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Domestic Space and Christian Meetings at Corinth: Imagining New Contexts and the Buildings East of the Theatre*

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Most scholars who have tried to understand the divisions that arose at the Lord's Supper in Corinth in the light of their concrete domestic setting have done so with regard to the physical structure of the Roman villa, with its triclinium, atrium, etc., often following the work of Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. However, there are a number of reasons, related both to the nature of the archaeological evidence and to the likely socio-economic level of the Corinthian Christians, why such a setting is far less plausible than is generally thought. Certainly, other possible kinds of domestic space should also be carefully considered. The excavations east of the theatre at Corinth carried out during the 1980s provide just one case study of a different kind of domestic space, which, it is argued, offers a more plausible background.

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor: 'house churches and the Eucharist'

When NT scholars have tried to imagine the kind of domestic space in which the divisions at the Lord's Supper arose at Corinth (1 Cor 11.17–34), they have generally thought in terms of a Roman villa with triclinium and atrium or

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1 J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (3rd rev. and expanded edn; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2002) 178–85.

peristyle.² Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, in his well-known book *St Paul's Corinth*, first published in 1983 and recently rereleased in a third, revised and expanded edition, draws on the archaeological evidence from Corinth and elsewhere to show what this domestic context may have been like and specifically how the physical structures shaped social interaction such that the origins of the σχίσματα Paul confronts are given a plausible explanation.

In a section entitled 'a typical house', Murphy-O'Connor considers first the villa at Anaploga, one of very few houses excavated at Corinth and the only one to have existed in the time of Paul (see fig. 1).³ Here, according to Murphy-O'Connor, the triclinium, with a 'magnificent mosaic floor', measures 5.5 × 7.5 metres.⁴ These dimensions, Murphy-O'Connor suggests, were 'very typical', based on a comparison with another Roman villa from Corinth and with other houses from Pompeii, Olynthus, and Ephesus.⁵ The average floor area for an atrium in these houses is 74 square metres, the average for a triclinium 37 square metres, according to Murphy-O'Connor's calculations. He continues, however: 'Not all of this area was usable. The effective space in the triclinium was limited by the couches around the walls; the rooms surveyed would not have accommodated more than nine diners (the usual number . . .) who reclined as they ate'.⁶

Imagining a house of such proportions to be the home of Gaius, and suggesting a plausible 'base figure' of around 40–50 persons 'for the Christian community at Corinth' – a figure derived from the number of named individuals plus their likely spouses and household adherents – Murphy-O'Connor considers what

2 The triclinium refers to a Roman-style dining room, so named because of the three couches placed in a U shape in the room. The atrium (courtyard) was sometimes built using columns to form a surrounding colonnaded portico, when it is termed a peristyle.

3 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 178.

4 In fact, the floor on which the mosaic was laid measures c. 9.25 m from north to south by 5.14 m (at the north), 5.23 m (at the south); see S. G. Miller, 'A Mosaic Floor from a Roman Villa at Anaploga', *Hesperia* 41 (1972) 332–54, at 333. These are the dimensions represented on the plan in fig. 1 and reproduced by Murphy-O'Connor. The smaller dimensions given by Murphy-O'Connor represent the size of the room in its earlier phase, on which see further below and fig. 2.

5 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 178–80. The other Roman villa from Corinth is the villa excavated by T. L. Shear (and sometimes known as the Shear villa): see T. L. Shear, *Corinth V: The Roman Villa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1930).

6 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 180. Cf. further K. M. D. Dunbabin, 'Triclinium and Stibadium', *Dining in a Classical Context* (ed. W. J. Slater; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991) 121–48; on 127 she refers to 'the conventional number of nine guests' but notes also developments and changes from this convention. S. P. Ellis, *Roman Housing* (London: Duckworth, 2000) 148, suggests that up to seven diners could be accommodated on the three couches of a *triclinium*, while the semi-circular *stibadium*, introduced by the first century CE, might take five to seven diners.

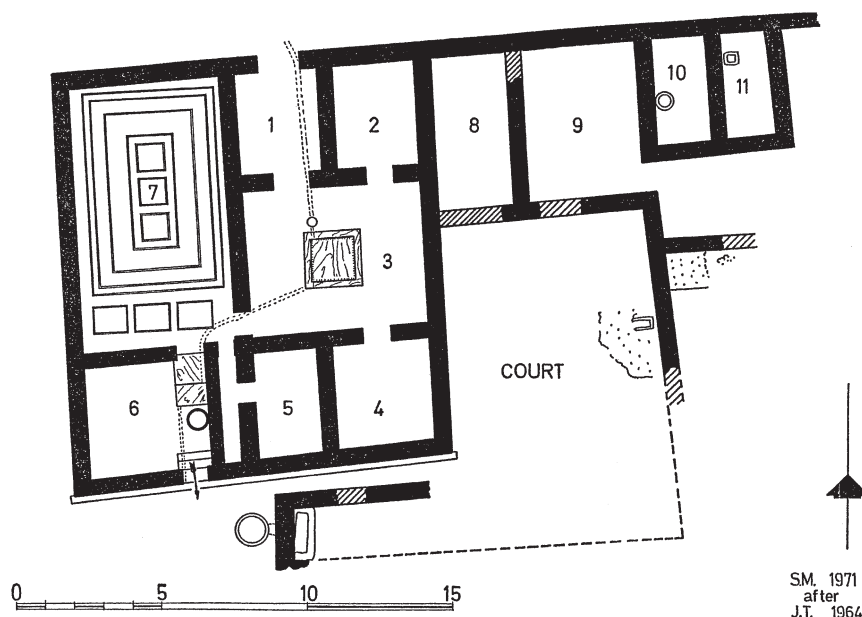


Fig. 1: Plan of the Anaploga Villa, taken from S. G. Miller, 'A Mosaic Floor from a Roman Villa at Anaploga', *Hesperia* 41 (1972) 332–54, at 335, reproduced here courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. (The same plan is presented by Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 179, though with the labels 'triclinium' and 'atrium' added to rooms 7 and 3 respectively.)

might have happened when 'the whole church' (1 Cor 14.23) gathered together with Gaius as host (Rom 16.23):⁷

The mere fact that all the believers could not be accommodated in the triclinium meant that there had to be an overflow into the atrium. It became imperative for the host to divide his guests into two categories: the first-class believers were invited into the triclinium while the rest stayed outside. Even a slight knowledge of human nature indicates the criterion used. The host must have been a wealthy member of the community, so he invited into the triclinium his closest friends among the believers, who would have been of the same social class and from whom he might expect the same courtesy on a future occasion. The rest could take their places in the atrium, where conditions were greatly inferior.⁸

The nature of the domestic space available made such discrimination inevitable, and so constitutes 'one possible source of the tensions that appear in Paul's account'.⁹

7 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 182.

