upon Christians suffering, not as a result of persecution but as a result of hostility, harassment, and social, unofficial ostracism on the part of the general populace'. 'The Functional Christology of First Peter', in *Perspectives on First Peter* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1966), p. 127.
movement largely drawn from the large numbers of the poor, landless citizens, workers, and slaves, who made up the vast majority of the population of the Graeco-Roman city. Whilst these assumptions have been challenged in recent years, with a 'new consensus' emerging to the effect that the adherents to Christianity were probably drawn from all levels of the social strata with the result that the Christian community of the first two centuries was a socially mixed and diverse group, this too has been recently and persuasively challenged in favour of the older and once dominant position.\(^{65}\) In a major sociological investigation, Justin J. Meggitt has sought to demonstrate that the first urban Christians shared fully in the utter poverty that characterised the social circumstances of the vast majority of the population of the Graeco-Roman city.\(^{66}\) The process and the dynamics by which a community drawn from this socio-economic demographic found and established physical space in the city, may be established by using and applying the insights of social networking theory. To this end it will be necessary to further establish the probable physical environment of the city in this network of social relationships existed.

### 3. The Physical Environment: Three Case Studies

The material remains of the largest and most densely occupied cities of the Roman world contain relatively few insights into the domestic housing and circumstances of all but the


privileged few at the very pinnacle of the ‘social pyramid’. Even in places where the vast majority of the populace must have existed in densely populated apartment buildings, only a small number of large and often lavish houses, almost always the abode of the privileged few of the society, have been excavated. The existence of the urban poor, and their probable living conditions and experience, must be predominately reconstructed then on the basis of extrapolation from the literary evidence. To this end, three major localities will be used as case studies, with a view to establishing the probable physical environment experienced by the urban poor and by groups such as the early Christian community, across the Graeco-Roman world during the critical first few decades of the community’s formation.

(a) Rome

By the time of the Augustan ascendancy and the beginning of the Imperial era, Rome was, by any criteria, already a metropolis of enormous proportions. The population of the city had, according to many estimates, exceeded one million inhabitants.67 Not only was

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67 The matter is a long contested one with a large body of literature. The estimate of one million inhabitants is widely supported – e.g. John E. Stambaugh, The Ancient Roman City (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 89, and Jerome Carcopino, Daily life in Ancient Rome: The People and the City at the Height of the Roman Empire (trans. E. O. Lorimer; ed. Henry T. Rowell; London: Routledge, 1941), pp. 19-21, among numerous others. In an earlier work drawing on the same sources, Whitney J. Oates had estimated the population of Rome at the time of Augustus to be 1,250,000. ‘The Population of Rome’, CP 29 (1934), p. 109. James E. Packer, conversely, finds that the population of Rome never exceeded a million, even at the height of its development. The Insulae of Imperial Ostia (Rome: The American
Rome the most populous city in the known world, it was (and remains to the present day),
one of the most densely populated cities in human history.68 This was because the city
was unable to expand geographically as its human populace increased.69 There were
several factors limiting the geographical size of Rome, not least being the fact that (until
the reconstruction after the fire of 64 CE) the city had never been planned but developed
in a haphazard and expedient manner as its population, and prestige and importance,
grew.70 The space devoted to public buildings, which were essential to the daily life of all
the inhabitants, was considerable. Significant also were the limitations imposed by the

 the population of ancient Rome can not be estimated accurately on the evidence available. ‘Römische
 estimates, most agree with the often made assertion that that Rome was ‘one of the most densely populated
 cities the world has ever known’. Stambaugh, The Ancient Roman City, p. 90.

68 Ramsay Macmullen, Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C to A.D. 284 (New Haven, CT: Yale University
 Press, 1981), p. 63, estimates the population density of Rome at this time to be about 200 persons per
 square acre, a figure roughly equivalent to about 45,000 persons per square kilometre. On the methodology
 of calculating the population density of ancient and modern cities see Colin Clark, ‘Urban Population

69 The phenomenon of the ‘urban sprawl’ is a modern one, facilitated by the development of fast and
 efficient transportation in the post industrial era. For good reason does the fifth century CE poet Sidonius
 Apollinaris (Carm. 2.56) reminisce - ‘Rome, you extend as a huge city within ample walls, yet your
 population makes you too small’.

70 E. J. Owens, The City in the Greek and Roman World (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 94. See Livy 6.4.6,
 5.55.2-5, 5.42.1-3.
lack of transport necessitating that most things be within walking distance.\textsuperscript{71} As the architect Vitruvius (\textit{Arch.} 2.8.17) realised, the impetus to expand upwards rather than outwards was the only logical way to accommodate the steadily increasing population.\textsuperscript{72} Both Juvenal (\textit{Sat.} 3.190-272) and Martial (\textit{Epigr.} 8.14.5-6) give typically hyperbolic (and probably somewhat exaggerated) descriptions of the crowded conditions that were a fact of daily life in a Rome around the turn of the second century CE.\textsuperscript{73} The ongoing and pressing need for higher and more storied buildings in Rome to house the burgeoning population had already necessitated that Augustus introduce legislation limiting the height of new buildings to seventy feet (Strabo, \textit{Geogr.} 5.3.7; Horace, \textit{Ep.} 1.1.100 ).\textsuperscript{74} The pressures of growth continued to be felt beyond the Augustan legislation.

\textsuperscript{71} The \textit{Lex Iulia Municipalis} of 45 BCE (\textit{CIL} 2.206) strictly regulated wheeled traffic (mainly carts driven by oxen) in Rome due to the already crowded, narrow streets and pathways, along which residents jostled for elbow room at every corner according to Juvenal (\textit{Sat.} 3).

\textsuperscript{72} Cicero, \textit{De lege agrarian} 2.96, remarks on the height of Rome; Tacitus, \textit{Ann.} 15.43, comments on the high buildings and narrow streets that characterized Rome before Nero’s rebuilding program following the great fire. Martial, writing in the early second century CE, says he himself lived ‘up three flights of stairs, and high ones’ (\textit{Epigr.} 1.117) and describes also the resident of an \textit{insula} climbing 200 stairs to reach the attic (\textit{Epigr.} 7.20). This, and other textual evidence, suggests the Augustan and subsequent legislation limiting the height of new buildings was either never enforced or routinely ignored.

\textsuperscript{73} Cf. also Cicero, \textit{Att.} 14.9.

\textsuperscript{74} One of the portents of Hannibal’s invasion related by Livy (21.62.3) is that of an ox which mounted a stairway from street level to a third storey apartment, indicating that multi-storey buildings existed in Rome two centuries before the beginning of the Common Era. The genesis of multi storey housing may have been the trend, commented on by Livy 39.14.2 and Varro, \textit{Lingua} 5.162, for constructing dining rooms on the upper floor of private houses with steps leading onto the street.
Accompanying the Augustan ‘building boom’ which resulted in the construction of numerous public works and facilities, were the increased rise of multi-storey buildings, each with a large number of rooms in which several families might live, sharing the cost of the scandalously high rents. The sight of these buildings awed the Greek orator Aelius Aristides when he visited in the mid second century CE.

Homer says of snow that, as it falls, it covers the crest of the range and the mountain peaks and the flowering fields and the rich acres of men… So also of this city. Like the snow, she covers mountain peaks, she covers the land intervening, and she goes down to the sea… And indeed she is poured out, not just over the level ground, but in a manner with which the simile cannot begin to keep pace, she rises great distances into the air, so that her height is not to be compared to a covering of snow but rather to the peaks themselves. And as a man who far surpasses others in size and strength likes to show his strength by carrying others on his back, so this city, which is built over so much land, is not satisfied with her extent, but raising upon her shoulders others of equal size, one over the other, she carries them… Therefore, if one chose to unfold, as it were, and lay flat on the ground the cities which now she carries high in the air, and

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75 Diodorus Siculus (31.18.2) notes that, even at the time of Ptolemy (first century BCE) rents in Rome were so high that the exiled king was forced to accommodate himself in a ‘small and shabby’ room. Prices were no doubt driven up dramatically by the ongoing demand for space in the city far outstripping the supply of accommodation: Penelope J. Goodman, *The Roman City and its Periphery: From Rome to Gaul* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 233. Those who could not afford accommodation found shelter in public places, such as baths, or in tombs. Ulpian, *Dig.* 12.3.11, 47.12.3; Petronius, *Satyr.* 71.8.
place them side by side, all that part of Italy which intervenes would, I think, be filled and become one continuous city stretching to the Strait of Otranto (Orat. 26.6-9).

The cities which Aelius says Rome ‘carries on her back’ are, no doubt, these same multi-storey apartment blocks, whose height Augustus had been compelled to limit with legislation, and in which the vast majority of the population were accommodated.\textsuperscript{76} Cicero (Cael. 17) had used, for them, the term \textit{insula}, which Russell Meiggs understands to be evidence for ‘the emergence of a vocabulary to mark a fundamental distinction in house types’, between \textit{domus}, the large house designed for and occupied by a single family, and \textit{insula}, for the multi-storied apartment buildings, divided into separately let rooms.\textsuperscript{77} By the turn of the second century CE the \textit{insula} was the normative type of housing in Rome for all but the wealthy few.\textsuperscript{78} When the fourth century CE Regionary Catalogues were composed there were some 46,000 \textit{insula} in Rome and only 1,790

\textsuperscript{76} The percentage of the residents of first and second century CE Rome housed in \textit{insula} was around 90\% according to Charles Gates, \textit{Ancient Cities: The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece, and Rome} (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 356.

\textsuperscript{77} Russell Meiggs, \textit{Roman Ostia} (Oxford: Clarendon, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn, 1973), p. 237. Meiggs cites in support of this Suetonius (Nero 38.2) who writes \textit{praeter immensum numerum insularum, domus priscorum ducum arserunt}. Cf. Suetonius, Nero 44.2 - \textit{inquilinos privatatum aedium atque insularum pensionem annuam repraesentare fisco}.

\textsuperscript{78} As J. Packer notes, ‘Rome was in fact a city of multiple dwellings’. ‘Housing and Population in Imperial Rome and Ostia’, \textit{JRS 57} (1967), p. 81. Martial, \textit{Epigr.} 1.117.7, has a small farm in the country, but only a third floor apartment in Rome.
domus. The large number has given rise to an ongoing debate, and generated a large body of literature, as to what, precisely, the word *insula* refers in the context of the Regionaries, and in particular, whether the term is to be understood as an architectural or legal one. As Glenn Storey has noted, the written sources (jurist, administrative, architectural, and literary) demand to be interpreted in the light of the archaeological evidence. The large proportion of space devoted to public buildings renders the geographical space required to accommodate some 46,000 separate apartment buildings or blocks in fourth century Rome highly problematic to say the least. Although not used consistently throughout, the term *insula* is, furthermore, often used to describe something akin to a ‘multiple dwelling’ in much of the literary and inscriptive record. The *insula* referred to by the Catalogues are then, probably, to be understood as, not separate apartment buildings or blocks, but multiple discreet dwellings (apartments or flats) within a single block or building.

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81 ‘Regionaries-Type Insulae 2’, p. 411.


The nature and squalor of the housing endured by the vast majority of the inhabitants, inside such *insula*, surmounted to what P. A. Brunt describes as ‘appalling slums’. The ground floor was often reserved for shops or places of business, or sometimes leased to the wealthiest tenants. In general, the quality of the accommodation and the corresponding economic circumstances of the tenants, declined as the stairs were mounted, with the poorest housed in cramped attics on the highest floor. Throughout the building, the rooms were small, dark, cold, and poorly serviced, without running water.

