

Jesus Followers in Pompeii: The *Christianos* Graffito and “Hotel of the Christians” Reconsidered

Thomas A. Wayment

Brigham Young University | thomas_wayment@byu.edu

Matthew J. Grey

Brigham Young University | matthew_grey@byu.edu

JJMJS No. 2 (2015): 102–146

Since the 19th century, archaeologists and historians have debated the presence of Jews and Christians in the Roman city of Pompeii before its destruction in 79 C.E. As a reflection of the unique enthusiasm inherent in this topic, claims regarding the presence of these minority groups have been extremely polarized, ranging from the wildly sensationalistic to the rigidly minimalistic. Some scholars have postulated the existence of robust Jewish and Christian communities at Pompeii, often by pointing to highly problematic evidence to support their claims.¹ In reaction against such speculation, other scholars have flatly rejected this proposal, often by dismissing evidence that could legitimately attest the presence of at least some Judeans and Jesus followers in the city and its vicinity.² Yet, despite the important historical implications of this debate, very little has been done in recent decades to sort through the claims and polemics,

We thank Dennis Mizzi and the two anonymous reviewers for reading early drafts of this article and for offering valuable suggestions for improvement. We also thank Massimo Osanna, Gabriel Zuchtriegel, and the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Pompei, Ercolano e Stabia, for granting us access to relevant sites in and around Pompeii during the summer of 2015. Finally, we thank our student assistants Jasmin Gimenez, Juan Pinto, and Haley Wilson for their help in the research process.

¹ See, for example, the maximalist interpretation of the evidence in Agnello Baldi, *La Pompei Giudaico-Cristiana* (Emilio de Mauro: Cava di Tirreni, 1964) and in the popular study of Carlo Giordano and Isidoro Kahn, *The Jews in Pompeii, Herculaneum, Stabiae and in the Cities of Campania Felix* (3rd ed.; Rome: Bardi Editore, 2001).

² An example of a more skeptical and minimalistic approach to the topic can be found in Giancarlo Lacerenza, “Per un riesame della presenza ebraica a Pompei,” *Materia Giudaica* 6.1 (2001): 99–103.

properly evaluate and contextualize the extant evidence, and determine what can be reasonably reconstructed of Jewish and Christian dynamics in first-century Campania.³

For example, in the early 1860s, a Latin graffito was discovered in Pompeii (Region VII Insula 11.11,14) that seemed to refer to the presence of Jesus followers in the city by its inclusion of the word *Christianos*. The publication of the *Christianos* graffito subsequently led to the popular dubbing of the building in which it was found as the *Hospitium Christianorum* (“Hotel of the Christians”) and prompted a wide range of opinions regarding the find’s significance. Some devout scholars have optimistically claimed that the graffito is the “earliest Christian artifact” reflecting an active Christian community in the city and that the hotel functioned as a base or “apostolic school” for Christian teaching in the region during the 60s and 70s C.E.⁴ Others have reacted to these sensational claims by simply dismissing a Christian reading of the graffito as “a figment of pious imagination,” although typically without carefully engaging the full range of relevant evidence.⁵ In short, the impulse to either prove or debunk the presence of Christians in Pompeii has resulted in a polarized debate in which some scholars have greatly exaggerated their claims based on uncritical interpretations of the data, and others have responded by categorically ignoring data that could provide valuable insights into the topic.

In an attempt to offer a fresh consideration of a key piece of evidence for the possible presence of Jesus followers at Pompeii, this paper will reevaluate the *Christianos* graffito and “Hotel of the Christians” in light of past scholarship, previously neglected epigraphic and archaeological observations, and socio-historical perspectives that can assist in contextualizing the extant evidence. To

³ One recent (though currently unpublished) attempt to bring more methodological rigor and balance to this topic is Jaimie Gunderson, “Inscribing Pompeii: A Reevaluation of the Jewish Epigraphic Data,” MA thesis, University of Kansas, 2013.

⁴ As will be discussed further below, one of the first scholars to make such claims was Giovanni de Rossi, “Una memoria dei Cristiani in Pompei,” *Bulletino di Archaeologia Cristiana* 2 (1864): 69–74. Similar claims were made most famously in a series of publications by Matteo Della Corte; see “Le più remote esplorazione di Pompei. Nuovi contribute allo studio su Pompei ed i Cristiani,” *Historia* 8 (1934): 354–72 esp. n. 21; “Revisione di un famoso graffito Cristiano,” *Rendic. Pontif. Acad. Rom. Di Archeol.* 13 (1937): 127; and *I Cristiani a Pompei* (Napoli, 1939), 5.

⁵ See, for example, Mary Beard, *The Fires of Vesuvius: Pompeii Lost and Found* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 302.

accomplish this, we will first reexamine the graffito itself by summarizing its discovery and various interpretations, by providing a new critical edition of the text, and by offering some preliminary commentary on its contents. We will then examine the building in which it was discovered—an analysis that, inexplicably, has not yet been undertaken in the debate—in order to provide the context necessary to assess claims that it was a hotel somehow associated with Jews or Christians. In conclusion, we will consider the possible historical implications of this graffito and insula for understanding the social location of Judeans and Jesus followers in the region of Pompeii between 62 and 79 C.E.