8 *Ibid.*, 183.

9 *Ibid.*, 184.

Peter Lampe reiterates Murphy-O'Connor's point, particularly in relation to the situation created by the different arrival times of various members of the congregation, with the socially lower members having less control over their time and thus being more likely to arrive later. 'Wenn die sozial niedriger Stehenden erst später zur korinthischen Versammlung eintrafen und dann nicht mehr im Triclinium, sondern nur noch in Atrium und Peristyl Platz finden, so spiegelt sich auch in diesem Zug ein vorbaptismaler Habitus: Sozial niedriger stehende Klienten wurden vom Patron im Atrium empfangen und abgefertigt.'¹⁰ Again, the nature of the domestic space, and the customs for its use, are seen as partial explanations of the Corinthian divisions at the Supper.

Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, following Murphy-O'Connor and Lampe, also see the physical structure of the Roman house, and specifically the limited space in the triclinium, as a cause of the problems at the Lord's Supper.¹¹ When the late-comers arrived, 'all the dining couches in the triclinium would be in use; there would not be enough space for the whole congregation to recline'.¹² They stress, however, that the existence of larger 'dining halls' in some houses, plus the common peristyle courtyards and gardens, meant that much larger overall numbers (into the hundreds) could be accommodated than is often supposed: 'It is unwise to set a hard upper limit of 30 to 40 for the number of Christians who might celebrate the Lord's Supper in a Roman triclinium plus peristyle or in open gardens.'¹³

A number of recent commentators, often following Murphy-O'Connor, adopt a similar perspective in their attempts to elucidate the nature and origin of the divisions to which Paul refers (1 Cor 11.18–22). Gordon Fee, assuming that the Corinthian meals were held 'in the homes of the rich', where the host therefore also served as 'the patron of the meal', reports that 'archaeology has shown rather conclusively that the dining room (the triclinium) in such homes would scarcely accommodate many guests; the majority would therefore eat in the atrium . . . which would still seat only about 30 to 50 guests on the average'. Fee refers in a note to the average size of triclinia as 'about 36 square meters', providing space 'for about 9 to 12 guests at table', assuming they reclined, and cites (only) Murphy-O'Connor in support.¹⁴ Similar comments are made by Richard Hays and

10 P. Lampe, 'Das korinthische Herrenmahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch-römischer Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis (1 Kor 11, 17–34)', *ZNW* 82 (1991) 183–213, at 201; cf. also p. 197 with n. 43, referring to Murphy-O'Connor.

11 C. Osiek and D. L. Balch, *Families in the New Testament World* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 200–3.

12 *Ibid.*, 201.

13 *Ibid.*, 203.

14 G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987) 533–4 with n. 10.

Raymond Collins.¹⁵ Anthony Thiselton speaks in glowing terms of the new insights that have been made possible by this historical reconstruction:

These verses [1 Cor 11.20–1] offer a classic and well-known example of how historical and archaeological research can shed a flood of light on the meaning of a biblical text which would not otherwise have been available. Initially with Theissen but then most clearly with Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's application of James Wiseman's archaeological work, a foundation has been laid which has transformed exegesis since the early 1980s.¹⁶

Thiselton identifies two aspects of this research, the focus on 'cultural customs of distinction', as pioneered by Gerd Theissen,¹⁷ and the focus on 'issues of space within a large Roman villa', as presented by Murphy-O'Connor.¹⁸ His own presentation of the latter aspect follows Murphy-O'Connor closely.¹⁹

Critical questions

There are, however, a number of reasons to question whether this reconstruction offers a typical or even plausible domestic setting for the Corinthian Lord's Supper. First, there are questions about the Corinthian evidence, especially about Murphy-O'Connor's key example, the villa at Anaploga. The bedding and fill underneath the mosaic date from the third quarter of the first century, as Murphy-O'Connor notes, but this provides only an archaeological *terminus post quem* for the floor.²⁰ (Thiselton is simply inaccurate when he refers to 'the villa

15 R. B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Interpretation; Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997) 196; R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (SP 7; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999) 418–19. Cf. also B. Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) 249 with n. 24, also 191–5. Recent commentaries in German, however, make little reference to this hypothesis, focusing rather on the customs concerning eating which may also have affected the character of the meal. See e.g. W. Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (EKKNT 7.3; Zürich: Benziger/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999) 22–8; A. Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (HNT 9.1; Tübingen: Mohr, 2000) 248–53. C. Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (THNT; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996, 2000) 261 n. 109 notes Murphy-O'Connor's suggestion with regard to 'einer räumlichen Trennung – die Wohlhabenden speisten im Triclinium, die Späterkommenden im Atrium des Hauses' – but concentrates his attention on the nature of the meal itself and the social customs that may have led to the divisions, following Theissen and others.

16 A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000) 860.

17 G. Theissen, 'Soziale Integration und sakramentales Handeln: Eine Analyse von 1 Cor. XI 17–34', *NovT* 16 (1974) 179–206; ET in G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982) 145–74.

18 Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 860.

19 *Ibid.*, 860–1.

20 Miller, 'Mosaic Floor', 332; J. Wiseman, 'Corinth and Rome I: 228B.C.–A.D.267', *ANRW* 2.7.1 (1979) 438–548, at 528.

dated between AD 50 and 75 at Anaploga'.²¹) The mosaic itself was dated by Stella Miller to the last quarter of the first century; but more recent scholarship has inclined to a somewhat later estimate, perhaps as late as the third century CE.²² The villa existed prior to the laying of the mosaic floor, the latter being added during a second phase of construction which involved shifting a wall (fig. 2).²³ This being so it is, of course, much more difficult to say anything about the patterns of use for the room in Paul's time, prior to its adaptation and mosaic flooring, especially since the villa has not been fully excavated or published.²⁴ Indeed, while Murphy-O'Connor simply describes the room as the triclinium, Miller (to whom Murphy-O'Connor refers) notes only as a 'suggestion' the idea that dining may have been its function, referring to the room as possibly the *andron*.²⁵ Given that this room is the largest in the villa (as far as the partial excavations reveal), it is of course likely that it served as the main reception room, but that does not mean that it functioned as a Roman-style triclinium, nor that other rooms were not also used for dining. Furthermore, the villa at Anaploga may have lain outside the city walls in Roman times and quite probably functioned as a working farmhouse belonging to a wealthy landowner.²⁶ Nor do any of the other houses of the Roman

21 Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 860.