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and access to public drains. Martial (Epigr. 8.14.5-6) says of his apartment ‘I live in a little cell… Boreas himself would not want to live here’, and the Digest (Paul 7.1.30; Marcellus 8.2.10) advises landlords that although some ‘modest light’ is preferable ‘it is possible even to dwell in a darkened building’. This was further compounded by the constant dangers posed by poorly constructed buildings that seemed perpetually subject to both fire and collapse. 

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86 Scobie, ‘Slums, Sanitation, and Mortality’, pp. 408-18; Martial, Epigr. 8.67. Although some wealthy residents improvised to remedy the lack of running water: Frontonius, Aqu. 2.76.

87 Strabo (Geogr. 5.3.2) says fire and collapse in Rome are ‘never-ending’. During the course of a dinner party described by Petronius (Sat. 74), the host is unnerved by a trumpeter possibly warning of fire, a frequent occurrence in Rome. Fire affected all strata of society, from the homeless masses of the great fire of 64 CE to the emperors themselves (Suetonius, Claud. 18, Aug. 57). The penalties for arson were severe (Martial, Spectacula 7). Part of the impetus for the Augustan legislation limiting the height of new buildings was the propensity of the existing buildings to combust or collapse (Strabo, Geogr. 5.3.7). Apart from the legislation limiting the height of new buildings, Augustus had also introduced the corps of night-watchmen (Cassius Dio 55.26) On the steps taken by Augustus and his successors to alleviate and control the risk of fire see O. F. Robinson, Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 105-10. Tacitus (Ann. 15.38) says of the great fire of 64 CE that its spread was facilitated by ‘the all-too-flammable nature of the old city, with its narrow winding streets and irregular buildings’. About a century after Juvenal wrote his satires the threat of fire in particular was undiminished. Ulpian, Dig. 1.15.2; Aulus Gellius 15.1.2-3. Herodian, 7.12.5-6, writing of the civil war ca. 237 CE, decades after the rebuilding conducted by Nero, testifies to the continuing propensity of the city to be subject to rapidly spreading fire: ‘the soldiers… set fire to houses that had wooden balconies (and there were many of this type in the city). Because a great number of houses were made chiefly of wood, the fire spread very rapidly and without a break throughout most of the city’. Cf. Livy 5.55; Tacitus, Ann. 15.43.
We live in a city which is, to a great extent, propped up by flimsy boards. The manager of your apartment building stands in front of the collapsing structure and, while he conceals a gaping crack (a crack many years old), he tells you to ‘sleep well’ – even though a total cave in is imminent! It’s best, of course, to live where there are no fires and no panics in the dead of night. Here, one neighbour discovers a fire and shouts for water, another neighbour moves out his shabby possessions. The third floor, where you live, is already smoking – but you don’t even know! Downstairs there is panic, but you, upstairs, where the gentle pigeons nest, where only thin tiles protect you from the rain, you will be the last to burn (Juvenal, Sat. 3.193-202).  

The streets of Rome, often crowded with pedestrians, were uneven and narrow. The pavement was ‘dirty’ and ‘rarely dry’ (Martial, Epigr. 5.22). The ‘urban stench’ could

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88 Cf. Seneca, Ben. 6.15.7, Ira 3.35.5, and Cicero, Att. 14.9, who says of the rental buildings he owns two have collapsed, the others have cracks, and not only the tenants, but even the mice have moved out! Tenants had some legal protection for vacating a premise due to a ‘legally proper fear’, usually of collapse (Ulpian, Dig. 39.2.28). As the rhetorician Julianus observed (in Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights 15.1), ‘the returns on urban property are great, but the risks are far greater’, adding ‘if there was any solution that would prevent houses at Rome burning so regularly, I would sell my country property and buy property in the city’. The best known example of a property speculator in antiquity is that of Crassus, who, according to Plutarch (Crassus 2), used public misfortunes, mainly caused by fire, to amass a fantastic fortune, by purchasing buildings gutted by fire at a low price and letting the rebuilt apartments at exorbitant rates.  

89 This was the case also in other parts of the empire, such as Egypt: Deborah W. Hobson, ‘House and Household in Roman Egypt’, Yale Classical Studies 28 (1985), p. 214.
be overwhelming and unhealthy, especially for the poor who (unlike Seneca, below) had no escape from it:

No sooner had I left behind the oppressive atmosphere of the city and that reek of smoking cookers which pour out, along with a cloud of ashes, all the poisonous fumes they’ve accumulated in their interiors whenever they’re started up, then I noticed the change in my condition at once (Seneca, *Ep.* 104).  

There was, apparently, no form of street lighting at night. The buildings, overcrowded and with open windows, were close to each other (within arm’s length). The city’s

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90 Petronius, *Sat.* 79, refers to broken, uneven, and dangerous paving; Martial, *Epigr.* 7.61, and Seneca, *de Ira* 3.35.5, speak of walking in mud and other filth; Juvenal, *Sat.* 3.247-77 adds to the ‘thick mud’ of the streets of Rome the further hazards of refuse, including full chamber pots, emptied from windows on the upper floors of buildings: ‘there’s death in every open window as you pass along at night’ he says, somewhat melodramatically, adding, ‘you may well be deemed a fool… if you go out to dinner without having made your will’. Aldrete concludes that ‘the streets of the city probably more closely resembled open sewers than our modern notion of roadways’. *Daily Life in the Roman City*, p. 99.

91 The clean and healthy air of the countryside and mountains was often contrasted to that of urban centres like Rome. Ammianus Marcellinus 27.4.14; Pliny, *Ep.* 5.6.5-6.

92 Horace, *Sat.* 2.7.25-35, speaks of needing oil for a lamp in order to keep an after dark dinner appointment. Irem Ayse Acaroglu, in an unpublished dissertation, claims that the first reported use of urban street lighting is in Ephesus, on the colonadded road (‘sacred way’) linking the city to the Artemision. ‘The Evolution of Urbanization in Anatolia from the Beginning of Sedentary Life Until the end of the Roman Empire (c. 8000 B.C. to c.400 A.D.’), (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation; Cornell University, 1970), p. 558.

93 This was the case also in Roman Egypt: ‘If someone lodges a complaint against someone else, saying that the door of the defendant’s houses opens into his property…’ (*P.Oxy* 48.3285). Martial says, of his
residents could find, at times, little respite from the noise of the teeming metropolis everywhere around them.

Are you asking me why I often head for
my little farm at dry Nomentum and the humble Lar at my farmstead?
There is no chance in the city, Sparsus, for a poor man
to think or rest. The schoolmasters in the morning
prevent one from living, the millers at night,
and the hammers of the coppersmiths all day long.
(Martial, Epigr. 12.57). ⁹⁴

Martial (Epigr. 12.57.24-28) further complains of being ‘awakened by the laughter of the passing crowd’, the noise generated by passers-by such that it seemed ‘all of Rome… stands by my bed’. ⁹⁵ The physical space of both the streetscape and the insula meant that

neighbour Novius, ‘we can reach out our windows and touch hands’ (Epigr. 1.86). Seneca (Ep. 90.25) notes that window glass or coverings of other kinds are an innovation recent enough to have occurred ‘within living memory’, cf. R. Macmullen, Roman Social Relations, pp. 63-64.

⁹⁴ Martial (Epigr. 9.68) complained further of the noise generated by schools and schoolmasters, and the habitually ‘thundering voices’ and ‘mad shouting’.

⁹⁵ Among the characters Martial met daily on the streets of Rome, or who kept him awake at night, were trampling hawkers, sellers of pudding, keepers of vipers, salt sellers and their cheap slaves, pie sellers carrying smoking sausages, and ‘second rate street poets’. Epigr. 1.41. Cf. Seneca, Ep. 56; Juvenal, Sat. 3.236-59.
privacy was difficult to obtain for the vast majority.\textsuperscript{96} The city could also be a violent and dangerous place. Hence Juvenal laments that the ‘squalor and isolation’ of urban life and the ‘endless nightmare of fires and collapsing houses’ are just a small part of the ‘cruel city’s myriad perils’ which include bands of brigands and ‘cut-throats’ (\textit{Sat.} 3.4-8 & 288-308; \textit{Pliny}, \textit{Nat.} 19.59).\textsuperscript{97} Yet, for all its pitfalls and difficulties, many, and not just the urban poor, chose to live in the crowded and over-priced apartments of Rome, rather than the more spacious environments of the surrounding towns or rural districts. The excitement generated by public entertainments, such as the frequent games and festivals, and the circus and chariot races, was one motivation (Juvenal, \textit{Sat.} 3.223-25). Furthermore, the architectural and engineering skills developed by the Romans, together with the regime of public works undertaken by Augustus and his successors, conferred at least some of the wealth and prosperity of the empire to its citizens, rendering daily life bearable, and offering a degree of comfort together with the provision of essential services, such as water, roads, and sewerage.

\textsuperscript{96} J. Stambaugh, \textit{The Ancient Roman City}, p. 178. Like most of the peoples of the ancient world, the Graeco-Roman worldview was one in which the distinctions between gods and humans, myth and reality, public and private, were ‘continually blurred’. Shelley Hales, \textit{The Roman House and Social Identity} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 5.

\textsuperscript{97} So the well known tirade against the breakdown of public order and civility in the Rome of his day throughout Juvenal’s third Satire, and the widely quoted incident involving the first century BCE tribune M. Livius Drusus (\textit{Vellerius Paterculus} 2.14.3, 2.45.3). Throughout the Epigrams, Martial depicts the city as ‘difficult, dangerous, unhealthy, and immoral’. So Art L. Spisak, \textit{Martial: A Social Guide} (London: Duckworth, 2007), p. 78. Columella warns rural landowners that the type of ‘skills’ an overseer of slaves is likely to have procured in the city are a fondness for ‘leisure, the Campus, the circus, the theatres, gambling, fast-food joints, and the brothels’ (\textit{On Agriculture} 1.8.1-4).
The Romans however were especially far sighted about matters to which the Greeks gave little thought, such as the construction of roads and aqueducts, and of sewers which could wash out the waste matter of the city into the Tiber (Strabo, *Geogr.* 5.3.8).

Public latrines, baths, and fountains, as well libraries, theatres, and gymnasium, were all available for the urban population of Rome. Despite these public conveniences, for the vast majority of the population of Rome, even at the height of the empire’s power and prosperity, the provision of basic needs such as water, sanitation, food, and safe housing was often problematic at the very least. All of this contributed to the very short life expectancy experienced by the vast majority of the population of any Roman city. As the elite and powerful of the city benefited immensely from the increasing wealth of Rome and its empire, and as citizenship and its inferred rights was tightly restricted, the masses had to be contented with ‘bread and circuses’, whilst, to ensure their passivity, the authorities needed to ensure the food supply.

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99 For a discussion of how this was achieved, despite the many hazards and difficulties, see Greg S. Aldrete & David J. Mattingly, ‘Feeding the City: The Organization, Operation, and Scale of the Supply System for
(b) Ostia Antica

Although many of the most important and impressive buildings and monuments remain in some form, Rome itself does not afford many material insights into the private and domestic life of its ancient citizens, chiefly because the site has been continuously occupied, built, and re-built.\textsuperscript{100} Such evidence is, however, invaluably preserved in other places (principally Ostia, Herculaneum, and of course, Pompeii), through the art and architecture of the domestic spaces preserved there. Ostia (from the Latin ostium meaning ‘mouth’), was located alongside the ancient course of the Tiber where it joined the sea, some fifteen miles from Rome.\textsuperscript{101} The well preserved remains, including the best preserved examples of high density urban housing of the period, were extensively excavated during the course of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{102} According to longstanding tradition, the city was founded by the fourth King of Rome, Ancus Marcius (Livy 1.33.9; Rome’, in Life, Death and Entertainment in the Roman Empire (eds. D. S. Potter & D. J. Mattingly; Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), pp. 171-204.