Part I: Reexamining the *Christianos* Graffito

Discovery and Interpretations

Because the *Christianos* graffito is the lynchpin for any discussion of the possible presence of Jesus followers in Pompeii, it is necessary to begin with a description of its discovery and subsequent interpretations. The complete body of scholarship on the graffito is too large to discuss exhaustively in a single article, but a brief summary of key events and proposals will provide important background for the analysis that follows.

The discovery of the graffito was made in 1862 by Giuseppe Fiorelli, whose team of archaeologists excavated a large building near the end of the Vicolo del Balcone Pensile (“Alley of the Overhanging Balcony”) now identified as Region VII Insula 11.11,14.⁶ During excavations, Fiorelli uncovered a charcoal graffito on the southwest wall of the building’s atrium that appeared to include the word *Christianos* (“Christians”). Within a few days the graffito had already begun to deteriorate from its exposure to the elements,⁷ but not before it was viewed by at least two additional eyewitnesses—first by the Italian scholar

⁶ There are multiple and conflicting accounts in academic literature of the graffito’s discovery and it is often difficult to substantiate the various claims, including who saw the graffito and when. See, for example, the different order of events described in Paul Berry, *The Christian Inscription at Pompeii* (Lampeter: Edward Mellen Press, 1995), 22–25; and in Margherita Guarducci, “La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani,” *Romische Quartalschrift* 57 (1962): 116. A close examination of the early Italian reports shows that, between the two, the account given by Guarducci is more reliable.

⁷ Charcoal graffiti are common at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and in the excavations prior to the 20th century they were left *in situ* without any attempt to protect or photograph them. Typically, a transcription was made and later published in the *CIL*, although many inscriptions were never published. Unfortunately, the charcoal graffiti often washed away in the first rains following their discovery, as was the case with the *Christianos* graffito.

Giulio Minervini and later by the German archaeologist Alfred Kiessling.⁸ Of the three known eyewitnesses, Minervini made the earliest transcription of the graffito (see fig. 1, p. 144), which was published in 1864 by Giovanni de Rossi, an Italian archaeologist renowned for his recording of catacomb inscriptions but who had not personally viewed the Pompeii artifact before it faded.⁹ The edition published by de Rossi, based on Minervini's notes and drawing, reads as follows:¹⁰

VINA
MARIA
ADIA · A·V
BOVIḠSAVDICHRISTIANOS
5 SEVOSO ONIS
X ... — .

As was common with specialized reports on Latin epigraphy, de Rossi provided Minervini's transcription of the graffito without a full translation into a modern language or an analysis of the entire text.¹¹ Instead, he commented on select

⁸ See Giulio Minervini, "Collected Works (1854–1862)," published in *Bullettino Archeologico Napoletano* (Naples, 1862).

⁹ Berry, *Christian Inscription*, 24–25 reports that de Rossi saw the graffito following a second cleaning of the wall. However, this claim contradicts de Rossi's own statement that by the time he arrived at the site the graffito had already disappeared completely (see de Rossi, "Una memoria dei Cristiani," 70–72). Furthermore, we have not been able to confirm Berry's report of a second cleaning of the wall after the graffito's initial discovery.

¹⁰ See de Rossi, "Una memoria dei Cristiani," 69–72. We have not been able to determine if Minervini's original notes have survived, although we have done a careful search for them at the library and archives associated with the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. In the editions of the graffito reproduced here, the dot underneath a letter signifies that the letter is restored with some caution and it may be read differently. These dots do not appear in the original editions, but have been noted in our editions to show where discrepancies may exist. A period signifies the presence of indecipherable marks in the graffito.

¹¹ The decipherable portions of the text de Rossi recorded likely read, "Wine . . . Mary . . . Bovi(o) is listening to the Christians . . .," but he is not explicit about this translation or its full meaning.

words and the possible readings of some phrases,¹² placing a particular emphasis on the graffito's fourth and fifth lines which he reconstructed as *audi Christianos s(a)evos olores* ("hate the Christians, cruel swans").¹³ Naturally, this reading highlighted the prominent use of the word *Christianos*, suggesting that the graffito was the earliest attestation of Christianity outside of the New Testament. However, while de Rossi's translation of the word *Christianos* as "Christians" was a reasonable reading of the word Minervini transcribed, a careful evaluation of his report shows that the remainder of his translation departs from the transcription in unexpected ways, such as the curious reconstruction of *sa(e)vos olores* ("cruel swans") from the letters SEVOS O ONIS.¹⁴

Shortly after Minervini made his transcription of the graffito, a second transcription was produced by Alfred Kiessling, the last scholar to view the artifact in person. Although Kiessling's edition was the first to be published (in 1862), his transcription was made after Minervini's, when portions of the graffito had partially deteriorated. Despite this disadvantage, Kiessling was able to make a more complete drawing of the entire graffito than the one provided by Minervini/de Rossi (see fig. 2, p. 144).¹⁵ Kiessling's printed edition, however, only reproduced lines four and five:¹⁶

¹² For example, de Rossi noted that Fiorelli read line three as A D K A, i.e. A(nte) D(iem) K(alendas) A(priles) ("before the first day of April"), a reading that has only infrequently been noted in secondary literature. He also reported that Minervini and Fiorelli thought the inscription might read, *audi Christianos . . . | sorores*, even though the first "r" of *sorores* was not seen by Minervini; see de Rossi, "Una memoria dei Cristiani," 71.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁴ In addition, it is interesting to observe that the transcription he provided shows that the graffito actually consists of two separate graffiti (note the different handwritings between the first three lines and the last three lines; see fig. 1, p. 144), though de Rossi does not extensively discuss this feature.

