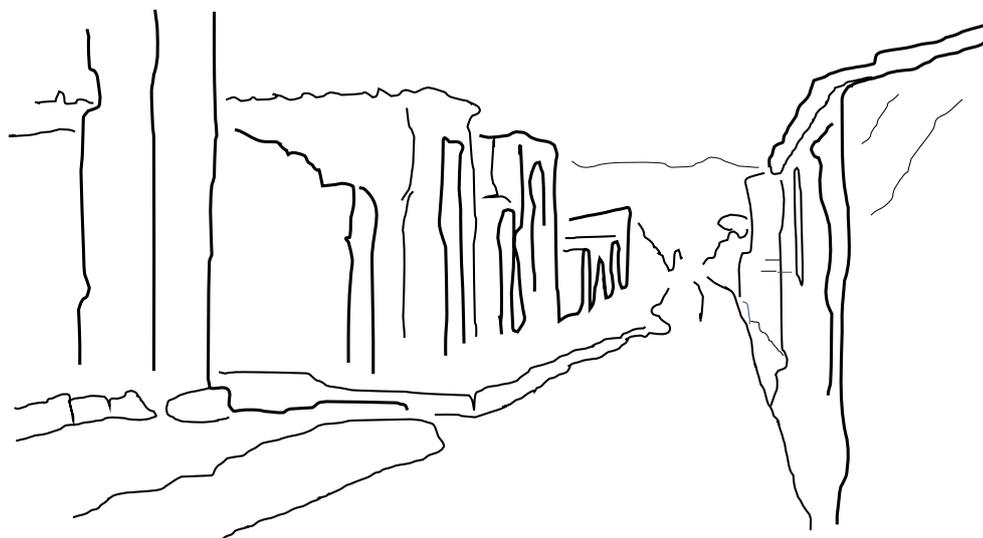


Entering Early Christianity via Pompeii

A virtual guide to the world of the New Testament



by Peter Oakes
& Benedict Kent

This learning resource is intended for members of the public and for students interested in early Christianity and the New Testament. It uses the remarkable remains of Roman buildings at Pompeii to reconstruct the social world of early Christian communities. Peter Oakes is Professor of New Testament at the University of Manchester. These materials are based on his extensive research on Pompeii and early Christianity and the publications that have come out of it. Benedict Kent has a PhD in New Testament studies from the University of Manchester.

Feedback: These materials are available for free download. The one thing we ask is for feedback to help us understand how the resources are being used, how useful they are, and how they could be improved. Please complete our [short online questionnaire](#) after using the resource. It's even more valuable to us if you can complete both our [before](#) and [after](#) questionnaires.

Come again: We're also interested in the benefits this material might have for users. If you'd like to return in the future and tell us about any effects the learning has had, we'd love to hear about it [here](#).

Additional resources: For a guide to Pompeii, downloadable maps and many further valuable resources about all the key sites in the region, visit the official Pompeii web-site, <http://pompeisites.org/en/>. For house summaries, visit [AD79](#). For extensive photo collections of the houses, visit pompeiiinpictures.com.

Copyright: Text produced by Peter Oakes (© 2009, 2016) and Benedict Kent at the University of Manchester. It may not be reproduced in any other form without prior permission of the copyright holders © Peter Oakes and Benedict Kent 2019.

The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

Images in this material either fall under Creative Commons licensing (<https://creativecommons.org>) or are © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com (su concessione del MiBAC - Parco Archeologico di Pompei). Please check our [Acknowledgments, Attributions and Bibliography](#) page for details.

Finding your way around

What did early Christian groups look like? What did it mean to belong to one? Where did they meet and how did they organise themselves? Although there is no clear evidence that Christian groups established themselves in Pompeii, the town's houses provide rare insight into what life was like for early Christians.

What can Pompeian houses tell us about the context of the New Testament?

Get linked up to a virtual Pompeii

Each chapter in this guide uses a different group of houses in Pompeii to imagine what life was like for Christians gathering in these kinds of spaces. If you have access to the internet then you'll be able to click the in-text hyperlinks for additional photos, maps and diagrams and for additional activities. Some links will take you to specific images, others will take you to a gallery of images you'll need to explore.



The insula of the Menander

We use the domestic spaces within the Insula of the Menander as our main examples but links will take you to images of other buildings for you to investigate at your leisure. An *insula* (lit. 'island') is a street block, often made up of numerous smaller residences: houses, apartments, workshops and service spaces. House codes (eg. I. 10.4) refer to a particular district (I), an *insula* (10), and a street entrance (4).

Character cards

Personified 'social-types' can help to guide our imaginations and raise new questions as we explore Pompeii's buildings. Use the character cards to consider how a first-century person might feel in a particular space and how they might respond to the advice from a Christian leader. If you are working as a group, you might like to distribute these characters among you and read through them before discussion



Ancient Christian texts

We will be using extracts from a letter written by the apostle Paul to worshippers of Jesus in Roman Corinth (=1 Corinthians) to understand life in the early churches and the social pressures their members faced. The communities reflected in 1 Corinthians were mainly made up of Gentiles (Greeks, Romans and others) with some Jewish members. They likely represented a cross section of non-elite society and many of them, including Paul himself, were probably craft-workers (cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:9).