\textsuperscript{100} For a description of one domestic Roman building that has survived since Imperial times, see Stambaugh, The Ancient Roman City, pp. 176-78.

\textsuperscript{101} It is, of course, important to bear in mind that ancient Ostia was bounded by the coast line, now some 4km away, and by the Tiber, until extensive flooding in 1557 changed the river’s course. Sonia Gallico, Guide to the Excavations of Ostia Antica (Rome: ATS Italia Editrice, 2000), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{102} On the early excavations at the site: Thomas Ashby, ‘Recent Discoveries at Ostia’, JRS 2 (1912), pp. 161-92. Like the harbour at Ephesus, silting caused by the rapidly flowing Tiber was an ongoing problem at Ostia. Strabo, Geogr. 5.3.5; Plutarch, Caes. 58.10. Eventually, Claudius had a new port built further along the coastline, closer to Rome.
Cicero, Resp. 2.5, 33; Strabo, Geogr. 5.3.5), although the archaeological evidence (principally the city walls) supports habitation at the site only from the fourth century BCE.\textsuperscript{103} Like nearby Rome itself, and many other cities of the period, the impetus for building works generated by the Augustan age were felt in Ostia and continued throughout the reigns of his successors, reaching a high point in the second century CE. To house the growing population generated by the wealth being derived mainly from trade, within a restricted geographical area, it was necessary at Ostia (as in Rome and elsewhere) to ‘expand vertically’.\textsuperscript{104} The archaeological record shows that, when the impetus for building was abruptly felt in Ostia by the turn of the second century CE, single level private homes were demolished and ‘insulae sprang up in every quarter’.\textsuperscript{105} The nature of the building in Ostia is especially significant in that, unlike Rome, ‘Ostia was a model city that represents the best in Roman design and construction of the second century A.D’.\textsuperscript{106} The road to Rome entered the city at one of its three main gates, the Porta Romana. From here, underneath the gaze of a welcoming inscription and the statue of the goddess Minerva, protector of the city (both still visible at the site today), the main road extended on an east–west axis. This street, lined by colonnades, passed the

\textsuperscript{103} Meiggs, Roman Ostia, pp. 20-27.

\textsuperscript{104} Meiggs, Roman Ostia, pp. 65. Cf. John R. Clarke, The Houses of Roman Italy 100 B.C. – A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 26-29. Like that of Rome, estimates of the population of Ostia have varied greatly. Packer, in a careful study, concludes that the number of inhabitants could not have exceeded 27,000. Housing and Population, p. 86.

\textsuperscript{105} Meiggs, Roman Ostia, pp. 238, 251.

\textsuperscript{106} Packer, ‘Housing and Population’, p. 87. Indeed, Ostia is the best example of standard Roman planning and is the template for subsequent colonial cities. Owens, The City in the Greek and Roman World, p. 110.
theatre, principally still intact and continuing in use for special occasions today, and met the other main road, extending on a north–south axis, at the Forum, which (like Rome) was the site of the most important public buildings and the centre of the city’s social, political, economic, and legal life. By the second century many of the public buildings and the larger houses were decorated with statues and mosaics, many of which are preserved in the on-site museum, and an office of ‘Curator of Public Buildings’ had been established in 111 CE to supervise the ongoing works of new buildings and the restoration of existing ones.

Even so, the material culture of Ostia was never that of Rome and its socio-economic position was, apparently, far less substantial than that of the capital, or of other towns of the period, such as Pompeii. The vast majority of the populace lived in small, cramped conditions, and most of the housing is of an ostensibly poor standard. In a detailed study of the housing and demography of Roman Ostia, James E. Packer arrived at the


108 There were few mansions or large private houses in Ostia, although this was perhaps due to its proximity to Rome where the very wealthy would have lived. Even among the more elaborate and spacious apartments the mosaics and other decorations are ‘second rate’ compared to those of other sites, such as Pompeii and Herculaneum. Packer, *The Insulae of Imperial Ostia*, p. 71.

following data concerning the domestic circumstances of the population of first century CE Ostia.¹¹⁰

The three broadly defined categories of urban housing, identified by Packer in relation to first century CE Ostia, are:

(i) Large private homes and villas. These are the types of houses extensively excavated and studied at places such as Pompeii and Herculaneum. Apart from the familia who owned the property, slaves would also have been accommodated in such domiciles,

¹¹⁰ *The Insulae of Imperial Ostia*, pp. 70-72, and ‘Housing and Population’, pp. 84-86. Packer estimated the total population of Ostia in the first century CE to be c. 27,000, of which approximately 2,000 were housed in large private homes and villas, approximately 5,000 were homeless, and approximately 20,000 lived in insula, small private homes, or other comparable accommodation. A. G. McKay believes the data compiled by Packer can be applied across the Empire in general, and to Ephesus in particular. *Houses, Villas, and Palaces in the Roman World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), pp. 213-14.
usually in smaller rooms and specially built quarters.\textsuperscript{111} A significant proportion of the inhabitants of the larger houses were, therefore, slaves or others dependent for their economic livelihood on the \textit{paterfamilias}.\textsuperscript{112}

(ii) Apartment buildings (\textit{insula}) and small private homes. The vast majority of the population were housed in high density, multi-storey apartment buildings. In addition to this were the smaller private homes of the urban plebs, most of which have not survived.\textsuperscript{113}

(iii) Homeless, with no fixed accommodation. Although measures were taken, from time to time, to alleviate the plight of the urban destitute, a social welfare policy was all but entirely lacking in antiquity.\textsuperscript{114} The very poor, unemployed, and destitute, fought for scraps of food in the marketplace, and took shelter in public baths, other public buildings,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Descriptions of the poverty of small, single level rural housing have, however, survived: (pseudo) Virgil, \textit{Moretum}; Seneca, \textit{Ep.} 47.10; Digest 32.1.41.3; Martial, \textit{Epigr.} 9.73; Ovid, \textit{Metam.} 8.614-724.
\end{itemize}
and graveyards. If Packer’s figures are correct, a staggering ratio of almost one in five persons in urban Ostia, could not afford permanent accommodation.

The importance of the data concerning Ostia is immediately apparent, for, whereas Pompeii, with its preponderance of large houses and villas, was never a ‘typical’ Roman town, Ostia provides a valuable insight to the type of housing and social infrastructure that would have characterised the heavily populated urban areas of Rome, and other cities of the Roman world during the course of the first two centuries of the Common Era.

From the scattered and fragmentary ruins of house blocks in Rome it is difficult to visualize living conditions; at Ostia such houses can be seen with their ground floors fully preserved and, in some cases, large parts of the first floor… the houses, three and more stories high, radically different from the Pompeian house, reflect the Rome of Martial and Juvenal.

115 Writing in the context of the economic circumstances of the fourth century CE, Alciphron graphically describes the urban poor of Corinth (Letters 3.24), and the homeless of Attica during winter (Letters 3.40). Cf. John Chrysostom, Hom 1 Cor. 11.5.

116 Meiggs, Roman Ostia, p. 13. Packer concludes that ‘the urban pattern of Rome was much like that of Ostia’, The Insulae of Imperial Ostia, p. 76. Carrington uses the Ostian evidence to trace the development of urban housing in ancient Italy right down to the twentieth century. ‘The Ancient Italian Town-House’, Antiquity 7 (1933), pp. 133-52.
As Packer’s data (above) shows, as at Rome, the vast majority of the inhabitants of Ostia were housed in multi-storey insula in conditions akin to Brunt’s ‘appalling slums’.

Living conditions in the many multiple dwelling buildings excavated at the site were generally crowded and (by modern standards) unpleasant, especially on the higher floors where the cheapest cenacula (rooms for rent) were located, the more prestigious lower floors being preserved for shops (tabernae) and middle class families. As was the case at Rome, the rooms on the upper levels in particular were small, the lighting poor, and facilities for heating and cooking were often rudimentary (chiefly braziers) or not present at all. J. Packer has (no doubt rightly) concluded that these multiple dwellings were not ‘homes’ in the modern sense of the word, in that the physical needs of the inhabitants were not met by the nature of the accommodation nor were they used to entertain guests.

What made life bearable at Ostia, as indeed at Rome and most other large cities of the Empire, were the beauty and excellence of the public buildings. Ostia had no less than fourteen baths and there is no point in the city more than five minutes walk from one of them. The nature of the physical evidence, excavated at the site at Ostia, strongly suggests that, for the vast majority of the inhabitants, as much of everyday life as possible was lived out in public places, in community with others. Packer calls this ‘communal living on a grand scale’, and applies the same principle to life in Rome:

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118 Rooms within an apartment building or house could be further sub-leased or sold, even to family members (P.Oxy 1.76).
119 The Insulae at Imperial Ostia, p. 73.
120 Packer, The Insulae at Imperial Ostia, p. 74.
121 The Insulae at Imperial Ostia, p. 74.
Like his Ostian counterpart, the typical Roman citizen must have lived almost entirely outside his apartment, in the streets, shops, arcades, arenas, and baths of the city. The average Roman domicile must have served only as a place to sleep and store possessions.122

Deborah Hobson, in a study of houses in Roman Egypt, reached a similar conclusion, noting that, for the average poor urban resident of the cities of Roman Egypt, life was largely lived outside and the sense of place was not connected to where one slept, but, principally, to one’s place of birth.123 The implications of this for the early Christian community, as well as other groups suspected of ‘anti-Roman activities’, was often severe, for, as Wayne Meeks notes: ‘much of life was lived on the streets and sidewalks, squares and porticoes’ with the result that ‘not much that happened in a neighborhood would escape the eyes of the neighbors’.124

(e) Ephesus

Turning to the third case study, we find that the situation regarding the domestic archaeology of Asia Minor is somewhat uncertain in that the region in general is greatly

122 ‘Housing and Population’, p. 87.
123 ‘House and Household in Roman Egypt’, pp. 228-29.
124 The First Urban Christians, p. 29.
under-represented in both the archaeological and literary record.\textsuperscript{125} Even a well preserved and partially excavated site, such as that of Ephesus, can provide only a paucity of physical evidence in regards to houses, some worthy of the description ‘palatial mansions’.\textsuperscript{126} The best excavated examples of the domestic architecture of ancient Ephesus face Hadrian’s temple across the Curetes street, in a prime central location. Here two insula (in the sense of city blocks) each containing six luxury houses, or better ‘residential units’, are built into the lower slope of the Bülbüldağ over three terraces. The two adjacent blocks, often called the Hanghäuser or ‘houses on the slope’ and individually designated Terrace House 1 and Terrace House 2 in much of the literature, have been progressively excavated since 1960, yielding some important results.\textsuperscript{127} These are, according to A. McKay, ‘undoubtedly the most exciting Roman house finds’ in all of Asia Minor.\textsuperscript{128} The oldest of the units in Terrace House 1 was constructed in the first century BCE with artwork and rebuilding dating from two to three centuries later, and archaeological evidence of continuous habitation into the seventh century. The residential

\textsuperscript{125} E.g. Katherine Dunbabin who laments the lack of studies and publications concerned with domestic mosaics. \textit{Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 223.