¹⁵ According to Guarducci, "La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani," 117, Kiessling's more detailed drawing later became the foundation for Karl Zangemeister's official *CIL* edition (see below).

¹⁶ Alfred Kiessling, "Scavi di Pompei," *Bullettino dell' Istituto di Corrispondenza Archeologica* 1 (Rome, 1862), 92–98. Guarducci, "La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani," 118, transcribes Kiessling's edition differently in line four, where she reads, "P—G. VI GAVDI·HRISTIANI." Determining a transcriber's intent when relying on a line drawing is not always straightforward. In this case, some letters could be read as one of two letters. For example, in Latin epigraphy, "E" is often written in its cursive form "II" so that if one vertical line remains it can be the vestiges of either "E" or "I."

PG · VI GAVDI . . HRISTIANI
8X̄ SICV. SO . . ORIIS

5

His transcription of these two lines clearly resembles that of Minervini/de Rossi in important ways.¹⁷ It also reflected the fact that some letters had already deteriorated since Minervini made the initial transcription. For example, by the time Kiessling saw the graffito, the “C” of *Christianos* had faded and the final “s” was no longer visible, but instead appeared to be an “i.”¹⁸

Still, Kiessling expressed confidence in the overall content of the critical fourth line, which he suggested could be restored as *igni gaude Christiane* (“rejoice in the fire, Christian”). While agreeing with de Rossi regarding the meaning of the fading word for “Christian” (rendered here in the singular), Kiessling’s rendering of the rest of the line differs slightly from the letters he reproduced in his edition.¹⁹ He did not explain his reasons for this, but his reading of “fire” in line four suggested to Kiessling that the graffito was a reminder to a Christian in Pompeii about the Neronian persecution in the mid-60s as reported by Tacitus.²⁰ Naturally, with these two published transcriptions

¹⁷ Kiessling’s more complete drawing, though not fully reproduced in his printed edition of the graffito, also agrees with Minervini’s transcription of the words “Wine” and “Maria” in lines one and two; cf. Zangemeister’s edition, which was based on Kiessling’s drawing (see fig. 2, p. 144).

¹⁸ Rex E. Wallace, *An Introduction to Wall Inscriptions from Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci, 2005), xxxi, notes that the final “s” is rarely dropped in the Pompeii graffiti, and therefore it is unlikely that the final “s” was simply omitted in the graffito. In this case, the discrepancies between the two editions likely favor a final “s” because it was seen by Minervini before the graffito began to fade.

¹⁹ Specifically, Kiessling reported the first part of the line as reading PG · VI GAVDI. Although one can construe these letters in various ways, *igni gaude* would imply that the first letter, clearly a “B” or “P,” was in fact an “I.” There are also other noticeable differences between Kiessling’s more complete drawing (see fig. 2, p. 144) and his published edition of lines four and five. These differences seem to reflect Kiessling’s attempts to make sense of the vocabulary and grammar of this difficult and fragmentary graffito.

²⁰ See Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44). Kiessling’s romantic reading leaves us to wonder whether he was attempting to rectify it with popular notions of Nero’s persecution of Christians, and thus created a literary influenced reading. See Lacerenza, “Per un riesame della presenza

Christianos into *ceristirae* or *christirae* (depending on how one renders “II”). In either instance, the meaning of the word is not immediately obvious and its spelling departs in unexpected ways from the previous editions on which the *CIL* entry is based, particularly in the last five letters. In fact, Zangemeister’s reconstruction of the entire fourth line—PG-VIG SAVDI CIIRISTIRAI— is almost completely unintelligible without positing odd grammatical variations or unique spellings.²⁴ It is possible that Zangemeister’s edition reflects his own personal skepticism of the possibility that the inscription referred to “Christians.”²⁵ In any case, the official *CIL* edition significantly impacted the subsequent discussion of the graffito, particularly among those scholars who began to dispute its association with Christianity.²⁶

In the decades following the publication of the graffito in the *CIL*, numerous scholars commented on its contents and significance, resulting in the circulation of a wide range of views. Many agreed that the graffito contained the word “Christians” and thus attested the presence of early Christians in Pompeii before its destruction in 79 C.E.²⁷ Some of these authors began to note other subsequent (and often highly dubious) finds they believed related to Christians

²⁴ For other criticisms of Zangemeister’s *CIL* edition, see L. De Feis, *Alcune Memorie Bibliche Scoperte a Pompei* (Florence: Libreria Fiorentina, 1906), 23.