22 Miller, 'Mosaic Floor', 332. G. Hellenkemper Salies, 'Römische Mosaiken im Griechenland', *Bonner Jahrbücher* 186 (1986) 241–84, argues strongly for a third-century date on the basis of style: 'Aus dem späten 1. oder dem frühen 2. Jahrhundert dagegen läßt sich dem Mosaik von Anaploga nichts Vergleichbares an die Seite stellen . . . Es kann somit kein Zweifel bestehen, daß das Mosaik von Anaploga in die Gruppe der reich ornamentierten, sehr bunten Böden des 3. Jahrhunderts gehört, für deren Komposition und Ornamentik Parallelen zu hellenistischen Mosaiken charakteristisch sind' (278–9). K. M. D. Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1999) 210 n. 6, suggests that 'a late first to early second century date' remains 'more convincing', though the second-century parallels she cites do not come from Greece, but Pergamon. I am grateful to Mary Walbank for drawing my attention to this point.

23 See Miller, 'Mosaic Floor', 332.

24 Wiseman, 'Corinth and Rome', 528; R. M. Rothaus, *Corinth: The First City of Greece* (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 139; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 28.

25 Miller, 'Mosaic Floor', 333 n. 8: 'Mr. John Travlos, who drew the plans of the villa, suggested that Room 7 served as a dining room. Since standard-sized couches do not fit evenly end-to-end around the room, one must assume some less regular arrangement if the room is designated as the *andron*.' The *andron* was the main reception room in the traditional Greek house (see Ellis, *Roman Housing*, 24).

26 Cf. M. E. H. Walbank, *The Nature and Development of Roman Corinth from 44 BCE to the End of the Antonine Period* (PhD diss., Open University, 1986) 323; *eadem*, 'The Foundation and Planning of Early Roman Corinth', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 10 (1997) 95–130; D. P. Tompkins, 'Review of D. Engels, *Roman Corinth*', *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 1/1 (1990) 20–33, at 30. More generally on villas as working farms, see Ellis, *Roman Housing*, 13–14.

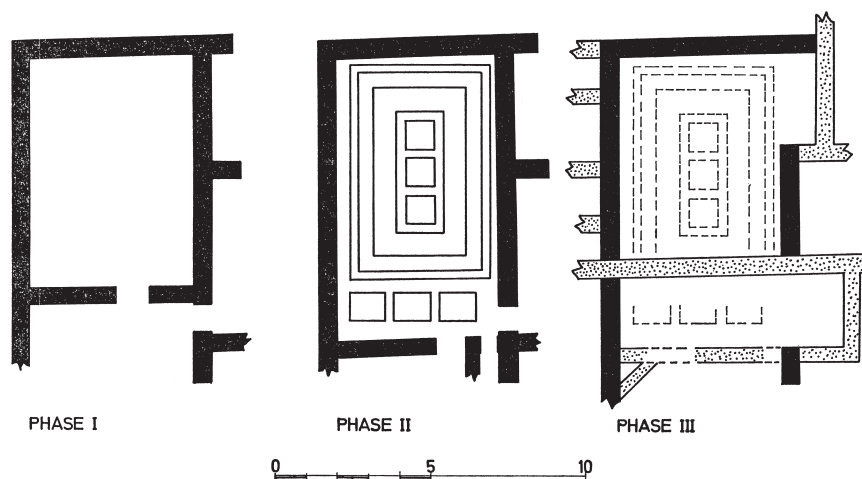


Fig. 2: Anaploga Villa, Plan of Room 7, Phases I, II and III, from S. G. Miller, 'A Mosaic Floor from a Roman Villa at Anaploga', *Hesperia* 41 (1972) 332–54, at 337, reproduced here courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

period (partially) excavated at Corinth yield evidence for the period of Paul's visits to the city.²⁷

This cautionary note should be linked to a second point, of a more methodological kind. Penelope Allison, in a recent article in the *American Journal of Archaeology*, forcefully criticises the common approach in studies of Roman domestic space which involves deriving from the 'literary sources . . . nomenclature for the individual spaces' and then applying this nomenclature to the material contexts, 'creating the fallacious perception that such labels are an integral part of the primary data'.²⁸ This labelling, moreover, often serves as '[t]he point of departure for investigations of the material remains'.²⁹ Allison is sharply critical of this tendency, noting that 'it is extremely subjective to interpret the domestic behavior in these villas through room functions for which there is no

27 Wiseman, 'Corinth and Rome', 528, mentions four excavated houses of the period he surveys (228 BCE–267 CE) (followed by Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 178): in addition to the villa at Anaploga, the one attached to Temple E is of uncertain function, being possibly connected with the cult of that temple; the Roman/Shear villa dates from the second century; and the house located against the east wall of the south basilica along the road to Cenchreae is still later (Wiseman estimates c.200 CE). For discussion of a fifth–sixth-century CE house on the Lechaion Road, see R. L. Scranton, *Corinth XVI: Mediaeval Architecture in the Central Area of Corinth* (Princeton, NJ: ASCSA, 1957) 17–21.

28 P. M. Allison, 'Using the Material and Written Sources: Turn of the Millennium Approaches to Roman Domestic Space', *American Journal of Archaeology* 105 (2001) 181–208 at 185.

29 *Ibid.* 185.

material evidence'.³⁰ In other words, we should not simply presume that a certain room must have functioned as the triclinium, and functioned as depicted in literary sources, without material evidence which indicates something of the room's functions, which may have been several and diverse. Allison mentions in particular the difficulty in identifying rooms for dining, echoing and developing a point made earlier by Katherine Dunbabin. Dunbabin writes that 'secure identification of rooms for dining is possible only under exceptional circumstances . . . In the great luxury villas we can usually only guess at the range and variety of rooms used for dining.'³¹ The implications of this point should be clear: so far as the archaeological evidence is concerned, we cannot with any confidence presume that the mosaic room at Anaploga functioned as a triclinium, and certainly not in Paul's time.

None of this renders Murphy-O'Connor's imaginative scenario impossible, of course, but there is a further reason to question its plausibility, related to his depiction of the findings as concerning 'a typical house'.³² Both of the Corinthian houses to which Murphy-O'Connor refers in ascertaining dimensions of a typical triclinium – the villa at Anaploga and the Roman (Shear) villa – are, he suggests, 'sumptuous' villas, their quality indicated not least by the marvellous mosaic floors found within them.³³ 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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ Whether it is plausible, then, to imagine the

30 Ibid., 189. Cf. also J. T. Smith, *Roman Villas: A Study in Social Structure* (London/New York: Routledge, 1997) 6, who refers to the problems of 'text-hindered archaeology'.