\textsuperscript{126} Murphy-O’Connor, \textit{St. Paul’s Ephesus}, p. 198. According to Rick Strelan, citing G. Hanfmann, ‘some private housing in Ephesus was storeyed up to five levels, many being quite palatial and containing excellent art work’. \textit{Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus} (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), p. 43n. The villa, once (incorrectly) designated as the Byzantine banqueting house, standing above the theatre is a further, largely unexcavated, example. Its design is Hellenistic, with a large peristyle facing west. Scherrer, \textit{Ephesus: The New Guide}, p. 170.


\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Houses, Villas and Palaces}, p. 212.
units of Terrace House 2, constructed towards the end of the first century BCE, were built around an internal peristyle or court, with lavishly decorated rooms of various size, together with magnificent gardens with pools, and walls decorated by paintings, mosaics, and frescoes. The furnishings and decoration are ceremonial in character throughout and reveal a very high standard of art and culture, including portraiture of numerous philosophers and poets together with mythological and poetic scenes, no doubt intended to reinforce on the visitor the considerable and important social standing of the owners. Like much of the Vesuvian evidence, these are, however, the homes of the privileged few. The grandeur and appeal of Ephesus today lies, understandably, in the scale and nature of the impressive ruins, with its colonnaded streets and iconic marble clothed buildings, together with the excavated remains of the lavishly decorated homes of the elite. It would be easy to gain from all of this a somewhat idealised and even romanticised picture of daily life and existence in the city, akin to the similarly glamorous depictions of Roman domestic and social life often found in earlier scholarship, which, excited by the finds at Pompeii and Herculaneum and comparing these to the descriptions of palatial villas in Vitruvius (Arch. 6) and Pliny (Ep. 2.17, 5.6; cf. Columella, Rust. 1.6), sometimes perpetuated the view that such houses ‘may be regarded as representative of… the Roman house’. The lavish homes and villas of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the


130 Most of the occupants are unknown. An inscription in residential unit 6 of Terrace House 2 names one C. Flavius Furius Aptus, who was presumably owner of that unit towards the end of the second century CE. Scherrer, *Ephesus: The New Guide*, p. 111.

opulent *Hanghäuser* of Ephesus were, however, greatly removed from the daily life and existence of the great majority of the inhabitants of the cities of the Roman world, inclusive of Ephesus, most of whom would probably have lived out a far more meagre existence in large, multi-storey apartment buildings (*insula*), or in private accommodation of varying sizes, as slaves, labourers, shopkeepers, and tradesmen of various description.

The enormous gulf which separated advantaged from disadvantaged in the Roman empire with respect to access to the legal system, medical care, and education, is also very evident in the case of housing which was taken to be an index of a person’s social status.  

This points to the existence in Ephesus, as in other parts of the Roman world, of two main types of domestic accommodation;

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and Co., 15th edn, 1894), p. 516. The influence of the Vesuvian evidence continues to be such that Andrew Wallace-Hadrill notes, since the early nineteenth-century the ‘standard conception’ of the Roman house has been largely derived from Pompeii and Herculaneum. *Houses and Society*, p. 15. Cf. also his essay ‘Rethinking the Roman *atrium* House’, in *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond* (ed. Ray Laurence & Andrew Wallace-Hadrill; Portsmouth: RI, 1997), pp. 219-40, which begins with the statement ‘our picture of Roman houses has been far too dominated by the evidence of Pompeii and Ostia’, p. 219.

(i) the private homes and villas of the wealthier classes typically owned by a single patriarch and occupied by his extended household

(ii) the high density apartment buildings (*insula*) in which the vast majority would have been accommodated in a variety of small and rudimentary rooms across (often) several storeys.

Whilst there are no extant material remains of *insula* at Ephesus, the archaeological record elsewhere (principally Ostia) has provided a partial picture of the nature and manner in which the majority of the population of a Roman city were housed, although, as Ann Hanson laments, it is still true that we know more about ‘the cramped rooms and tiny apartments of the urban poor than we know about the men and women who inhabited them’. 133

Despite the attention lavished on the *Hanghäuser*, it is clear that very few of the urban population of a city such as Ephesus would have been accommodated in such luxurious circumstances. A scarcity of evidence, archaeological or historical, remains of the multi-storied residential complexes, and of the tightly packed residential districts of the cities of Asia Minor and the eastern half of the Roman empire in general. As noted above, the only extant examples are in Italy, principally Ostia, although the literary record in particular preserves several lengthy descriptions of life in such *insula* in Rome during the imperial period. Because Ephesus experienced the same geographical limitations imposed

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by the lack of transport and the space dedicated to public buildings, present at Rome and Ostia and elsewhere, and because the urban area was well defined by walls and naturally occurring features, it seems probable that the same pressure felt in Rome by the combination of a growing population and limited geographical space, was generated also by the rapid expansion of Ephesus in the imperial age and manifested itself as an impetus to vertical expansion.\(^{134}\) Although throughout the east as a whole inquiries are frustrated by a lack of both material and literary evidence,\(^{135}\) the existence of at least two storey buildings in provincial cities and across the eastern half of the empire is well attested and suggests that, as in Italy, urban expansion was largely vertical. It is clear that many private homes, if not most, included at least an ‘upper room’ of the sort mentioned repeatedly in the Gospels (Mk 14.15, etc.) and Acts of the Apostles (1.3). The Acts (20.9) further records an incident in which a young man named Eutychus falls out of a window from the third level of a building in Troas, north-western Asia Minor. Strabo says the people of Aradus (Syria) live in ‘houses with many stories’ (Geogr. 16.2.13), and notes also that the houses in nearby Tyre ‘have many stories, even more than the houses of Rome’ (Geogr. 16.2.23). The descriptions of housing in the Egyptian papyri indicate that, where the nature of the housing is attested, 40% of urban houses were of two storeys, whilst 42% had three or more storeys, with one having seven storeys (\textit{P.\,Oxy} 34.2719).\(^{136}\)

\(^{134}\) Strabo (\textit{Geogr.} 14.641) notes the size and importance of Ephesus and Philostratus claims that the city has ‘increased in size beyond all the cities of Ionia and Lydia and, having outgrown the land on which it was built, had advanced into the sea’ (\textit{Vit. Apoll.} 8.7.28).


Antioch was, similarly, densely populated.\textsuperscript{137} Hence, as G. Hanfmann concludes, it has ‘become clear that as in Rome, Ostia, and Antioch, building upward must have prevailed in Asia Minor’,\textsuperscript{138} although vertical expansion was not universal, especially in the medium and smaller sized towns in rural areas.\textsuperscript{139}

The city area of Ephesus was defined, in part, by naturally occurring topography, and, in part, by the Hellenistic walls erected during the reign of Lysimachus. The ancient coastline lay to the west where the harbour complex was located. Geological drilling has shown that the land east of the ‘sacred way’ (Anodos), occupying the coastal plain stretching between the harbour and the Artemision, was still marine marshland into the second century CE.\textsuperscript{140} The extant Hellenistic walls on the slope of the Panayırdağ formed the eastern periphery of the city area between the Northern Gate and the Magnesian Gate. Graves and sarcophagai found between the walls and the ‘sacred way’ (Kathodos) indicate that this area lay outside of the city boundary.


\textsuperscript{138} \textit{From Croesus to Constantine: The Cities of Western Asia Minor and Their Arts in Greek and Roman Times} (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1975), p. 50.


What remains unclear still is the manner in which the considerable populace of this great city were housed within the boundaries of this urban area. Seneca (Ep. 102.21) noted in passing that the Ephesus of his time (mid first century CE) was ‘thickly populated’ and ‘richly spread with dwellings,’ and this accords with recent archaeological work that has confirmed the likelihood that both the southern slope of the Panayırdağ and the heavily terraced northern decline of the Bülbüldağ together with the adjoining harbour plain were densely populated residential areas in imperial times.\footnote{Scherrer, Ephesus: The New Guide, pp. 72, 120, 156.} According to the work conducted

\footnote{From Helmut Koester (ed), Ephesos Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture (HTS 41; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).}
there by Hike Thür, the entire slope of the Panayırdağ ‘was probably covered with residential houses with their entrances on two roads with the modern names of Academy Street and Bath Street’. The same patterns are evident along the heavily terraced northern decline of the Bülbüldağ and the adjoining harbour plain which ‘were among the most densely populated areas of the Hellenistic-Roman city’ although, like the slopes of the Panayırdağ, until very recently ‘hardly any excavations’ had taken place in this part of the city area. Between 2000 and 2006 the Austrian Archaeological Institute conducted, for the first time, extensive research in these areas using geophysical prospection and ground penetrating radar assisted by GPS technology. Although initially focused on the ‘upper city,’ it became clear that this research could not be conducted in isolation, and the prospection area was widened to include also the largely unexcavated northern and western areas of the ‘lower city.’

Das Ziel dieses Projekts war primär die Erforschung der Oberstadt von Ephesos, des Stadtareals östlich und südlich der oberen Agora (des ‘Staatsmarkts’), unter Anwendung moderner, zerstörungsfreier Methoden der Feldarchäologie. Bereits zu Projektbeginn war jedoch klar, dass die Entwicklung dieses Stadtteils nicht unabhängig oder losgelöst von jener des übrigen ephesischen Stadtgebiets diskutiert werden kann. Dies hatte zur Folge, dass die Feldforschungen über den

143 In Scherrer, Ephesus: The New Guide, pp. 120, 156.
144 Scherrer, Ephesus: The New Guide, p. 151. A further result of the paucity of excavation is that many buildings important to the history of the city are known only from inscriptions.
definierten Projektraum der Oberstadt hinaus auch auf die Unterstadt, den West-, Mittel- und Nordteil der Stadt, ausgedehnt wurden.\textsuperscript{146}

The results of the study confirmed the pattern of physical expansion during the first two centuries of the Common Era, revealing the layout of the streets arranged to the familiar Hippodamian grid pattern, and have further enabled the researchers to determine the probable functional land usage of the site in ancient times.

\textbf{Functional Use of Land}\textsuperscript{147}

Red = residential (housing)

Green = commercial use centered around the port (warehouses, markets, etc.) with some residential housing

Blue = public buildings

Grey = undetermined.

\textsuperscript{146} Groh et al, 'Neue Forschungen', p. 47.

\textsuperscript{147} From Stefan Groh et al, 'Neue Forschungen', p. 101.
The Austrian researchers have, on the basis of this evidence, divided the city into three regions following the conventions used at other sites such as Ostia and Pompeii.

Es lassen sich drei Regionen (Regio I–III) nach funktionalen Kriterien unterscheiden: die Regio I mit der Mehrzahl der öffentlichen Gebäude, dem neuen Stadtteil in der Ebene und einer Wohnstadt im hellenistischen Straßenraster; die Regio II mit der eigentlichen Wohnstadt hellenistischer Tradition und die Regio III, das Hafenviertel.\footnote{Groh et al, ‘Neue Forschungen’, p. 114. Extensive descriptions of the archaeological features of each of the regions is given, pp. 81-102}
Geophysical prospection has revealed, for the first time, the actual layout of the streets, together with the patterns of expansion from Hellenistic to Roman periods.\textsuperscript{150} The original Hellenistic city, laid out on the familiar grid pattern, was extended during the rapid expansion of imperial times into the unoccupied areas of Regio I and Regio II. The expansion followed the grid pattern, and the street system remained largely unchanged into the Byzantine era.\textsuperscript{151} The results of the study show that, as the population of the city grew, Regio II developed into a residential hub and was probably very heavily populated,

\textsuperscript{149} Stefan Groh et al, 'Neue Forschungen', p. 79.


