



Fig 3 Single-room apartment with remains of wooden bedstead on the second floor of the same apartment building (Fig 2 above) in Herculaneum, first century CE. Remnants of a painting adorn the back wall. A whole family may have lived in such a room, cooking on a brazier outside.

Photo: Carolyn Osiek

Even inscriptions, which in the Roman era often give extensive social information, come mostly from those with sufficient wealth to be able to afford them. Sometimes, however, the most imposing monuments are not those of the elite but of people of humbler origins who have acquired enough property to be able to proclaim to the world their success and prosperity. One thinks, for instance, of the garishly imposing monument of the baker Marcus Virgilius Eurysaces and his wife, Atistia, at Porta Maggiore in Rome or the double commemoration of the freedwoman Naevoleia Tyche, who erected an imposing monument for herself and her freedman husband, Gaius Munatius Faustus, and their *familia* of freedmen and freedwomen outside the Herculaneum Gate at Pompeii, but whose remains were found, with those of her husband, in a simple tomb in a different cemetery area.<sup>3</sup>

The poor inhumation and incineration burials of the open field at Isola Sacra near Ostia probably once had such family information painted on their clay tiles, now disappeared. And beyond these, there was the feared common public burial ground. To avoid that unacceptable alternative, burial societies of *tenuiores*, or little people, were common. Members would meet regularly, usually once a month, and make a modest contribution into a common chest.

<sup>3</sup> Discussion with photo in John R Clarke 2003), *Art in the lives of ordinary Romans: Visual representations and the non-elite viewers in Italy, 100 BC-AD*, pp 184-185.

### ***The New Testament teaching on family matters***

These gatherings functioned as social clubs as well, but their express and ultimate purpose was to provide a decent burial for their members, who otherwise feared not to be able to afford it. The late second-century theologian/apologist Tertullian describes the monthly contribution of Christians toward burials and other charitable works in very similar terms (*Apology* 39.6). Guilds and social clubs of those who had a common trade were also readily formed. Patronage of these burial societies and workers' associations was part of the honorable behavior of the elite, both men and women. It earned them statues, inscriptions, and glory from the grateful members.

Whether for upper or lower classes, standards of sanitation and safety left much to be desired. Disease was rampant and life expectancy low. With no knowledge of how diseases spread, inhabitants were defenceless against it, especially in the large cities. Most methods of prevention and healing were folk remedies or magical incantations with very mixed success. Garments made of wool, the standard material for most clothing, were bleached with urine, both human and animal, before being treated with other chemicals, including sulphur, and washed. Most hygiene arrangements were primitive. Apartment buildings and larger houses had their own common latrines, but no centralized plumbing for waste removal. Public latrines were accessible to all, seemingly for both sexes. Defecation and urination were not considered private functions.



Fig 4 House of Lucius Caecilius Jucundus, son of a freedman, at Pompeii, first century CE. This simple *domus* illustrates the relative wealth possible for a freedman and his immediate descendants. The owner was involved in a number of business ventures, as witnessed by the records he left behind.

Photo: Carolyn Osiek