31 K. M. D. Dunbabin, 'Convivial Space: Dining and Entertainment in the Roman Villa', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 9 (1996) 66–80, at 67–8. There is some contrast here with the opening comments in her study '*Triclinium and Stibadium*', where she refers to 'numerous securely identifiable examples' of rooms clearly intended for dining (121); the essay offers a survey of the patterns and developments. Nonetheless, the point holds that in particular cases, such as the Corinthian villa at Anaploga, we should not presume, following certain literary depictions, that a certain room, and that room only, functioned as the dining room according to set custom without relevant material evidence.

32 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 178.

33 Ibid.; cf. Wiseman, 'Corinth and Rome', 528. For the Roman villa, see Shear, *Corinth V: The Roman Villa*.

34 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 180.

35 Ellis, for example, treats villas as aristocratic, elite housing (*Roman Housing*, 22–72, 73, 112). Cf. the recent comment of Beryl Rawson, "'The Roman Family'" in Recent Research: State of the Question', *BibInt* 11 (2003) 119–38, at 124: 'I envisage the great majority of the population in Rome, and perhaps other major towns and cities, living in small, cramped apartments which had little space for more than the conjugal family and a small number of slaves.'

first Christians at Corinth meeting in such a house depends to a considerable extent on judgements concerning their socio-economic status. Indeed, in order to imagine such a setting as the one in which Gaius hosted the church, Murphy-O'Connor adopts the necessary corollary: that Gaius was 'a wealthy member of the Christian community'.³⁶

Until recently, views on the social level of the first Christians had reached a fair degree of consensus, the so-called 'new consensus' reported by Abraham Malherbe in 1977.³⁷ (The description of a new consensus replacing an old one is, however, simplistic and in some respects inaccurate.³⁸) This 'consensus' view was that the early Christian groups, and specifically those in Corinth,³⁹ encompassed a greater degree of social diversity than had previously been acknowledged, with some members coming from the ranks of the well-to-do.⁴⁰ There were, nonetheless, significant differences of opinion concerning whether these higher-status members of the church should be seen as elite, 'ruling class' persons, 'aus der Oberschicht',⁴¹ or only as relatively better off but not elite or upper class.⁴² This 'new consensus' received a major challenge with the publication in 1998 of Justin Meggitt's *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, in which Meggitt argues that the evidence used to identify named Corinthian Christians as members of the wealthy elite

36 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 182; cf. p. 183 (quoted above).

37 A. J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Baton Rouge, LA/London: Louisiana State University, 1977; 2nd edn, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 31.

38 Cf. G. Theissen, 'The Social Structure of Pauline Communities: Some Critical Remarks on J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*', *JSNT* 84 (2001) 65–84, at 66: 'The "new consensus" is neither new nor is it a consensus.' For further questioning of the contrasts depicted between old and new consensus, see S. Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus', *JSNT* 26 (2004) 323–61.

39 Corinth provides the most substantial early evidence, as pointed out by G. Schöllgen, 'Was wissen wir über die Sozialstruktur der paulinischen Gemeinden?', *NTS* 34 (1988) 71–82.

40 See further D. G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996) 91–101; B. Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1990) 21–70. Especially influential on this new consensus are G. Theissen, 'Soziale Schichtung in der korinthischen Gemeinde: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des hellenistischen Urchristentums', *ZNW* 65 (1974) 232–72 (ET in *Social Setting*, 69–119), and W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven, CT/ London: Yale University, 1983) 51–73.

41 Theissen, 'Soziale Schichtung', 232 (*Social Setting*, 69: 'from the upper classes'); A. D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6* (Leiden: Brill, 1993) 130 ('some members from the Corinthian social elite . . . the ruling class of the city'; cf. also 45, 59, 88); D. W. J. Gill, 'In Search of the Social Elite in the Corinthian Church', *TynBul* 44 (1993) 323–37.

42 E.g. Horrell, *Social Ethos*, 98; D. B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University, 1995) xv–xvii. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 73, comments that '[t]he extreme top and bottom of the Greco-Roman social scale are missing', but the churches contain 'a fair cross-section of urban society'. Note Clarke's disagreement with Meeks's assessment that the extreme top of the scale is missing (*Secular and Christian Leadership*, 45).

cannot sustain this conclusion, and that Paul and the early Christians shared the absolute poverty which was the fate of the vast majority of the population of the Roman empire, a conclusion also supported in Steven Friesen's recent work.⁴³ Following the publication of Meggitt's book there has been renewed discussion, with Dale Martin and Gerd Theissen defending a new consensus position against Meggitt's critique.⁴⁴

Space does not permit a detailed engagement with that debate here, but a few key points of particular relevance may be outlined.⁴⁵ First, in defence of the new consensus, I think that Meggitt has downplayed the extent and significance of socio-economic diversity among the so-called non-elite and thus among the early Christians at Corinth. Meggitt's prime concern is to argue for the economic and absolute poverty of all the members of the Pauline churches, and the vast majority of the empire's population, in a clear polemic against the new consensus view, and this leads, as Meggitt acknowledges, to a focus on this broad context rather than on the possible levels of social differentiation.⁴⁶ Bengt Holmberg may also be right to speak of a 'pauperistic' tendency in Meggitt's reading of the evidence;⁴⁷ in other words, evidence that might indicate some level of higher social or economic status on the part of Paul or other early Christians is downplayed or rejected as uncertain,⁴⁸ while evidence to support the view of their absolute poverty is maximised.⁴⁹ It may be, then, that rather than reject the 'new consensus' altogether, a

43 J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) 153, 179 and *passim*; Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies'.

44 D. B. Martin, 'Review Essay: Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*', *JSNT* 84 (2001) 51–64; Theissen, 'The Social Structure of Pauline Communities'; *idem*, 'Social Conflict in the Pauline Communities: Further Remarks on J.J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*', *JSNT* 25.3 (2003) 371–91. For further discussion, see also B. Holmberg, 'The Methods of Historical Reconstruction in the Scholarly "Recovery" of Corinthian Christianity', *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (ed. E. Adams and D. G. Horrell; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, forthcoming); Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies'.

45 For relevant extracts, bibliography, etc., see further Adams and Horrell, ed., *Christianity at Corinth*.

46 See e.g. Meggitt, *Paul*, 5: 'Of course, there were significant differences between members of this group [i.e. the poor] and these would have appeared important to the poor themselves. Some would have lived more precarious lives than others . . . But in order to emphasise the reality of the economic predicament that was shared by *all* members of this group, it is important that this term is used without lengthy qualifications, wherever applicable.' Sometimes, therefore, despite his polemic against the new consensus, Meggitt qualifies his criticisms of it, noting that he is focusing on economic and not social differentiation; cf. 99 n. 118, 153–4 n. 417.