\textsuperscript{151} Groh et al, ‘Neue Forschungen’, pp. 73-79.
whilst new commercial buildings and facilities, which also contained some residential housing typically above the shops and workshops, were constructed along the harbour plain in Regio III. As the city of Ephesus grew numerically in the imperial age, and as its economic growth funded new and increasingly grandiose public buildings, the streetscape expanded, extending the extant Hellenistic grid system as far as possible given the topographical features of the site. The patterns of urban growth and expansion in Imperial Ephesus, indicate that the primary form of accommodation was the type of multi-storey apartment building found elsewhere (Ostia), with such buildings occupying whole city blocks (insula) in a city laid out according to, and further developed along the lines of, the Hippodamian grid pattern.

Satellite picture of the site (2008)

152 This is the region where the famous inscription (I.Eph. 1a20; cf. I.Eph. 4.1266) of a guild of fishmongers was found.

153 © Google maps.
The excavations at Ephesus sponsored by the Austrian Archaeological Institute between 2000-2006, described above, confirm that a heavily populated residential area did indeed occupy the plateau lying between the Panayirdağı and Bülbüldağı hills, extending also the harbour plain, during the first two centuries of the Common Era. The street system remained largely unchanged into the Byzantine era. The rapid expansion of imperial times largely followed the established grid pattern into these previously unoccupied areas, which developed as a commercial and residential hub that was probably very heavily populated with high density housing and with commercial buildings and facilities containing residential housing, typically above the shops and workshops. Although little is known of the nature of the housing in these areas, the ‘partially excavated multi-storied residential buildings’ that lined Marble Street, if they can be taken as representative, suggest it was of a relatively modest standard, being in terms of both floor space and decoration, far inferior to those on Curetes Street (the Hanghäuser). Hence Jerome Murphy-O’Connor concludes that, in contrast to the luxury of the private villas of the

154 Groh et al, ‘Neue Forschungen,’ pp. 73-79.

155 Excavations conducted across Greece and Asia Minor show urban areas set out according to the grid pattern with considerable space (between 25% and 40%) devoted to public buildings. Of Olynthus: Nicholas Cahill, Household and City Organization at Olynthus (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002); Priene: (‘the oldest and finest’ example of a Hellenistic city built on the Hippodamian grid plan) Ekrem Akurgal, Ancient Civilizations and Ruins of Turkey, p. 185; Aphrodisias: Christopher Ratté, ‘New Research on the City Plan of Ancient Aphrodisias,’ in Across the Anatolian Plateau: Readings in the Archaeology of Ancient Turkey (ed. David C. Hopkins; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2002), pp. 197-203.

wealthy (such as the Hanghäuser), were the more commonplace multi storey insula which provided accommodation for the vast majority of the populace who lived either above their workplaces, or in rented apartments with many others, that were crowded, cramped, and noisy. This is very much like the picture of urban life that emerges of Rome, in the literary record, and of Ostia, in the archaeological record.

4. Population and Demography

Whilst the literary and archaeological data described in the three case studies referred to above can illuminate the probable physical features of the urban environment, it cannot populate them. Measuring the population, and the population density within it, of any ancient city is an exercise frustrated by many intangibles. The larger cities of the Roman world functioned as regional centres whose populace might also include a local diaspora of small landholders living beyond the city walls, sometimes whole villages in outlying areas, together with the households of large properties such as the ‘Villa of

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158 So Stefan Groh et al: ‘Angaben zur Bevölkerungszahl von Ephesos im 2. Jahrhundert n. Chr. sind bei dem derzeitigen Forschungsstand rein spekulativer Natur.’ ‘Neue Forschungen’, p. 113. As Barbara Levick has prudently observed ‘it is a notoriously dangerous business for the historian to estimate the ancient population either of a district or of a town’ for, not only is there often no evidence at all, ‘what does exist is frequently treacherous’. Roman Colonies in Southern Asia Minor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 92. Apart from the paucity of evidence, as Tim Parkin points out, the population of the cities of the Roman world was not static but changed over time. Demography and Roman Society (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 4-5.
Mysteries’ located just beyond the walls of Pompeii.\textsuperscript{159} There are, furthermore, numerous questions that archaeology simply cannot answer, such as those of household composition and the levels of household occupancy.\textsuperscript{160} As Diana Delia concludes, of Roman Alexandria, it is all but ‘impossible’ to measure the population density of a city in which substantial archaeological evidence of the nature of the housing is not present and the levels of household occupancy unknown.\textsuperscript{161} Some concrete data has, however, been forthcoming in recent research at Ephesus through the aegis of the Austrian team. In addition to plotting the pattern of the streets and the probable land use, the researchers calculated that the habitable area of urban Ephesus contained about 300 ‘areas’ of which between 200 and 250 could be determined as residential or as commercial containing on site residential housing. It was assumed that each ‘area’ further contained up to ten ‘plots’

\textsuperscript{159} R. P. Duncan-Jones, ‘City Population in Roman Africa,’ \textit{JRS} (1963), pp. 85-86.

\textsuperscript{160} Hence Bradley Ault and Lisa Levett lament that, for all of their beauty, interest, and wonder, the houses excavated at Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Ostia, and at other locations across the Roman world are, essentially, ‘empty shells’ that tell us very little about the lives of those who once inhabited them. ‘Digging Houses: Archaeologies of Classical and Hellenistic Assemblages,’ in \textit{The Archaeology of Household Activities} (ed. Penelope M. Allison; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 44. Similarly, Michele George notes the fundamental incongruity between the historical and archaeological record in regards to slaves: we know, for example, from the historical sources that slaves were present, in the larger houses in very significant numbers, however we see almost no trace of their existence in domestic architecture. ‘Servus and Domus: The Slave in the Roman House,’ in \textit{Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond} (ed. Ray Laurence & Andrew Wallace-Hadrill; Portsmouth: RI, 1997), p. 24.

with ten households, with an average size per household of ten persons, this yielding a total population of ca. 25,000 accommodated in 90-120 hectares of urban area (giving a population density of between 208 pph [people per hectare] and 277 pph).\textsuperscript{162} This is clearly at odds with almost all previous estimates, including that of J. C. Russell, who estimated the inhabitable area to be 345 hectares and the total population 51,060 with a density of only 148 pph,\textsuperscript{163} a figure that Jerome Murphy-O’Connor dismisses as ‘far too low’:\textsuperscript{164} Recognizing that the estimate of total population is probably too low, the Austrian researchers were willing to countenance a greater population (up to 70,000) at the height of the city’s growth and expansion in the second century CE. In comparison, nearby Miletus had a population of c. 40,000 in 70 hectares of urban area (giving an estimated density of 571 pph), and Alexandria a population of up to 500,000 in about 900 hectares of urban area (giving a density of 555 pph).\textsuperscript{165} The population densities of the most heavily populated urban areas on each continent today is universally much lower; e.g. Sydney (21 pph), New York (40 pph), Sofia (94 pph), Rio de Janeiro (101 pph),

\textsuperscript{162}‘Eine Stadtfläche setzt sich aus zehn Parzellen zusammen, d. h., es ist ursprünglich mit zehn Familien mit ca. zehn Mitgliedern, in Summe mit 100 Personen pro Stadtfläche zu rechnen. Im Stadtgebiet befinden sich etwa 300 Stadtflächen, von denen zumindest 200–250 oder 90–120 ha zu Wohn- und gewerblichen Zwecken genutzt werden, was eine Zahl von ca. 25 000 Personen ergibt.’ Groh et al, ‘Neue Forschungen,’ p. 112.

\textsuperscript{163}‘Late Ancient and Medieval Population’, \textit{TAPhA} 48 (1958), pp. 80-81.

\textsuperscript{164} \textit{St. Paul’s Ephesus}, p. 131.

\textsuperscript{165} Groh et al, ‘Neue Forschungen,’ p. 113. Assuming a total population of 20,000 and total residential area of 42 hectares (allowing around one third of the urban space for non-residential use) the population density of Pompeii would be c. 476 pph.
Addis Ababa (180 pph), Hong Kong (361 pph), and Bombay (389 pph).\textsuperscript{166} If the population of imperial Ephesus was anything like the widely asserted figure of a total in the region of 200,000 to 250,000, as has been widely asserted, the density would be truly astonishing.\textsuperscript{167}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>90 hectares</th>
<th>120 hectares</th>
<th>345 hectares</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>200,000</td>
<td>2,222 pph</td>
<td>1,666 pph</td>
<td>579 pph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>2,777 pph</td>
<td>2,083 pph</td>
<td>724 pph</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{166} Alain Bertaud,‘Order Without Design,’ 2003 (www.alain-bertaud.com).

The table above shows that, even at the lowest end of the scale, the population density of ancient Ephesus far exceeded that of the most densely populated urban areas in the world today. At the upper limit suggested by Groh et al, the population density of Ephesus (at 1,111 pph) is far in excess of Bombay (389 pph), and if the commonly suggested population in the region of 200,000 to 250,000 is allowed, the density is in excess of 2,000 pph.\footnote{R Stark, \textit{The Rise of Christianity}, p. 143.} Whilst nothing precise can be claimed in terms of actual figures, given the great variances in estimates of population and habitable area, it does seem certain that the population density of ancient Ephesus was immense, and far beyond anything comparable to even the most heavily populated urban areas today.\footnote{At the very least, Ephesus was one of the most heavily crowded cities of the era. Acaroglu, ‘The Evolution of Urbanization’, p. 543.} The primary factors bringing about the enormity of the population density were, (i) the well defined city area enclosed by walls and natural features, (ii) the space dedicated to public buildings and infrastructure, within the overall geographical area of the city, which was consistent with that of other excavated Graeco-Roman cities in which the public buildings and other infrastructure occupy between 25% and 40% of the total urban area,\footnote{Ramsay McMullen, \textit{Roman Social Relations}, p. 63. At Pompeii the space occupied by public buildings is approximated at 34% and at Ostia 43%. Stambaugh, \textit{The Ancient Roman City}, p. 90n.} and (iii) the lack of transport necessitating that, unlike the urban sprawl and ease of transport in modern cities, everything in an ancient city like Ephesus needed to be within walking distance. A densely populated city is in accordance with the picture of city life that comes to us in the literary evidence wherein the ‘shouting’ and ‘chanting’ of the outraged artisans of
Ephesus was sufficient to gather a large crowd according to biblical story (Acts 19.28-29). In such an environment, as was the case at other centres such as Ostia, life was lived in community, in full view of neighbours and others.  

As is the case regarding population and density, our understanding of the social circumstances and the demographic features of ancient cities are adversely effected by a paucity of evidence that results in historical demographers being ‘poorly equipped’ to establish any reliable facts regarding population trends and composition in the ancient world. Despite this, some conclusions can be drawn as to the age and composition of populations across the Roman world, and their relative life expectancy. The incidence of infant mortality (death prior to attaining one year of age) in the Roman Empire was, compared to a modern Western society, extremely high and numerous inscriptions reflect these realities and lament children who have died young.

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171 In an apocryphal account of Paul’s preaching activity in Iconium, Thecla is said to have been converted to Christianity by listening to Paul preach inside the courtyard of a neighbouring house from an adjoining window. *Acts of Paul & Thecla* 7.