²⁵ Both Berry, *Christian Inscription*, 27–28, and Guarducci, “La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani,” 119, claim that Zangemeister does not exclude the possibility of a Christian reading of the graffito, but the *CIL* entry does nothing to confirm or even allow for such a reading.

²⁶ It is interesting to note that, around this time, Fiorelli himself (the discoverer of the graffito) began to question this association. Although it is not clear if Zangemeister’s 1871 edition influenced him in this shift, in 1873 Fiorelli expressed concern that the editions of Kiessling and de Rossi showed notable discrepancies and instead indicated that he believed the graffito simply referred to five amphorae of wine; see G. Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi di Pompeii*, (Naples, 1873), 97–103.

²⁷ Although each had slightly different interpretations of the graffito’s significance, those scholars that read the fourth line as a reference to “Christians” included Johannes Overbeck and August Mau, *Pompeji in seinen Gebäuden, Alterthümern und Kunstwerken* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1875), 436–37; Victor Shultze, “Die Christen-Inschrift in Pompeji,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 4 (1881): 125–30; Paul Allard, *Historie des Persécutions: Pendant les deux premiers siècles Volume I* (3rd ed.; Paris: Librairie Victor Lecoffre, 1903), 73–76; Antonio Ferrua, “Epigrafia ebraica,” *La Civiltà Cattolica* 87 (1937), no. 3, 127–37; and F. Filson, “Were There Christians in Pompeii?,” *Biblical Archaeologist* (1939): 14.

(such as various “cross” images) and, as a result, offered extremely speculative reconstructions of a well-organized Christian community in the city.²⁸ Others, reacting against the more sensational claims, expressed extreme skepticism regarding a Christian reading of the graffito, the presence of Christians in the city, or both.²⁹ Naturally, this debate prompted additional (if highly conjectural) readings of the graffito which appeared well into the early 20th century.³⁰

Almost a century after the graffito’s initial discovery and in response to this remarkable array of proposals, Italian scholar Margherita Guarducci published what has been perhaps the most important modern academic study of the graffito to date.³¹ Guarducci’s interest was, in part, to sort through all previous publications on the topic and to present her own conclusions based on a responsible evaluation of the evidence. In the process, Guarducci offered a compelling reading of the graffito and an analysis that stands out as exemplary in its caution and careful use of previously published editions. Although she did not address the first three lines of the text, she read the critical fourth and fifth lines as BOVIOS AUDI(T) CHRISTIANOS | SEVOS O[S]ORES: “Bovio is

²⁸ The most enthusiastic and speculative proponent of this position was Matteo Della Corte, “Le più remote esplorazione di Pompei. Nuovi contribute allo studio su Pompei ed i Cristiani,” 354–72 esp. n. 21; “Revisione di un famoso graffito Cristiano,” 127; and *I Cristiani a Pompei*, 5.

²⁹ August Mau, *Pompeji in Leben und Kunst* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1899), 17–18; Domenico Mallardo, “La questione dei cristiani a Pompei,” *Rivista di Studi Pompeiani* 1 (Naples, 1934–1935), 116–65, 217–61.

³⁰ Perhaps the most novel approach to the graffito was suggested by William Newbold, “Five Transliterated Aramaic Inscriptions,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 30 (1926): 291–95. In addition to accepting the reading of the Latin word “Christian,” Newbold creatively argued that the rest of the text was actually an Aramaic graffito written in Latin letters, which he rendered from his reconstructed Aramaic as: “A strange mind has driven A. and he has pressed in among the Christians who make a man a prisoner as a laughing-stock [to the people of Pompeii?].” Newbold claimed that this graffito reflected the (Jewish?) writer’s disdain for those who spent long hours listening to a Christian apostle in the building’s atrium. Although Newbold’s study is occasionally mentioned in the academic literature (e.g., Giordano and Kahn, *Jews in Pompeii*, 84–88), it has received virtually no serious engagement and has been dismissed by most critical scholars; see in particular the assessment of Newbold’s “stupefying conclusion” in Guarducci, “La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani,” 118–19. For the most part, however, Newbold’s idiosyncratic work on this graffito has only received “a profound silence” (Berry, *Christian Inscription*, 33).

³¹ Guarducci, “La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani,” 116–25.

listening to the Christians, cruel haters.”³² A significant contribution of Guarducci’s translation and discussion is that she clearly articulated what seemed obvious from the eyewitness transcriptions of Minervini and Kiessling—that the most natural reading of the graffito contains a reference to an individual named “Bovio(s),” a rare but attested name, who appears to have heard and possibly adhered to some form of Christian teaching.³³

Guarducci also attempted to discuss the ramifications of her reading in the context of first-century Pompeii. She concluded that in all likelihood the graffito reflects a local memory of Christianity that was “hostile” and possibly alludes to Christians as the “haters of mankind” (a common perception of Christians by outsiders). She saw it as almost certain that there were Christians as well as Jews in Pompeii prior to the earthquake of 79 C.E., and she connected them with the Christian community of nearby Puteoli mentioned in Acts 28:13–14. Showing restraint in dealing with the other allegedly “Christian” artifacts from Pompeii, she cautiously noted that a few may be genuinely Christian, although she did not state which ones in her opinion fell into that category. She did, however, dismiss the frequent claim that the insula in which the graffito was discovered was a meeting place for Christians (see below).³⁴