47 Holmberg, 'Methods of Historical Reconstruction'.

48 Cf. also Martin's criticism of Meggitt for raising 'the bar for historical evidence to heights impossible for normal historiography' ('Review Essay', 62).

49 Sometimes this tendency is also evident in Meggitt's concern to show that practices commonly claimed to demonstrate elite or upper-class status need not do so. For example, arguing against

somewhat revised, more cautious form of it may emerge as most plausible. However, it also seems to me that Meggitt has forcefully highlighted how little *firm* evidence there is to identify any of the Corinthian Christians known to us as elite, wealthy, aristocratic, or upper class.⁵⁰ Certainly, mention of someone's οἶκος or οἰκία is an insufficient basis for such a conclusion.⁵¹ And all we know about Gaius, after all, apart from his name and his baptism by Paul (1 Cor 1.14), is that he served as host not only to Paul but also to 'the whole church' (Rom 16.23). Such hospitality hardly requires that he owned a villa like the one at Anaploga, nor that he belonged to the upper stratum of Corinthian society.⁵² The crucial point in the context of the present argument is that it is at the very least uncertain whether any of the Corinthian Christians, and their 'host' Gaius in particular, would likely have owned a large, sumptuous villa.⁵³

Theissen's view that a reference to travel (e.g. in the case of Phoebe) indicates high status, Meggitt cites the example of 'Flavius Zeuxis, a Hierapolis merchant, who sailed seventy-two times to Italy [and] did not leave a very prestigious monument behind him . . . His personal fortune could not have been great' (Meggitt, *Paul*, 149 n. 393). Yet this evidence at least suggests that Flavius Zeuxis was not destitute, nor consistently living at subsistence level, thus implying a greater degree of economic (as well as social) distinction within the empire's population than Meggitt seems to allow.

50 In terms of what might be firm evidence Erastus is a key figure for the view that there were upper-class members of the Corinthian church. If the Christian Erastus of Rom 16.23 is rightly identified with the Erastus who laid the theatre pavement in return for being elected *aedile* (as argued, e.g., by Theissen, *Social Setting*, 75–83; Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership*, 46–56), then we clearly have a wealthy and elite individual within the church's membership. For the Erastus inscription, see J. H. Kent, *Corinth VIII.3, The Inscriptions 1926–1950* (Princeton, NJ: ASCSA, 1966) §232, pp. 99–100. Here too, however, Meggitt has shown that the evidence for this identification is hardly indisputable, not least due to problems in dating the inscription (J. J. Meggitt, 'The Social Status of Erastus [Rom. 16:23]', *NovT* 38 [1996] 218–23). Even if the identification is judged on balance probable, there is no hint that the Corinthians ever met in Erastus's home.

51 Pace Gill, 'In Search of the Social Elite', 336: 'There is a hint that Stephanas is a member of the élite as his household is mentioned.' The words οἶκος and οἰκία, largely overlapping terms by NT times (cf. 1 Cor 1.16; 16.15), are used to refer to a wide range of dwellings (houses, rooms, apartments, etc.) and household groups, so do not by any means imply a house(hold) of elite proportions (cf. LSJ, 1203–5; O. Michel, 'οἶκος, κτλ.', *TWNT* 5.122–36). If Fortunatus and Achaicus are dependent members of Stephanas's household (cf. 1 Cor 16.15–18), then certainly Stephanas is a householder with a social position higher than that of his slaves or dependents. But there is no indication that this is a particularly large or wealthy household.

52 Probably the most likely scenario is that 'the whole church' refers to the (occasional) gathering together of smaller household groups, which may indeed imply that Gaius had a larger space available than other members of the congregations. But it is a big jump from this inference to the supposition that he was a wealthy aristocrat who owned a large country villa.

53 Notably, while Meeks (*Urban Christians*, 57) thinks (on the basis of rather slender evidence) that Gaius 'is evidently a man of some wealth', he also considers that 'we meet no landed aristocrats' among the Pauline Christians (73). That would seem to suggest that Gaius's ownership of something like the villa at Anaploga is unlikely. On villas as working farms belonging to aristocrats, see nn. 26 and 35 above.

Imagining new contexts: the buildings east of the theatre

There is, then, considerable uncertainty concerning the scenario that Murphy-O'Connor depicts. First, the archaeological evidence is much less clear than he implies, and does not allow us to be confident about the character and use of dining rooms in the villa at Anaploga or elsewhere in Corinth at the time of Paul. Second, we can hardly be confident that such a villa is a plausible context in which to imagine the Corinthian Christians meeting. Furthermore, given that even proponents of the new consensus consider the lower classes to have comprised the majority in the congregations,⁵⁴ we would do well to try and describe some of the domestic contexts in which it is realistic to imagine such groups meeting.⁵⁵ Indeed, Murphy-O'Connor provides just such a consideration in his treatment of the workshop as a setting for mission and church meetings.⁵⁶

Unfortunately, despite the major and long-established excavations at Corinth, very little is known about the character of many of the residential areas of Roman Corinth, since excavations have been largely concentrated around the forum area, on the sanctuaries of Demeter and Kore and of Asclepius, on a small number of selected villas, and on other significant structures in and outside the city. There are also both pragmatic and ideological considerations why knowledge of poorer-quality housing is limited: in practical terms it is simply the case that the poorer the accommodation, the less enduring are the materials with which it is constructed, and so the less likely is its record to remain; in ideological terms, there is an understandable tendency in archaeology to concentrate on impressive and major structures, particularly those of religio-political significance.⁵⁷ As Ramsay MacMullen observes, 'no one has sought fame through the excavation of a slum'.⁵⁸ The rather recent rise of interest in domestic space is, however, beginning to lead to some significant correction of this comparative neglect.⁵⁹

54 Cf. e.g. Theissen, *Social Setting*, 69. Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 73, suggests that 'the "typical" Christian . . . is a free artisan or small trader'.

55 Cf. Meggitt, 'Response to Martin and Theissen', 93, who in querying the supposition that the Christians at Corinth must have met in a 'larger-than-"average" private house' suggests: 'We may need to engage our imagination a little more when we try to envisage the meetings of the early Christians.'

56 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 192–8. Alternative settings for Christian meetings have also been explored by R. Jewett, 'Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church: The Implications of a Form-Critical Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10', *BR* 38 (1993) 23–43.

57 Cf. Meggitt, *Paul*, 62.

58 R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations 50 BC to AD 284* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University, 1974) 93, quoted by Meggitt, *Paul*, 62.

59 See, e.g., R. Laurence and A. Wallace-Hadrill, eds, *Domestic Space in the Roman World: Pompeii and Beyond* (JRA Sup 22; Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1997); I.M. Barton, ed., *Roman Domestic Buildings* (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1996); Ellis, *Roman Housing*.