172 W. Scheidel, ‘Roman Age Structure: Evidence and Models’, *JRS* 91 (2001), p. 1. This is because very few records of ancient life expectancy, mortality, or fertility, have survived. Those extant, principally epitaphs, are notoriously unreliable. For one, there is, again, a strong bias to the wealthier classes present in tombstones and funerary inscriptions as, although some of the poorer classes joined funerary associations, it was still unlikely that many of the urban poor could afford to erect a post-mortem monument. R. P. Duncan-Jones, ‘Age-Rounding, Illiteracy and Social Differentiation in the Roman Empire’, *Chiron* 7 (1977), p. 345; Keith Hopkins, ‘On the Probable Age Structure of the Roman Population’, *Population Studies* 20 (1966), p. 247. Hopkins further concludes that ‘the pattern of ages at death derived from Roman tombstones… is mostly demographically impossible and always highly improbable’, p. 246.
Here I lie, Veturia by name and descent, a married woman. I was Fortunatus’s wife, my father was Veturias… I died after having borne six children; one of them survives me (CIL 3.3572).\textsuperscript{173}

To the spirits of the departed and to Hateria Superba who lived one year, six months and twenty-five days. Her inconsolable parents, Q. Haterius Ephebus and Julia Sosima, set up this monument for their daughter, for themselves and their household (ILS 8005).

The literary record, similarly, preserves repeated examples of very high infant and childhood mortality with less than a quarter of most children born even to wealthy and privileged families surviving beyond ten years of age.\textsuperscript{174} Tim G. Parkin calculates infant mortality in the Roman empire to be in the order of 300 per 1,000 births annually.\textsuperscript{175} This is to be compared to rate of less than 10 per 1,000 in modern Western societies today. In addition to this, a significant number of infants surviving beyond one year of age would

\textsuperscript{173} Cf. CIL 2.5477, 6.14094, 6.7578; Martial, Epigr. 5.34.

\textsuperscript{174} E.g. Cicero, Fam. 4.5.1-6; Plutarch, Ti C. Gracch. 1.2; Pliny, Nat. 7.13.57; Seneca, Marc. 16.3, Helv. 16.6; Suetonius, Cal. 7; Qunitilian, Inst. 6.2-11. For good reason did Augustus, according to Cassius Dio (56.3), advise the (wealthy) citizens of Rome ‘we must… make up for the mortality of our human nature by means of the unending succession of future generations’.

die before reaching their fifth birthday.\textsuperscript{176} The exceptionally high incidence of infant and childhood mortality meant that life expectancy at birth across the Roman empire was, on average, very low, and that the age composition of the population was very young. Because life expectancy was so low and the incidence of infant mortality so high, fertility rates needed to be very high in order to maintain a stable population.\textsuperscript{177} Even for the elite, however, the high incidence of infertility, natal mortality, and infant mortality, meant that ensuring heirs and sustaining one’s \textit{domus} was fraught with difficulty and sadness.\textsuperscript{178} Most cities must have sustained their population largely through migration.\textsuperscript{179}


\textsuperscript{177} This lies, partly, in the background to the Augustan legislation concerning marriage and the production of children (\textit{lex Iulia de adulteriis} and \textit{lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus} 18 BCE; \textit{lex Papia Poppaea} 9 CE), although the laws were primarily concerned with restoring the ‘many exemplary practices of our ancestors that were becoming forgotten in our time’ (\textit{Res Gestae} 8.5). Privileges were extended, by Augustus, to those who married and produced children (Dio Cassius 53.13.2-3; 54.16.1-2). Cf. Suetonius, \textit{Aug.} 34; Isidorus, \textit{Origines} 5.15.1; Tacitus, \textit{Ann.} 3.25.1; Digest \textit{Marcian} 23.2.19; Aulus Gellius, \textit{Noct. att.} 2.15.-4-7; Justinian, \textit{Inst.} 4.18.2-3. Cf. Polybius 36.17-5-10, who, commenting on depopulation in Greece during the second century BCE, attributes this partially to greed, avarice, extravagance, and the anti-social behaviour of some who do not marry or marry but refuse to bring up the children born to them. For a sceptical view of the evidence of Polybius see Donald Engels, ‘The Use of Historical Demography in Ancient History’, \textit{CQ} 34 (1984), p. 392.

\textsuperscript{178} Pliny, \textit{Ep.} 4.21.1-3; \textit{CIL} 3.6759, 6.20427

\textsuperscript{179} The manner in which this was case at Ephesus, for example, is outlined by L. Michael White: ‘Urban Development and Social Change in Imperial Ephesos’, in H. Koester (ed), \textit{Ephesos: Metropolis of Asia}, pp. 43-49.
high rate of mortality also had economic implications, in that cities often became ‘dependent for their continuing prosperity on immigration from the countryside, other cities, and through the purchase of slaves’.\textsuperscript{180} Several methodologies have been used to calculate average life expectancy across the Roman empire. A study of over 2,000 epitaphs giving age at death led John Durand to estimate the average life expectancy at birth to be between 20 and 30 years across the Roman world, with the inhabitants of Asia at the upper end of the scale (29.2) and the residents of Rome at the lower.\textsuperscript{181} Bruce Frier understands the evidence of Ulpian (\textit{Dig.} 35.2.68) to be applicable across the empire and the yardstick by which other methods ought to be measured, especially that of epigraphy.\textsuperscript{182} Frier calculates the average life expectancy at birth given by Ulpian’s ‘life table’ to be 21.11 years.\textsuperscript{183} Frier reached a similar conclusion in a further study of ancient


\textsuperscript{183} ‘Roman Life Expectancy: Ulpian’s Evidence’, p. 249. The incidence of infant mortality in Ulpian is 466.9 per 1,000 births, p. 249.
sources (principally Ulpian but also some extant gravestones), concluding that average life expectancy across the empire was about twenty-one years at birth and around forty-five years for those who lived to reach an age of ten, and again, albeit more cautiously, in regards to skeletal evidence for Pannonia, which yielded similar results in terms of life expectancy and seems also to apply across the empire. As Tim Parkin observes, ‘it is mainly the severe rates of mortality at infancy and childhood that produce such a low expectation of life at birth’. Even so, the average life expectancy, whether 21 or 25 or 30, as commonly reported, is an indication based on averages, which are most reliable where data is distributed evenly and reliably. In reality, the prospects of an infant born in the Roman empire of the first and second centuries CE were much lower. About one in three or maybe one in four would die before reaching their first birthday. A significant number would die in childhood. However, upon attaining ten years of age one could expect to live a little longer than the average life span of 20-30 years, and those reaching their twenties would, on average, far exceed this.

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186 *Demography and Roman Society*, p. 92.


188 On the effect that the relatively late age of marriage (c. 25 years on average) among Roman men had on the nature of the society, see Richard P. Saller, ‘Men’s Age at Marriage and its Consequences in the Roman Family,’ *CP* 82 (1987), pp. 21-34.
The incidence of infant and childhood mortality would have produced a very young population. A significant piece of evidence in regards to the probable age composition of Roman cities and communities are the extant census returns originating from Roman Egypt during period ca. 11 CE to 258 CE, and ‘usually conceded to be most credible

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189 Average life expectancy at \(x\) years, after the standard life table applied to late Republican Rome (Coale-Demeny 2, Model West, Level 3, Female), reproduced from Parkin & Pomeroy, *Roman Social History*, p. 354. The table expresses average life expectancy in years, plotted on the vertical axis, from the reference point of age \(x\) years, plotted on the horizontal axis. Life expectancy at age \(x=0\) years (i.e. birth) is 25 years, mainly due to the very high incidence of infant mortality. Those who live to the age of \(x=10\) years can expect, on average, to live a further 37 years. Those who attain an age of \(x=30\) years can expect, on average, to live a further 26 years, etc.
demographic evidence that survives from the Greco-Roman world’.\textsuperscript{190} In a major analysis of this evidence Roger S. Bagnall and Bruce W. Frier conclude that ‘despite many uncertainties’ the census returns indicate an average life expectancy very similar to that previously reached in other contexts, ‘in the lower twenties, probably between 22 and 25 years’.\textsuperscript{191}

**Egyptian census data\textsuperscript{192}**

![Graph showing age distribution](image)

An important methodological question immediately arises: to what extent can the evidence of human mortality above be applied to, and considered representative of other urban centres? In regards to the application of this evidence beyond Roman Egypt,


\textsuperscript{191} *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, p. 109.

\textsuperscript{192} Showing the percentage of persons in each age group, assuming a stable population and cohort of 100,000. Table after Parkin & Pomeroy, *Roman Social History*, p. 64.
Bagnall & Frier, importantly, conclude that, allowing for regional differences in regards to nuptiality and household structure, ‘the basic demographic attributes of Roman Egypt are, at the least, thoroughly at home in the Mediterranean’ nor is there any ‘a priori reason why most of these attributes should be regarded as unique to Egypt among Roman provinces’. If the data above can be applied across the Roman empire, and to Asia Minor in the first century CE, as seems apparent, the picture of urban life that emerges is that of a very young populace, in which more than 50% are aged under thirty, almost half of whom are children. Those who lived beyond ten years of age would have outlived most of their childhood playmates. Children and adolescents would have matured very quickly. Careers, the generation of a livelihood, marriage, and the procreation of children and heirs, were all things that could not wait. Hence *carpe diem* (seize the day) was a widespread sentiment (*CIL* 6.23942).

5. From ‘House Church’ to ‘Tenement Church’

It is in the context of the urban environment described previously utilizing the three case studies of Rome, Ostia Antica, and Ephesus, and characterized by the sociological and demographic features described above, that the first generations of urban Christians appeared. As a highly bonded group in this environment, the continued existence of the community, not withstanding the perpetuation of its missiological impetus, would to a large and important extent that is often left unacknowledged, depend on its ability to find and establish physical space in the city. Most previous studies on the emergence of early

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193 *The Demography of Roman Egypt*, p. 173.
Christianity have concluded, or sought to demonstrate, that the private house or villa, or at least domestic space usually inhabited by a single *familia* presided over by a *paterfamilias* who acted as patron-householder, provided the physical locus for the formation of the early Christian community in the cities of the Graeco-Roman world. It will be demonstrated here, however, that especially in the so-called ‘second stage’ of its development (the *Domus ecclesiae*), the *insula* or apartment block was widely utilized as an instrument for, not only group formation, but expansion also. This was facilitated by a number of factors, among them the very high incidence of mortality and very low life expectancy, and high levels of migration, which produced a fluidity of population which in turn, at the height of the empire’s expansion corresponding as it did to the rise (and rise) of Christianity, resulted in an unprecedented boom in prosperity, population, and building works, together with a rapidly expanding and changing rental market.

(a) Finding space in the city

Christianity took root and began to flourish as an essentially urban phenomenon. The social world of early Christianity was then, that of the Graeco-Roman city described in the case studies above. This was an urban landscape characterised by over-crowding, narrow streets, and a density of housing and population that was 'astonishing'.

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produced a social environment of 'face to face communities'\textsuperscript{195} in which the differentiation between private and public space and gatherings was blurred, a situation compounded by the natural curiosity of neighbours and the efficacy of the ‘gossip’ networks.\textsuperscript{196} In such an enclosed environment the 'face to face' nature of communal life meant that material barriers such as walls, buildings, and yards did not necessarily separate people. Social differentiation was, instead, emphasised by personal markers such as ethnicity, religion, familial heritage, and economic status.\textsuperscript{197} The shared meal at table was, in this social situation, much more than an occasion for eating and fellowship. It was the locus of social differentiation and status and the place where religion, ethnicity, economic status, and social standing were established, defined, and, ultimately, exposed. Whilst the vast majority of the population of the Graeco-Roman city were, no doubt, housed in crowded, multi-storey \textit{insula}, inadequate attention has been given to the potential for such physical spaces to function as the locus of community and to provide a physical place for highly bonded groups such as families and communities gathered around a common interest or cultic practice to establish a presence in the city. To this end


\textsuperscript{196} This was especially so in regards to important social rituals such as meals and hospitality. Hence Margaret Y. MacDonald writes: ‘Paul understands the rituals of community gatherings to be publicly visible, undoubtedly subject to the evaluation of curious neighbours, and circulated by means of gossip networks’. \textit{Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 145. This was further exacerbated by the ‘proselytising’ nature of Christianity as a ‘conversionalist sect’ in which there was a constant tension between the imperative of ‘preaching the Gospel’ to all and the privacy of the community.