Although Guarducci’s analysis of the graffito and its implications were methodologically sound, her work—which was published in Italian and has not received much attention in English scholarship—did not put an end to the longstanding debate over the reading, interpretation, and significance of the *Christianos* graffito. In recent decades, some writers have continued using the graffito to promote the more sensationalistic reconstructions of Christians in

³² Ibid., 121–22. In her edition, Guarducci notes that *sevovs* would be an orthographic variant of *saevovs*, a variant that is present in at least two third-century Latin documents. The translation of her Italian is our own.

³³ In her commentary, Guarducci notes several examples of the Latin name Bovius; see “La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani,” 122, esp. n. 18. For three examples of *Bovii*, one of them from nearby Puteoli, see Wilhelm Shulze, *Geschichte Lateinischer Eigennamen* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1966), 234; cf. Heikki Solin and Olli Salmies, *Repertorium nominum gentilium et cognominum Latinorum* (Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1988), 37. Iiro Kajanto, however, does not list any such examples (Iiro Kajanto, *The Latin Cognomina* [Helsinki: Keskuskirjapaino, 1965]). See also Wallace, *Introduction to Wall Inscriptions*, XXIX–XXX.

³⁴ Guarducci, “La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani,” 124–25.

Pompeii,³⁵ some more responsible scholars have acknowledged the legitimacy of Guarducci's reading and the presence of at least some Christians in the city (though without the more sensational overlays of the previous century),³⁶ and yet others have continued to dismiss both, either by ignoring the graffito entirely or by simplistically denouncing it as "a figment of pious imagination."³⁷ In the latter category are even unfounded accusations of fraud, including the claim that the original eyewitnesses invented the graffito and that "in fact, probably no one ever saw it!"³⁸

In light of this long and tumultuous history of scholarship (most of which has been in Italian and inaccessible to non-specialists), as well as its significant implications for the study of early Christianity in Italy, we believe that a new critical edition of the graffito based on the extant evidence would be a valuable resource for the future study of this important artifact. We also hope

³⁵ For example, see the treatments of the graffito in Giordano and Kahn, *Jews in Pompeii*, 83–88, and Berry, *Christian Inscription*, who uses the graffito and several dubious artifacts from Pompeii to argue for the presence of a robust Latin-speaking Christian community in the city (for example, see Berry, *Christian Inscription*, 7–12).

³⁶ See, for example, Antonio Varone, "Giudei e cristiani nell'area vesuviana, in AA.VV. Pompeii 79," *Antiqua* 15 (1979): 131–46; W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 131; Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (trans. Michael Steinhauser; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 7–10; and Alastair M. Small, "Urban, Suburban and Rural Religion in the Roman Period," in *The World of Pompeii*, ed. John Dobbins and Pedar W. Foss (New York: Routledge, 2007), 194.

³⁷ Beard, *Fires of Vesuvius*, 302; cf. Alison E. Cooley and M. G. Cooley, *Pompeii and Herculaneum: A Sourcebook* (2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 2014), 107–108, 159. The latter are open to the possibility that Christians were in the city of Pompeii, but do not include the *Christianos* graffito as evidence for this in their sourcebook.

³⁸ See Moormann, "Jews and Christians at Pompeii," 68 (cf. Mallardo, "La questione dei cristiani a Pompei," 137–38). We cannot find compelling evidence to suggest that such skepticism is warranted. There were multiple independent witnesses to the inscription and, while their editions show variations, there is no reason to discount their work as sheer fantasy. For example, de Rossi claimed that Minervini and Fiorelli showed him the place of the inscription because they had seen it *in situ* a few days earlier ("Una memoria dei Cristiani," 70–72), but he is compellingly honest that it had already vanished by that time: "[Fiorelli] showed me the site [of the inscription], but no matter how much I forced my eyes to see it, my every effort was in vain: no vestige remained." Furthermore, the discrepancies between the two eyewitness accounts seem to confirm that a process of the graffito's deterioration was underway, with some faded letters absent in Kiessling's later transcription.

that, after having sorted through the previous scholarship and polemics surrounding the graffito, a methodologically responsible edition will refocus attention on the artifact itself rather than the speculative interpretations that have often been associated with it.