Some general information may nonetheless be gleaned.⁶⁰ Corinth was laid out as a Roman city after its refounding in 44 BCE following the Roman grid-plan known as centuriation.⁶¹ This divided the majority of the city into *insulae*,⁶² though it should be noted that there is no archaeological evidence in Corinth for the existence of *insulae* in the sense of multi-storied blocks of five or more storeys, such as are known from Rome, Ostia, and Herculaneum.⁶³ Indeed, the high-rise developments elsewhere may often be explained by particular pressures of population expansion and space restrictions that are less applicable to Corinth. Outside the city there is some evidence for poorer accommodation, such as two-room peasant houses⁶⁴ and the makeshift quarry workers' accommodation at Cenchreae.⁶⁵ Within the city, shops and workshops are an important and relevant form of domestic as well as commercial space, since they often provided accommodation for those who worked in them, along with their families, in a back room, loft, or mezzanine floor, or sometimes even in the workshop itself.⁶⁶ These, as Murphy-O'Connor notes with reference to the shop units in the North Market, close to the forum, provided less sumptuous accommodation and the potential for meetings too, though given their size (on average around 3 x 4 metres) only relatively small numbers could be assembled (Murphy-O'Connor estimates 10–15).⁶⁷

More specific and detailed possibilities may be derived from the excavations east of the theatre, which took place over successive seasons through the 1980s. Here, primarily due to their proximity to the theatre, the Corinth archaeologists, under the direction of Charles K. Williams, unearthed a series of buildings running along the east side of the Roman street known to the archaeologists as East Theater Street. The buildings are referred to by numbers: 1, 3, 5 and 7 (see figs. 3–7). The history of these buildings is complex, with evidence of damage,

60 See esp. Walbank, *The Nature and Development of Roman Corinth*, 294–389; more briefly, D. Jongkind, 'Corinth in the First Century AD: The Search for Another Class', *TynBul* 52 (2001) 139–48.

61 D. G. Romano, 'Post 146 BC Land Use in Corinth, and Planning of the Roman Colony of 44 B.C.', *The Corinthia in the Roman Period* (ed. T. E. Gregory; JRA Sup 8; Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1993) 9–30; Walbank, 'The Foundation and Planning of Early Roman Corinth'.

62 Using the term here to refer to rectangular blocks of land in the city created by the grid plan layout and not to the blocks of accommodation also known as *insulae*; cf. e.g. Romano, 'Post 146 B.C. Land Use in Corinth', 19–20.

63 See further M. Wheeler, *Roman Art and Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson; New York/Washington: Frederick Praeger, 1964) 129–32; Barton, *Roman Domestic Buildings*.

64 Walbank, *The Nature and Development of Roman Corinth*, 315.

65 R. Scranton, 'The Upper Town', in R. Scranton, J. W. Shaw and L. Ibrahim, *Kenchreai: Eastern Port of Corinth* (Leiden: Brill, 1978) 6–12, at 8.

66 Cf. Ellis, *Roman Housing*, 78–80.

67 Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 194–6.

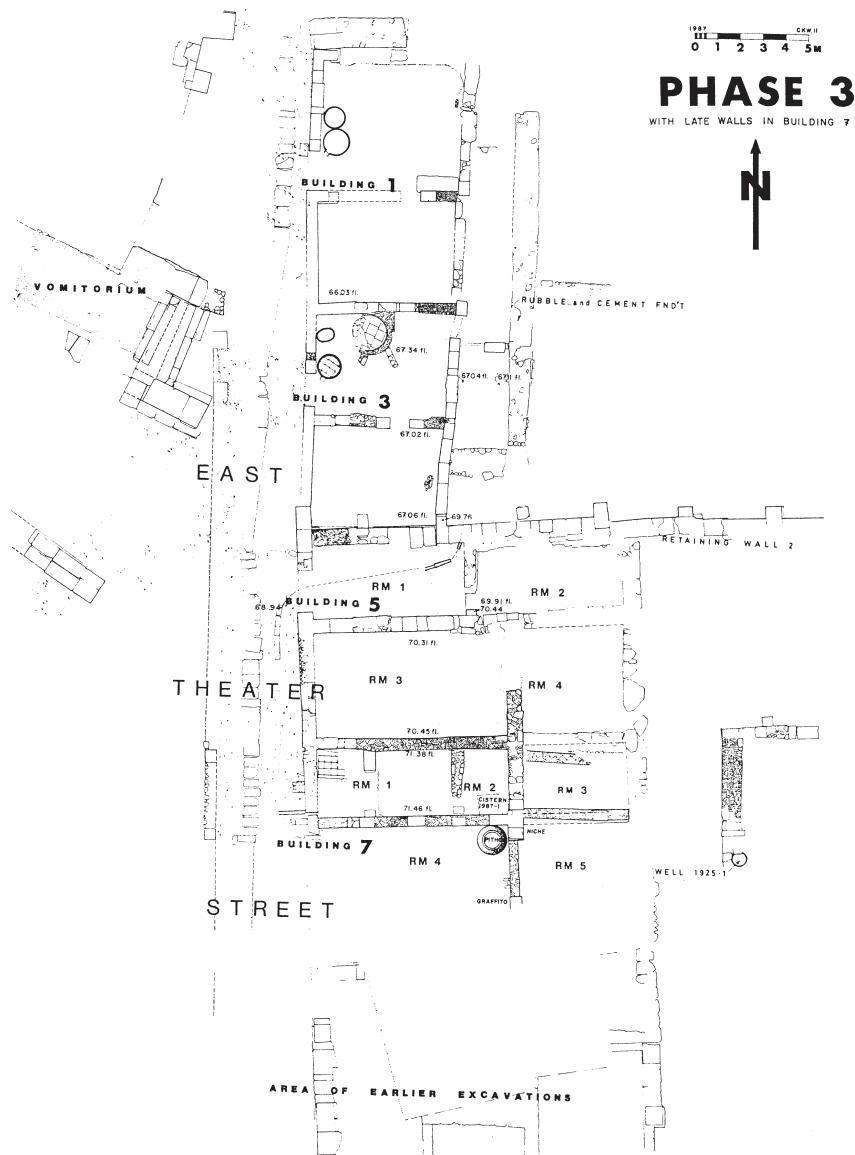


Fig. 3: Plan of buildings 1, 3, 5, 7 east of the theatre, from C. K. Williams and O. H. Zervos, 'Corinth, 1987: South of Temple E and East of the Theater', *Hesperia* 57 (1988) 95-146, at 121, reproduced here courtesy of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.