\textsuperscript{197} Stowers, ‘Social Status’, pp. 81-82.
Andrew Wallace-Hadrill has recently, and helpfully, questioned the ‘conventionally rigid distinction between the *domus* and the *insula*’ instead placing an emphasis on the network of relationships that operated within the domestic space, whatever its material nature and characteristics.

I found myself gradually moving away from the standard image of the Roman *domus* as a ‘single-family unit’ and toward thinking of it as a ‘big house’ inhabited by a ‘houseful’ rather than a household; not only a parent-children-slaves unit, but a cluster linked by relationships that could vary from relationship and dependency to commercial tenancy.\(^{198}\)

In a rapidly growing and expanding city, such as Ephesus and to some extent Rome and Ostia Antica also, the movement and flow of people was incessant, with continued growth and expansion largely sustained through continuous migration, given the very

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Wallace-Hadrill draws attention to the excavations at Antiche Stanze (Rome), wherein a large house 'not at all distant from that of a Pompeian *domus*' was constructed in association with a dense block of shops and apartments in multi-storey buildings, these probably generating a rental income for the householder. A further feature of the complex was a large room occupying two storeys which he suggests may be the meeting room or hall of a group or association. His conclusion: 'the modern conviction that the rich *domus* was fundamentally different from an *insula* with its rental apartments evaporates' upon consideration of the evidence. *Domus and Insulae* in Rome', pp. 10-14.
rates of infant mortality and the low life expectancy. The constant flow of people into a city like Ephesus meant that the means of accommodating them, principally the rental market, would have been, as a consequence, remarkably fluid. The Egyptian papyri, which preserves a large number of house sales and rentals, shows a pattern of frequent coming and going with no apparent lasting association between a house and the occupying household. Domestic space could have a multiplicity of functionality. In some large houses, such as the Hanghäuser at Ephesus, parts of the private house facing the street were rented as shop space and either used as shops by the owner or sub-leased to other occupiers who lived in rooms behind or above the shop. Some rooms within a larger private house and in multi-storey buildings were rented to other tenants, typically on the upper floors. In the highly transient nature of the rental market whole insula, as well as individual floors and clusters of apartments therein, might readily become available in relatively short spaces of time. There was potential in the rapidly changing urban environment for groups such as guilds and collegia to establish themselves in individual insula and to, eventually, occupy whole city blocks and areas, using these as a basis for consolidation and further expansion. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill again:

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201 Apuleius, Apol. 57.

Multiple apartments imply essentially commercial relationships; yet I have suggested that we should not overlook the possibility of a strong sense of community among such neighbors. Just as the corporation lists of Ostia name people together, and the columbaria bury them together, *insulae* may conveniently house them together.\textsuperscript{203}

The emphasis falls here on the network of relationships within the domestic space, whatever its material nature and characteristics. Although groups connected by kinship, trade, and religion (e.g. the first Christians) did find space initially in rented or donated public space such as halls, and in the larger homes of the wealthier patron-householders, the potential for the *insula* to function as a physical space in the context of the densely populated urban landscape, in which homogenous communities gathered around not only familial links but ethnic, commercial, and cultic ties also, should not be discounted.\textsuperscript{204}

This pattern is, in fact, well known on a smaller scale whereby the ground floors of multi-storey buildings typically housed shops (*tabernae*) and workshops, with the shopkeeper or tradesman and their families occupying an upper floor, and on a much larger scale in Rome, whereby whole neighbourhoods (*vici*) were eventually occupied by families.

\textsuperscript{203} ‘*Domus* and *Insulae* in Rome’, p. 18.

\textsuperscript{204} Of the early Christian community, see David L. Balch, ‘Rich Pompeian Houses, Shops for Rent, and the Huge Apartment Building in Herculaneum as Typical Spaces for Pauline House Churches’, *JSNT* 27 (2004), pp. 27-46.
engaged in the same economic enterprise.\textsuperscript{205} At times, as the particular group or association increased its stake in the premises, entire ground floors, and sometimes the second floors, were renovated to provide space for the dominant group to conduct its business, hold its meetings, and perform its rituals. Domestic space was a ‘dynamic and changing environment’ that was often multi-functional and adaptable according to need.\textsuperscript{206} The space was, furthermore, defined by occupants, and not the reverse, for ‘it is not the lodgings and the houses which give their names to those who live within them, but it is the tenants who give the places the names of their own pursuits’ (Aeschines 1.123-124). One of the ways in which a highly bonded group, formed around a kinship, ethnic, commercial, or cultic anchor, might establish a presence in the city was to seek to rent and occupy shops, workshops, and rooms in a particular building (\textit{insula}) and, over time, gradually establish a dominant presence within that building to the extent that renovations of the space consistent with the needs of the dominant occupying group became possible. In time, an entire floor, building, or even block of buildings or neigbourhood (\textit{vici}), might become the physical locus for the presence of that group in that city. For this reason does Andrew Wallace-Hadrill invite his readers 'to think about Rome not so much as an undifferentiated sea of distinct units of housing, be they \textit{domus}

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\textsuperscript{205} In Rome ‘each quarter would specialize in a particular branch of business, all the artisans and traders of a single neighbourhood working at the same or at complementary crafts’. F. Dupont, \textit{Daily Life in Ancient Rome}, p. 144.
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\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{206} Joanne Berry, ‘Household Artefacts: Towards a Re-Interpretation of Roman Domestic Space’, in \textit{Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond}, p. 194.
\end{flushleft}
or insulae, flowing around the great public monuments, but as a series of cellular neighborhoods'.

(b) Finding space in the insula

It has long been demonstrated that the Pauline Christian communities in particular experienced a gradual transition from an egalitarian community gathered around a charismatic leader, to a more highly structured organism modeled on the hierarchy of the Graeco-Roman household. The manner in which this occurred, relatively quickly, throughout the course of the second half of the first century and beyond has been capably documented by Margaret Y. MacDonald, applying the sociological methodology of institutionalization, and is present, with varying degrees of clarity, in the New Testament and other early Christian texts. Whilst the process has been understood in terms of its sociology, this has not often been the case in regards to the nature of the physical space in which the group must have met. The sociological phenomena of

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208 Horrell, 'From adelphoi to oikos theou', p. 310.


210 The originally egalitarian, ‘charismatic’ group who appear in the Corinthian correspondence, with a loosely defined structure and largely itinerant leadership, is usually contrasted with the explicit instructions of the deutero-Pauline Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy; Titus). The structure of local leaders (presbyters) and overseers (episkopos) proscribed by the Pastoral Letters is fully developed in the Ignatian correspondence of the early second century.
institutionalization occurred roughly concurrent with the progression of the second and third stages identified in the development of Christian architecture (*Oikos ecclesiae* and *Domus ecclesiae*). In his seminal study on the origins of Christian architecture, L. Michael White wisely cautions that the distinctions and stages of development should not be pressed too far and rightly warns that a high degree of overlap exists in the archaeological record, varying from place to place.  

In some places, Christians in small numbers might have continued to meet in the upper rooms or *triclinia* of private homes well beyond the arbitrary cut off point for the transition from first stage (*oikos ecclesiae*) to second stage (*domus ecclesiae*). In other places houses might have been renovated and rooms (halls) used for worship, and elsewhere homes converted for Christian use, of the sort known from Dura-Europos, might have been established where the community had the means to do so. What does seem clear is that, by around 100 CE, the Christian community had become, or was becoming, highly structured with a system of local leaders operating under the leadership of a regional overseer. The authority of the local overseers (*episkopos*) was being asserted and insisted upon by both the writer of the Pastoral Epistles and Ignatius, addressing Christian communities in eastern cities around the turn of the second century. By this time the number of Christians in each of the cities so addressed was rising and the capacity for the community to continue to be accommodated within private homes must have been severely stretched, especially if the

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211 E.g. It is not necessarily the case that the basilica became the norm everywhere immediately after the conversion of Constantine. White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture*, Vol. 1, p. 23.  

212 E.g. Tertullian, *Val. 2.580*, around the turn of the third century.
community met in the triclinium as is usually supposed.\(^{213}\) The social pressure inevitably manifested itself architecturally. The earliest extant reference to Christians 'going' to what is specifically identified as a place of worship is by Clement of Alexandria (ca. 180-203) who uses the term Τῇν ἑκκλησίαν (\textit{Paed}. 79.3). In a similar passage from the \textit{Stromata} (29.3-4) Clement refers to the locale of the assembly as 'sacred' (ἰερόν) this being understood in these terms by virtue of the fact the structure built in the divinity’s honour. This indicates that buildings identified as places of assembly were present, at least in the east, around the turn of the third century, well before the house at Dura-Europos was to be renovated for Christian purposes c. 240 CE, but within the date range for the second stage (\textit{Domus ecclesiae}) proposed by the ‘three stage’ theory (c. 150 - 250 CE).\(^{214}\) The provision of such places of worship, and the acceleration of the ‘third stage’ of architectural development (\textit{Aula ecclesiae}) must have been relatively widespread in some areas for towards the end of the third century. Porphyry (\textit{Christ.} Frag. 76) laments that

\(^{213}\) The \textit{triclinium} was, essentially, a dining and reception room, and a setting for important family occasions, wherein the householder entertained the most privileged of guests to meals, philosophical discourses, and made announcements and pronouncements (e.g. Apuleius, \textit{Metam.} 2.19). The capacity of most \textit{tricilinia} would probably not have exceeded forty. Yvon Thèbert, ‘Private Life and Domestic Architecture in Roman Africa’, in \textit{A History of Private Life. I, From Pagan Rome to Byzantium} (ed. Paul Veyne; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 369. But see also the discussion of D. Balch who warns against assuming a fixed number in each instance, concluding that some houses available to the community might have had a considerably larger capacity and some less. 'Rich Pompeiian Houses', p. 28.