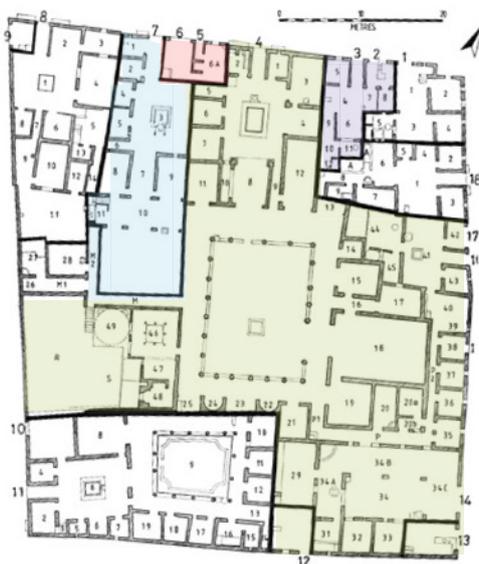
Making sense of Roman Pompeii

Buried by the volcano: Pompeii is particularly relevant to understanding the world of the New Testament because the city was destroyed by Vesuvius in AD 79 (=79 CE), right in the period when NT texts were being written. The city gives us dateable evidence and vast amounts of it. Pompeii was 'frozen in time' – you can see grass that was mown that morning! There are complications. In years before the eruption there were earthquakes and many houses were not in normal use in 79, including some still being repaired. In years after the eruption people dug into the site and removed property from many rooms. However, the places buried by Vesuvius still give us by far the fullest evidence for first-century life.



Society and households: Like towns throughout the Mediterranean world, an elite few percent ran Pompeii and owned almost all the property. Every part of the other 95%+ was also full of hierarchies. Patronage relationships linked the elite to relatively well-off traders and others. Less formally, the same kind of dependencies ran on down through the levels of society. Even the household was a hierarchy in terms of gender, age, power and, especially, slavery – present in even fairly modest craftworker families. Freeing of urban slaves was common (often at an *old* age such as 30!) but most freed slaves stayed somewhat bound to their former owners—another form of what was called patronage.

Temples and worship: Like other ancient peoples, Greeks and Romans gathered at temples to make offerings and to perform hymns, prayers and vows. Smaller altars around the city were used to gain favour for the inhabitants of the street. Shrines inside houses were attended by the whole *familia* to ensure protection. In light of these practices, Christ-groups appear rather unusual. Their worship involved singing, prayer and teaching but not physical temples, altars or sacrifices – only a regular communal meal. It was remarkably 'low tech'.



Eclectic housing: In Pompeii, many opulent houses are found surrounded by a variety of smaller spaces. Elite, non-elite and poor lived side-by-side or on top of each other, with the latter two groups providing the workforce, rental incomes and luxury goods for the former.

The insula of the Menander

Green = the elite House of the Menander

Red = a small workshop

Blue = a house of a cabinet-maker

Purple = a bar and rooms

Some useful of Latin terms

<i>amphora</i>	jar for transportation
<i>familia</i>	an entire household—not just the people related to each other
<i>fauces</i>	narrow front entrance to the Roman house
<i>impluvium</i>	pool for collecting rainwater in the atrium
<i>insula</i>	street block, often made up of smaller residences
<i>lararium</i>	shrine to <i>lares</i> , often beside other gods
<i>lares compitales</i>	gods of the cross roads
<i>lares familiares</i>	gods of the household
<i>macellum</i>	meat market
<i>officina</i>	workshop
<i>pater familias</i>	father of the household
<i>popina</i>	bar or cookshop
<i>porticus</i>	covered walkway
<i>taberna</i>	small shop
<i>thermapolium</i>	cookshop
<i>triclinium</i>	dining room

Acknowledgements & attributions

Thanks are due the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Suoprintenza Archeologica di Pompei and the British School at Rome who, in various ways, supported the research that now underlies this resource. Thanks also go to Roger Ling for permission to use his plans of the insula of the Menander and to Jackie and Bob Dunn for permission to reproduce some of the images from their website. These images are © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Su concessione del MiBAC - Parco Archeologico di Pompei.

We've made every effort to gain permission for any copyright material. If any material has been used inadvertently, please contact us with information about the copyright issue.

Images

Finding your way around

- Map of Pompeii, by cmglee, MaxViol - House of the Vettii (Pompeii) location.svg, used under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license (CC BY-SA 3.0); <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=35983881>
- Insula of the Menander (I.10), outside of house 1 © Jackie and Bob Dunn, www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Su concessione del MiBAC - Parco Archeologico di Pompei; <https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R1/1%2010%2001.htm>
- Portrait of a Roman woman Marc Pascual from Pixabay; <https://pixabay.com/photos/portrait-roman-old-naples-pompeii-922764/>
- P46 (1 Corinthians 2:3–2:11; 2:11–3:5) by Alastair Haines - University of Michigan, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4248177>

Making sense of Roman Pompeii

- Vesuvius, by falco from Pixabay; https://pixabay.com/users/falco-81448/?utm_source=link-attribution&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=image&utm_content=2593001
- Population diagram by mcMurryJulie from Pixabay; <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/rare-disease-population-2888820/>
- Amphitheatre at Pompeii (II.6) © Jackie and Bob Dunn www.pompeiiinpictures.com, Su concessione del MiBAC - Parco Archeologico di Pompei; <https://pompeiiinpictures.com/pompeiiinpictures/R2/2%2006%2000%20p4.htm>
- Temple of Apollo, Corinth by ComeHaveaPeace from Pixabay: <https://pixabay.com/photos/ancient-corinth-temple-ruins-greece-115766/>
- Map of the Insula of the Menander, adapted from Ling 1997, fig. 24 (drawn by S. Gibson, J. S. Gregory, R. J. Ling, D. Murdoch), with thanks to Roger Ling for permission to reproduce this plan