Fig. 4: Looking north down East Theater Street, with buildings 7, 5, 3, 1 on the right-hand side of the street. Photo © David Horrell.

alteration, and habitation that led Williams and Zervos to distinguish eight phases, the first of which was later subdivided.⁶⁸ Despite this complex history, a number of points significant for our purposes can be drawn from the reports.

Buildings 1 and 3 were probably built early in the first century, then somewhat altered and reconstructed following the earthquake in the 70s CE. Buildings 5 and 7 (7 being treated in the earlier reports as part of building 5) probably date from a little later, 'probably the Flavian period', possibly earlier, though no earlier than the mid-first century CE.⁶⁹ While all these buildings might profitably be considered, due to their earlier date and particular points of interest I shall focus on numbers 1 and 3. These two buildings have a similar plan. The ground floor of each consists of two rooms, the northern of which in each case has a number of ovens – two in building 1, three in building 3. As well as a doorway, each has a window onto East Theater Street (building 1 also has a window facing north). Probably following alterations after the earthquake in the 70s, smaller rooms at the back of each unit, on the eastern side, were created, most likely windowless storage rooms.⁷⁰

68 C. K. Williams and O. H. Zervos, 'Corinth, 1987: South of Temple E and East of the Theater', *Hesperia* 57 (1988) 95–146.

69 C. K. Williams and O. H. Zervos, 'Corinth, 1985: East of the Theater', *Hesperia* 55 (1986) 129–75, here at 153.

70 Williams and Zervos, 'Corinth, 1985', 132; *idem*, 'Corinth, 1987', 122.



Fig. 5: Looking south up East Theater Street, with the buildings to the left. Photo © David Horrell.

Because of the greater than usual size and number of ovens in these buildings, and because of the large quantities of discarded animal bones, mostly skulls and lower legs, found piled in the south-west room of building 3 and around the ovens in that building, Williams and Zervos concluded that both were equipped for some kind of commercial use. One possibility is that they were *tabernae* or *popinae*, though the lack of drinking vessels in the remains makes this unlikely. They most likely served as some kind of butchery kitchens, preparing and selling cooked meats to visitors to the theatre and others resident in the neighbourhood.⁷¹ The windows onto the street functioned as counters, ‘to allow one to sell prepared foods to passers-by’.⁷²

The nature and extent of the materials that fell when these buildings were damaged or destroyed also led Williams and Zervos to conclude that there was most likely a second and possibly a third storey in each case, ‘with families residing on the upper floor or floors’.⁷³ The same applies to buildings 5 and 7.⁷⁴ These storeys may have been original, then repaired after the earthquake of the 70s CE, or possibly they were added at this point in time. Nothing detailed has emerged about the structure or layout of the residential accommodation that seems to have

71 See Williams and Zervos, ‘Corinth, 1985’, 146–8.

72 Ibid., 131.

73 Ibid., 148; cf. 134, 139–42, 147–8.

74 C. K. Williams and O. H. Zervos, ‘Corinth, 1988: East of the Theater’, *Hesperia* 58 (1989) 1–50, at 7.



Fig. 6: Building 3 viewed from the south, with the ovens clearly visible. Photo © David Horrell.

existed on the upper floors of these buildings, though based on the evidence of fallen frescoes found in 1984, 'at least one upper floor of building 3 must have had rooms decorated with a quite presentable fresco programme', probably one large room and at least one other room.⁷⁵ The available floor area in each building, assuming similar dimensions to the ground floor, would have been approximately 10×5 metres in each case (building 1 is actually somewhat larger than building 3, but only by a metre or so).

Despite this lack of detail, the information about buildings 1 and 3 does give us some insight into one kind of domestic space in first-century Corinth, a kind of space rather different from that of the 'sumptuous' villas described by Murphy-O'Connor. How might this information then help us to reflect on the possible contexts of early Christian meetings?

It is important first to stress two caveats. One is that there is of course no suggestion that Christians ever met in any of the buildings east of the theatre, any more than in the villa at Anaploga. In fact, if we discount the Erastus inscription, which in any case has no Christian content itself, there is as yet no direct archaeological evidence for Christianity in Corinth until around and after the fourth

⁷⁵ Williams and Zervos, 'Corinth, 1985', 140. On the wall paintings in building 3, see L. Gadberg, 'Roman Wall-painting at Corinth: New Evidence from East of the Theater', *The Corinthia in the Roman Period*, ed. Gregory, 47–64. Buildings 5 and 7 (more than 1 and 3) resemble the kind of apartment housing described, for example, by Ellis (*Roman Housing*, 73–8), though there is no corridor evident in the Corinth plans here.



Fig. 7: Building 3 from the north-east. Photo © David Horrell.

century.⁷⁶ Our knowledge is severely limited, and requires the use of disciplined imagination to apply it to early Christianity. The second caveat is that the buildings on East Theater Street are not to be thought of as ‘typical’ of domestic accommodation in first-century Corinth.⁷⁷ The buildings next to the theatre clearly had a quite specialised purpose, which determined the character and use of the ground floor space. Furthermore, the considerable variety of possible types of domestic space – from country villas to peasant homes, smart town apartments to rooms behind or over a shop, not to mention the more ramshackle and temporary dwellings of the destitute – means that we should be wary of labelling any specific form as ‘typical’.

⁷⁶ For overviews of this evidence, see Scranton, *Corinth XVI*, 6–26; Rothaus, *Corinth*, 93–104; P. Richardson, ‘Judaism and Christianity in Corinth after Paul: Texts and Material Evidence’, *Pauline Conversations in Context: Essays in Honor of Calvin J. Roetzel* (ed. J. C. Anderson, P. Sellew and C. Setzer; JSNTSup 221; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002) 42–66, here 61–5.

The tomb of Bishop Eustathios, found in the (probably) sixth-century cemetery basilica (the Kodratos/Quadratus basilica), may also be a piece of somewhat earlier evidence. For a description, see G. Daux, ‘Chronique des fouilles et découvertes archéologiques en Grèce en 1961’, *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique* 86 (1962) 629–974, 695–704; more briefly, J. Wiseman, *The Land of the Ancient Corinthians* (Göteborg: Paul Åströms, 1978) 85–6 with nn. 46–48; Rothaus, *Corinth*, 97–8. I am grateful to Mary Walbank for drawing my attention to this point.

⁷⁷ Cf. also Jongkind, ‘Corinth in the First Century AD’.