\(^{214}\) Papyrology of an Egyptian provenance also strongly suggests that, by the third century, the Christian community were in a position to acquire property, in both cases private houses, for dedicated usage. \textit{P.Oxy. XII}, 1493; \textit{P.Gen.Inv.} 108.
the Christians of his day feel the need to erect great buildings, mimicking the pagan
temples, rather than pray in their houses (as has, presumably, been their custom).215

Both the archaeological and literary records affirm that, by the third century, the second
stage of the development of Christian architecture (Domus ecclesiae) was in full progress,
with existing private houses being renovated for dedicated Christian purpose and
probably larger spaces, such as halls and basilica, beginning to emerge in some places.
The transition from the oikos ecclesiae or ‘house church’ did not, however, occur
spontaneously. For many decades, in the period stretching from emergence (c. 50 CE)
through to the first certain archaeological example of a converted domus ecclesiae (c. 240
CE), the Christian communities of the Graeco-Roman world must have continued to meet
in private domestic space of increasingly large capacity to accommodate the escalating
numbers involved. This is especially the case during the critical period of the second
century CE, which occupies the transitional period between Oikos ecclesiae and Domus
ecclesiae, and which is largely silent in the archaeological and literary record. Examples
of other closely bonded groups in antiquity do provide, however, some important clues as
to what might have been occurring among the urban Christians during this period. L.
Michael White describes the progress of the cult of Sarapis, which was brought to the
island of Delos in the Ptolemaic period. Initially established in the apartment of its priest,
the cult continued to be housed in rented premises for two generations before a temple

215 This is consistent with the claim of Eusebius (Hist. eccl. 8.2.4-5) that one of the intents of the
persecution conducted by Diocletian (dated by Eusebius to March 303) was to destroy the church buildings.
dedicated to the god was eventually built (designation Sarapeion A by archaeologists).\textsuperscript{216}

Interestingly, and very significantly, the first Sarapeion was built 'by architectural extension of an existing insula'.\textsuperscript{217} A similar architectural progression has been revealed by the excavation of the synagogue at Dura-Europos, originally a private house in an \textit{insula} block of ten dwellings.\textsuperscript{218}

A survey of the local religious landscape at Dura-Europos over time indicates that this process of gradual appropriation and adaptation was commonly followed. A guild of professional scribes took over two houses and renovated them into a collegial establishment in the same block as the synagogue, also renovated from a house. Down the street in one direction stood the renovated domus ecclesiae of the Christians; in the other direction was the house renovated to become a mithraeum. In case after case, year after year, these small religious associations adapted private domestic structures for public religious or collegial use. The ability to acquire such property and adapt it for special use through architectural renovation had significant impact on the social fabric of the city.\textsuperscript{219}

Cultic space was often created by means of renovation. At Ostia, the Mithraeum of Callinicus (second century) was created by renovating two ground floor rooms of an

\textsuperscript{217} White, \textit{The Social Origins of Christian Architecture}, Vol. 1, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{219} White, \textit{The Social Origins of Christian Architecture}, Vol. 1, p. 44.
existing *insula* located on a prominent street,\(^{220}\) and to this may be added the mithraeum in two converted rooms of the Casa di Diana *insula* at Ostia.\(^{221}\) This points to the possibility that, ultimately, sociological categories may provide an answer to the archaeological questions. Justin Martyr, a Christian teacher in Rome of Palestinian origin who provides in his *Apologia* one of the earliest known descriptions of Christian worship (*1 Apol.* 61, 65, 67), upon being interrogated by Q. Junius Rusticus,\(^{222}\) confirms that the Christians of his time meet in the place where he is staying (i.e. renting) 'above the baths' in what was almost certainly 'a large urban insula of the type typically found at Rome'.\(^{223}\) As with other groups, the pattern is for Christians to establish themselves within a locale, initially a house or apartment owned by a group member, and then to gradually assert through the acquisition of property, and architectural adaptation thereof, the ascendancy of the group in a manner that can be demonstrated archaeologically. Such a progression, based on continuity of use and adaptation of a site, is present at the excavations at San Clemente. Here the stages of development follow the chronology below:

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(i) construction of the original building (designated House ABCD) late first century CE
(ii) construction of conjoined private domus (designated House WXYZ) late first or early second century
(iii) renovation of part of House WXYZ for a mithraeum late second or early third century
(iv) rebuilding of House ABCD as a hall, possibly for Christian usage, mid third century
(v) renovation of entire structure to create a Christian basilica late fourth century.\(^{224}\)

A similar progression, with structural modifications of internal rooms carried out to create space for meetings of larger groups, can be observed in excavations at the insula Aracoeli (Rome),\(^ {225}\) and in the renovated insula Titulus Byzantis (Rome), with the floor plans showing the modifications carried out pictured below.\(^ {226}\)

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Richard Krautheimer finds the same process present in excavations at the later basilica of SS. Giovanni e Paolo (Rome), where it was not a private house (*domus*) but an apartment complex (*insula*) which underwent renovation and adaptation.

It progressed from an insula complex, in which a small Christian cell met in a rear shop, to a renovated domus ecclesiae. Gradual adaptation continued until the entire insula had been taken over, well before the time it was converted to basilical form.\(^{227}\)

The literary record further embellishes that which is present in the archaeological. The Christians in one part of Rome had 'taken possession of a certain place' in the early third century, provoking a complaint and (favourable) response, preserved in a biography of Severus Alexander.\footnote{Historia Augusta, \textit{Severus Alexander} 49.6.} That the complainants are cooks or keepers of eating houses suggests the premises are probably rooms above the \textit{tabernae} in an insula block.

The same phenomena demonstrated to be present in Rome, was almost certainly repeated in other parts of the Roman world. At Panapolis in Egypt, for instance, papyri compiled by city officials listing numerous houses in an apparently residential area of the city mentions the presence of a Christian \textit{ekklesia} (church building) which comprised one of four houses in a corner block.\footnote{E. A. Judge & S. R. Pickering, 'Papyrus Documentation of Church and Community in Egypt to the Mid-Fourth Century', \textit{JAC} 20 (1977), p. 61.} The only substantial examples of excavated houses at Ephesus, the so-called \textit{Hanghäuser} or ‘Houses on the Slope’, provide some further archaeological evidence for expansion and adaptation within distinct city blocks or self contained \textit{insula}. The \textit{Hanghäuser} have a domestic design and function different to that often found elsewhere in the Roman world and are substantially different to the Vesuvian houses. In contrast to Pompeii, for example, the entrance to both of the apartment blocks are of little importance to the overall design, neither is the intersection between the entrance and the street. It is clear, in fact, that the visitor, at least at the point of entry into the house, was not at the forefront of the designer’s mind.\footnote{Shelley Hales, \textit{The Roman House and Social Identity}, p. 223.} Michele George, consequently, finds ‘little evidence’ here for the presence of the Roman custom of the
Furthermore, there is a paucity of space for large gatherings of people, even in the largest internal peristylin and rooms, and there are very few rooms, especially in Hanghaus 1, large enough to hold more than a small number of people. At the beginning of the second century CE about half of the entire floor space of Hanghaus 1 was no longer used for housing but converted to make space for the banqueting hall or meeting place of an unknown association. As David Balch asks, 'might not Paul have practiced his profession in a shop along a major street in a domus owned by Priscilla and Aquila, a shop that could have a back door directly into the house where the ekklesia worshipped Christ'? We might add, if the shop were one of the many that occupied the ground floor of an insula, might not the door lead into a room or to an upper floor where the community gathered and might not that space have been progressively renovated to accommodate the growing community? If this pattern was repeated in other domestic accommodation throughout Ephesus, inclusive of the many insula that probably filled the largely unexcavated residential regions of the city, it may provide a tentative template for the process by which groups and associations established a physical presence in the urban

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233 Scherrer, Ephesus: The New Guide, p. 100. The nature and function of this association is unclear: it may be cultic or possibly commercial.

234 'Rich Pompeiian houses', p. 40. This is consistent with the admitted 'imaginative' description of early Christian worship in similar circumstances at Corinth, suggested by David Horell on the basis of archaeological excavations along the East Theatre street during successive seasons in the 1980's. 'Domestic Space and Christian Meetings at Corinth', pp. 360-69.
landscape of Ephesus, the self proclaimed ‘first and greatest metropolis of Asia’, and across the Roman world wherever Christianity flourished.

**Conclusion**

The first urban Christians established themselves within private, domestic space, wherein the necessary ritual, which was based around a meal, conveniently took place.

Until A. D. 200, then, a Christian architecture did not and could not exist. Only the state religion erected temples in the tradition of Greek and Roman architecture. The saviour religions, depending on the specific form of their ritual and the finances of their congregation, built oratories above or below ground, from the simplest to the most lavish but always on a small scale. Christian congregations prior to 200 were limited to the realm of domestic architecture, and further, to inconspicuous dwellings of the lower classes.\(^{235}\)

By the early years of the third century the situation had changed dramatically. The earlier dogmatic controversies were being resolved, the numbers had swelled to over half of the population in many parts of the Roman world, and the congregation numbered amongst its members some men of immense wealth and considerable social standing.\(^ {236}\) We know that Christianity took hold in the densely populated urban cities of the Graeco-Roman

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world, such as Ephesus, and began to establish itself rapidly, to the extent that the physical evidence of the Christian presence therein can be seen today in the form of the ruins of the fourth century basilica to St. John. What has remained largely unknown is how the first generations of Christians established and maintained a physical and social presence in the cities of the Graeco-Roman world in the decades between the emergence of the cult and the first purpose built or renovated buildings dedicated as places of Christian worship.

It is, furthermore, well known that the first urban Christians, like most of the inhabitants of the Graeco-Roman city, would have been accommodated in the densely packed *insula* in which the vast majority were housed, living out their lives in an essentially ‘face to face’ social environment in which the modern disjunction between public and private space, and between the public and private spheres of life, was often blurred, indistinct, or not simply not present. The physical evidence for such structures are sadly lacking, with lavish attention instead devoted to the luxurious houses of the socially elite, not only in Pompei, but in the excavation of large houses such as the Villa Anaploga at Corinth and *Hanghauser* at Corinth. As Ramsey MacMullen has noted, ‘no one has sought fame through the excavation of a slum’. 237 Recent research has, furthermore, led to a re-evaluation of two commonly held assumptions regarding the social history of early Christianity. The fragile ‘new consensus’ reached in the 1970’s, 238 that the first Christians represented a socially mixed group drawn from across the social spectrum and

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237 *Roman Social Relations*, p. 93.

238 The term is coined by A. J. Malherbe in *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (1983).
comprising both elite and non-elite members, has been persuasively challenged by the recent research of Justin Meggitt and Steven Friesen, among others, who maintain that the vast majority of the first Christian communities shared the utter poverty that was the lot of the overwhelming number of their compatriots.\(^\text{239}\) In relation to this, considerable doubt has been cast upon the once widely held assumption that the Christian communities met in the homes of its wealthier members, in that the triclinium and atrium of such homes could not have accommodated the numbers involved.\(^\text{240}\)

The application of social network theory to this dilemma has helpfully demonstrated how groups existed in this urban environment by cohering around a common familial, ethnic, commercial, or religious anchor, often presided over by a ‘paterfamilias-like’ figure who performed the role of patriarch and leader. Among the Christian converts of cities like Ephesus, and Corinth, the apostle Paul (resident in each place for considerable lengths of time) would have filled this role. Many of the converts, having severed other pre-existing social bonds by virtue of their baptism and identification as Christians, formed community together, originally using the private homes of individual members as the physical meeting space, although other locations (such as the lecture-hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus) also feature in the literary record. The natural tendency of the group to cohere both socially and in a tangible sense might also have led to the possibility that 'Christian quarters' or districts may have developed in the 'larger cities' of the Roman world, and


that this social phenomenon may have a direct correlation to the extant archaeological
evidence.\textsuperscript{241}

If so, it is almost certain the \textit{insula}, in which the vast majority were housed, must have
played a significant role. For, having outgrown the capacity of its members houses, it
would have been logical for the Christian community to seek to establish a physical
presence in the context of multi resident, high density housing, in which the vast majority
were already domiciled. This would have been achieved by following the well established
practices of extant cultic, ethnic, and commercial groups, by first occupying a definable
room or apartment, or possibly space above a place of trade or commerce, and gradually
expanding the presence as people came and went, until a series of rooms or apartments,
and ultimately an entire floor, could be acquired and dedicated to cultic use as well as
domestic use, for the benefit of the association. From the outside, these would appear to
the passer-by as ordinary domestic structures, attracting no unwanted or unnecessary
attention to the community gathered therein. These ‘tenement churches’ provide a bridge
between the ‘house churches’ of the New Testament and the first places dedicated
exclusively to Christian worship (church buildings), in this respect filling the gap in our
knowledge concerning the development of the physical space in which the first
generations of Christians met and conducted their rites during this crucial period of
development.

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