A New Edition

Before presenting this new edition, a few observations must be made regarding our approach and methodology. Unfortunately, because of the complete deterioration of the graffito it is not likely that the evidence for its reconstruction will ever move beyond what was preserved in the line drawings of Minervini/de Rossi and Kiessling.³⁹ However, without any compelling reasons to discount them, these eyewitness transcriptions should provide enough information to establish a fairly reliable reconstruction of the fragment. A careful comparison of the two original drawings shows that both agreed on critical letters in their observations. These agreements form the basis of our reconstruction and are presented without annotation. Letters that were disputed in the original drawings are presented with an underdot so as to clearly indicate points of possible disagreement. In order to avoid any unnecessary eclecticism, we omit those words or characters that appear without explanation in a single edition and only include features which are substantiated by both eyewitnesses. We believe that such a minimalist reconstruction will result in the most secure edition of the graffito for future analysis.⁴⁰

Because the graffito was clearly fragmentary at the time of its discovery, it is also necessary to delineate what we know about its contents, what we do not know, and what can be reasonably reconstructed. Therefore, we have inserted brackets to indicate places where we think a portion of the text is missing; where

³⁹ Berry, in *Christian Inscription*, claims that by using modern imaging equipment he was able to see traces of the charcoal inscription that was inscribed with a stylus. However, his claims strain credulity. Aside from there being no evidence for the graffito being “inscribed,” Berry provides no scientific data that resulted from his activities and no new evidence for a better reading of the graffito than what was transcribed by its eyewitnesses.

⁴⁰ Practices of publishing editions of graffiti and inscriptions have changed significantly over the years. Because we are reliant upon 19th-century editions to create a modern edition, some difficulties naturally arise in discerning the intent of the original authors. While the earliest transcriptions of the graffiti are reproduced in several publications, we have found Guarducci’s publication of them to be reliable and most accurate to the originals; see “La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani,” 117–18.

no brackets are used we believe we have reached the end of a line. In addition, we have provided accompanying notes for each line of the graffito to allow for comparison between our reconstruction and the earlier editions. Finally, the eyewitness transcriptions clearly indicate that the graffito actually consists of two graffiti written by separate individuals, as shown by the distinct differences in letter-forms in the graffito's upper and lower portions. This change in handwriting is indicated in our reconstruction by "(m. 2)." Based on these observations and approaches, we propose the following reading:

1]VINA
]MARIA
]DIA ·A·V
(m. 2)] BQVIOS AVDI C̄HRISTIANQ̄S	
5]SEV Q̄S Q̄[RATI]ONIS	
]X	

Translation: "Wine . . . Mary . . . Bovios is listening to the Christians . . . if the face of the o(rati)on . . ."

Notes

1) Kiessling's drawing of the inscription (followed in Zangemeister's edition) allows for]NINA.

2) Minervini's edition restores only the right half of the first letter, which is clearly an "M." Kiessling (followed by Zangemeister) read NERVII ΛARIA. The first five letters were placed directly above PGVIGS (of Kiessling/Zangemeister's edition) in the line below and formed what looks to be the basis for a left hand margin of the graffito. Kiessling/Zangemeister's edition also appears to indicate that the handwriting of NERVII (=Nerve?) was the same as that of lines four to six. Minervini suggested the end of the line could also read VARIA, but the line tracing of his edition does not suggest this as a reasonable reconstruction given what appears to be the ductus of the first letter.

3) Minervini restored ADIA A · V. The first letter of this line could be a crude "N" or even "M." It is possible that the name Secu]ndia or stipe]ndia was intended. The first suggestion represents the Latin name Secundia and the second represents the word "tax" or "payment."

4) Kiessling read PG · VI GAVDI . . HRISTIANI, but his edition allows for the reconstruction offered here. Later commentators discussed the possibility that there were two separate hands at work here, and both transcriptions (Kiessling's and Minervini's) strongly suggest two different hands.⁴¹

⁴¹ D. Mallardo was critical of the idea that there are two separate graffiti and instead argued for a single graffito written by the same person, "La questione dei cristiani a

We are fairly confident that two different graffiti are evidenced here. The upper one is more upright and crude in its letter forms. The lower tends to slant slightly to the right. In the copies of Minervini and Kiessling, the first “s” is terminal and indicates an intentional ending of a word. The terminal “s” was extended so that it created a top bar above “x” in the line below. Minervini’s edition also contained a terminal “s” at the end of the line.

5) Kiessling/Zangemeister read 8 X SICVI · SO . . ONIS. The “e” of SEU is restored with some hesitancy because later editors interpreted Kiessling’s line drawing as “SICU,” but his transcription could equally be rendered as SEU based on the cursive Latin “e” that is written using two vertical lines, which in Kiessling’s edition is rendered with a slight curvature of the right member thus allowing for IC instead of II “e.” Minervini offered the restoration of one word of line five as SORORES (“sisters”) beginning with the second “s” of that line.

6) In Minervini’s edition, there are two abbreviations noted by a supralinear stroke following a letter. The supralinear strokes were apparently visible to Minervini, but the letters were sufficiently obscured that it is impossible to determine what they were. The abbreviated words could refer to many different things, including a name of the person writing the inscription or even a dating reference. The “x” at the beginning of the line suggests a dating formula. Kiessling’s line drawing contains a more precise rendition of what he saw, but it is equally garbled: “|| . . . F.” The final letter appears to be a Greek digamma and the first letter would represent “e.” Currently, nothing reasonable can be made of this line.