By way of more constructive conclusions, we may begin by noting that the buildings east of the theatre add some specifically Corinthian evidence to Meggitt's argument that the non-elite regularly encountered meat in 'decidedly unsacral' settings.⁷⁸ Meggitt's discussion is focused on the issue of 'meat consumption in Corinth', disputing Theissen's reconstruction of the background to 1 Cor 8–10,⁷⁹ but most of his evidence is drawn from Roman sources generally, or relates to Rome itself rather than Corinth. The evidence from buildings 1 and 3 hardly enables us to say how regularly the non-elite of Corinth purchased cooked meat, but given that the theatre could seat very large numbers – Wiseman estimates a capacity of 'about 14,000 persons'⁸⁰ – we can certainly say that the clientele of East Theater Street were not only the well-to-do or the social elite.

The discoveries of East Theater Street also enable us, using our 'disciplined imagination', to go some way towards picturing one kind of domestic space in which Christians could have met, the kind of space that might well have been occupied by small traders and business folk, not too different in social level, perhaps, from artisans like Prisca and Aquila, and Paul himself. Such people were not from the lowest social strata; they may have owned one or two slaves and been able to afford some 'luxuries', as the wall-paintings in building 3 indicate – so this alternative scenario does not by any means presume that such a domestic setting implies a host who was poor in the sense of living at or around subsistence level.⁸¹ Just as the artisans Prisca and Aquila hosted meetings of the *ekklesia* in their home, presumably in the room(s) above or behind their workshop,⁸² so too the butchers of East Theater Street (or whoever occupied the upper floor(s)) could have hosted meetings in the upstairs room(s).⁸³ In a fairly large upper room, or rooms, equipped perhaps with some tables and benches, it would by no means be impossible to cram in 50 or so people, though this would probably be pretty

78 J. J. Meggitt, 'Meat Consumption and Social Conflict in Corinth', *JTS* 45 (1994) 137–41, here 138.

The placement of the *vomitorium* on the opposite side of the street might indicate something of the quality of the meat sold (see fig. 3)!

79 Theissen, *Social Setting*, 121–43.

80 Wiseman, 'Corinth and Rome', 487.

81 Cf. Jongkind, 'Corinth in the First Century AD', 147. On the wall paintings see Gadberg, 'Roman Wall-painting at Corinth'. A. J. Brothers comments, for example, that apartments in *insulae* were by no means always for the poor, and that the poorer residents tended to be on the upper floors where accommodation was of lower (and less enduring) quality ('Urban Housing', in Barton, *Roman Domestic Buildings*, 54).

82 Cf. Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth*, 192–8; 1 Cor 16.19; cf. Acts 18.2–3; Rom 16.3.

83 Given the possibilities for multiple occupation of buildings, and for inhabitants of different social levels to occupy different accommodation units within a building, we should not simply presume that those who conducted their business on the ground floor were the (sole) occupants of the whole building, though this seems likely in the case of buildings 1 and 3, given the lack of external staircases, corridors, etc. I am grateful to L. Michael White for drawing these possibilities to my attention.

crowded.⁸⁴ Knowing virtually nothing about the shape or size of the rooms makes it impossible to posit an architectural explanation for the *σχίσματα* that arose in the Christian meetings at Corinth, in contrast to Murphy-O'Connor's attractively neat hypothesis based on the nine available places in the triclinium. But just as Allison warns against unwarranted assumptions and oversimplifications that create the impression that we are more well informed than we are about Roman domestic life,⁸⁵ so too, as Meggitt has recently argued, NT scholars may need to learn to infer less from certain sources, to abandon detailed yet ultimately implausible reconstructions, and to acknowledge how little we know about so many aspects of ancient life, particularly for the non-elite.⁸⁶ There are, as we have seen, a good many reasons to doubt the validity of Murphy-O'Connor's Corinthian reconstructions, given the extent of the available evidence.

Picturing the first Christians in Corinth meeting in an upper-storey room in East Theater Street is, of course, entirely imaginative, though no more so (and probably a good deal less so) than imagining them meeting in the villa at Anaploga. Though vague and unspecific, and yielding no particular insight into how the divisions at the Lord's Supper were related to the domestic space in which the Christians met, the East Theater Street scenario does at least fit rather well with an unusually precise piece of information given to us by Luke.⁸⁷ Describing what was perhaps a rather crowded meeting in Troas (maybe even a meeting of 'the whole church' there?), in an upper-storey room (*ὑπερῶον*) with people sat on the window ledges, Luke ensures the eternal fame of Eutychus by recording the soporific effect of Paul's lengthy discourse upon him: 'Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground three floors below (*ἀπὸ τοῦ τριστέγου*) and was picked up dead' (Acts 20.9).⁸⁸

84 Osiek and Balch, *Families in the New Testament World*, reckon 'one half-square meter per person and an equal half square meter for furniture' etc. (201), referring to work by Jay Dozier on the numbers that could dine in various rooms and gardens (201–2). The c. 50 sq m that we have to reckon with in this instance could thus accommodate 50 diners, on their figures.

85 Allison, 'Using the Material and Written Sources', 188.

86 J. J. Meggitt, 'Sources: Use, Abuse, Neglect. The Importance of Ancient Popular Culture', in Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth* (forthcoming).

87 Questions about Luke's sources or accuracy concerning the historicity of this point are largely irrelevant: what is important is the indication that Luke – not averse to depicting Christianity spreading among the well-to-do (e.g. Acts 17.4, 12) – depicts a Christian meeting happening in such a setting, which was presumably therefore plausible, even 'typical', for him.

88 On *τρίστεγον* (the neuter substantive from *τρίστεγος*), 'the third story [*sic*] of a building', i.e. the second above ground level, see BAGD, 1016. For the use of *τρίστεγος* in the papyri of the first century CE and later, specifically in the phrase '... οἰκίας τριστέγου', 'of a three-storeyed house', see J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the New Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930) 642.

Conclusion

There are, as we have seen, good reasons to doubt the plausibility of the imaginative reconstruction of the Corinthian Lord's Supper presented by Murphy-O'Connor; the extent to which this scenario has been presumed and reinforced in recent commentaries makes a critical reassessment all the more important. Certainly NT studies should pay more attention to the varieties of domestic space in the urban setting of Corinth and other cities of the Roman empire, and consider these as possible settings for early Christian meetings. The East Theater Street scenario is also imaginative, but for a number of reasons constitutes a more plausible, if less detailed, reconstructed setting: it represents one form of urban accommodation that existed during the time of Paul's visits to Corinth, a type likely to have been occupied by non-elite, though not the most impoverished, urban residents, and it fits well with the setting Luke depicts in Acts 20.9. Of course, this is only one plausible type of setting among a range of possibilities, but on a number of counts it is worth considering seriously, even though it means confessing that we are – and are likely to remain – unable to ascertain any architectural explanation for the Corinthian σχίσματα.