Commentary

Attempting to wrest meaning from this extremely fragmentary graffito is no easy matter, and the fact that it is potentially the earliest physical attestation of Christianity in the Roman Empire encourages us to proceed with caution. In our preliminary commentary, we will first consider the meaning and significance of lines four and five (the lower graffito), followed by some additional observations on lines one and two (the upper graffito). To begin, it is important to note that, based on this reconstruction, Guarducci’s reading for line four remains the most compelling, with a personal name in the nominative case (ΒΟVIOS) followed by a finite, third person singular verb (ΑVΔΙ) and a direct object (ΧΡΙΣΤΙΑΝΟΣ). This reading accords well with both eyewitness drawings and is most reasonably translated as “Bovios is listening to the Christians.” Naturally, such a translation has significant historical implications for the presence of Jesus followers in

Pompei,” 291–95, esp. n. 1. A. Baldi, *La Pompei Cristiano-giudaica*, 25, ridicules the work of Mallardo, which he calls a fantasy.

Pompeii and must be carefully analyzed, starting with the critical word *Christianos*.

Assuming that this word was transcribed correctly by its eyewitnesses and in the absence of a more compelling alternative, it appears to us that the most natural reading of *Christianos* is, indeed, as a reference to early followers of Jesus. The formation of the word *Christianos* was done through combining a Greek noun with the Latin ending *-ianus* and by adding the accusative plural ending *-os* to the noun. By forming a Latin noun in this fashion, the author of the graffito seems to have assumed that *Christus* (or perhaps *Chrestus*) was a proper name and that *Christianos* (the accusative plural object of *audit*) was a group of his followers to whom Bovios was listening.⁴² Of course, it is reasonable to ask whether the individual being followed by the group was Jesus of Nazareth or some other individual referred to as *Christus/Chrestus*,⁴³ but the attested use of the word “Christian” as an early popular designation for Jesus’ followers strongly suggests that the former was intended.⁴⁴ Particularly relevant to this

⁴² Typically the noun *audio* would require an accusative or dative object to render it in the sense of “to hear” or “to listen to” or even “to follow.” In this graffito, the case ending in *-os* is important because it identifies the Christians as the object of the finite verb. It also indicates that the author of the graffito understands the word as a Latin noun/name. For similar examples of this form of group designation (e.g., the *Caesariani*, *Galbiani*, *Herodiani*), see C. K. Barrett, *Acts: International Critical Commentary* (2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 1:556. This idea originates with H. B. Mattingly, “The Origin of the Name ‘Christiani,’” *JTS* 58 (1958): 26–37.

⁴³ *CIL* VI.24944 does mention an individual named Iucundus Chrestianus and, of course, there has been much discussion regarding Suetonius’s mention of Jews being expelled from Rome at the instigation of *Chrestus*. Many scholars believe that the latter was a reference to Jesus of Nazareth, but D. Slingerland argues that this was not the case; see “Chrestus: Christus?” in A. J. Avery-Peck, *New Perspectives on Ancient Judaism* 4 (Lanham: University Press of America, 1989), 143. Cf. Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; Dio Cassius 60.6.6; Acts 18:2; Orosius, *Adversum Paganos* 7.6.15; D. Slingerland, “Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4 and the Account in Cassius Dio,” *JQR* 79 (1989): 305–20; D. Slingerland, “Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4, Acts 18, and Paulus Orosius’ *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*: Dating the Claudian Expulsion(s) of Roman Jews,” *JQR* 83 (1992): 127–44.

⁴⁴ The formation of the name *Christians* is attested textually in the New Testament in Acts 11:26; 26:28 (Antioch and Caesarea Maritima), and 1 Pet 4:16 (Rome). For Acts 11:26 there is some variation in the textual tradition between the two readings: Χριστιανούς is attested in the majority of witnesses, but κ^{*} 81 1243 read Χρηστιανούς and B P⁷⁴ D read Χρειστιανούς (D^{*} Χρειστιανοί). For Acts 26:28 B reads Χρειστιανόν, and κ^{*} reads Χρηστιανόν. The same holds true for 1 Pet 4:16, where κ^{*} alone reads Χρηστιανός. The earliest literary usages of the term Christian, either as a self-designation or applied to

graffito is the statement by Tacitus (ca. 110 C.E.) regarding events in Rome under Nero (ca. 64 C.E.), in which followers of Jesus were considered “a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians [*vulgus Christianos appellabat*].”⁴⁵ According to Tacitus, the name of this group was based on the name of its founder, *Christus*. Although Tacitus’ statement was made a few decades after the destruction of Pompeii, it adds plausibility to the suggestion that the *Christianos* graffito was written by a working class individual who viewed “Christ followers” in a negative light.⁴⁶

In light of this conclusion, it is also important to consider whether such an early reference to Christians would likely refer to them as *Christians*, *Chrestianos*, or in some other way.⁴⁷ In papyri from around this period ι, ιε, η, and ε are often interchangeable, meaning that the author could have intended *Chrestianos* when writing *Christianos*, or vice-versa.⁴⁸ There is also evidence that by the second century, Christian authors had grown sensitive to the fact that people were confusing the name of their founder *Christ* with the Greek adjective

them by Roman authors, are: Clement, *Strom.* 4; Tertullian, *Apol.* 3; Lactantius, *Div. Inst.* 4.8; Ignatius, *Eph.* 11.2; *Rom.* 3.2; *Magn.* 10.3; *Pol.* 7.3; Pliny, *Epistles* 10.96; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2; Lucian, *Alexander* 25; 38; *Peregrinus* 11, 12, 13, 16. See also Dio Cassius 60.6.6; Acts 18:2; Orosius, *Adversum Paganos* 7.6.15.

⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.

⁴⁶ Another attestation of the word “Christian” outside the New Testament is found in the writings of Josephus, who stated that the “tribes of the Christians” (Χριστιανων) were named after their founder (*Ant.* 18.64).

⁴⁷ Unfortunately, as anyone who has worked with Roman period Greek or Latin inscriptions and documents can attest, little can be made of the spelling differences between *Christianos*, *Chrestianos*, and *Chrēstianos* unless there are other factors that can help determine whether scribes intentionally spelled the name in a particular way. This is precisely the intent of the study by W. Shandruck, “The Interchange of ι and η in Spelling χριστ- in Documentary Papyri,” *BASP* 47 (2010): 205–19, who concludes that there are valid reasons for considering Χρηστιανός the earliest spelling of the title Christian. See also the issues noted by L. Blumell, *Lettered Christians: Christians, Letters, and Late Antique Oxyrhynchus* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 37–38.

⁴⁸ Discussion of this phenomenon can be found in Shandruck, “Interchange of ι and η,” 205–19; G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* 3 (Macquarie: Macquarie University, 1983), 129–30; and Anne Marie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Cambridge: Princeton University Press, 2008), 140–41 n. 56. Cf. F. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (2 vols; Milan: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino–La Golia, 1976), 1:235.

Chrestos (“useful or good”), and thus were mispronouncing the name Christian as *Chrestian*.⁴⁹

In short, then, if line four of the graffito has been transcribed correctly, the most reasonable explanation is that it refers to an individual who was listening to a group of Jesus followers in Pompeii or its vicinity.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, little can be said of Bovios, the person who was listening to the Christians. In the graffito, this name is attested only as a nomen without the cognomen or the tripartite name of a citizen, and thus may represent a slave name.⁵¹ The expected Latin form of the name would be Bovius, but in this instance the Latin nominative ending was substituted by the Greek –os, which may provide some insight into Bovios’s cultural origins. Latin forms of the name are attested in inscriptions from nearby Puteoli,⁵² although there is no compelling evidence to identify any of those individuals with the Bovios at Pompeii. Given the setting in Pompeii where the *Christianos* graffito was discovered, it is possible that Bovios was a transient merchant or worker in one of the nearby textile workshops (see below). The fragmentary nature of the graffito also makes it impossible to determine if Bovios was being ridiculed by the author for *being* a Christian or merely for having *listened* to Christians. In either case, it seems that the actual author of the graffito was not a Jesus follower, since at this point in the first century (pre-79 C.E.) the word “Christian” was a likely contemptuous epithet applied to Jesus followers by outsiders and not yet used by believers as a self-designation.⁵³

⁴⁹ For example, Justin Martyr seems quite sensitive to the issue of confusion between the Χριστιανοί and the adjective χρηστοί; see *1 Apol.* 4.1; 4.5.

⁵⁰ In support of this reading, P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhundert: Untersuchungen zur Sozialgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1989), 8, calls the *Christianos* graffito at Pompeii an “interesting example” of possible Christian presence in Pompeii. Barrett, *Acts*, 1:556 also thinks the graffito should be taken in this way, i.e. that it represents affiliation with a group of Jesus followers.

⁵¹ See Gunderson, “Inscribing Pompeii,” 34; Joanne Berry, *The Complete Pompeii* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 91; E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 187, 424, 528, and 556.

⁵² See n. 33 above.

⁵³ See the discussions in E. A. Judge, “Judaism and the Rise of Christianity: A Roman Perspective,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45 (1994), 355–68 (esp. pg. 363); J. Elliot, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 789–94; and Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 12–13.

Regarding the contents of line five, it appears that Guarducci's rendition of the phrase as SEVOS O[S]ORES ("cruel haters") is much more questionable. Both eyewitness transcriptions agree that the letters "SO" were followed by a lacuna of several letters, which was clearly followed by the Latin case ending -onis/-ores. Based on the positions of the letters in the lines above and below the lacuna we estimate that Minervini's and Kiessling's transcriptions left enough space for approximately two or possibly three missing letters. Both editions also appear to indicate that the line began with *seu/sicu* (cf. Latin *sive*), followed by three letters, and then ended with the singular genitive case ending.⁵⁴ Therefore, the final word of line five could be plausibly reconstructed as *o[rati]onis* ("of the oration" or "belonging to the oration"); since it follows what appears to be a nominative noun (*os* "face"), the line could have the sense of "the head/face of the oration," but this is admittedly conjectural since there is no surviving artifact to consult and the letters "rati" might not fit comfortably in the conjectured position. Although such a phrase is not attested in literature, it would appear to convey the idea of the beginning of an oration or in light of an oration, which may be appropriate in the context of the previous line which mentions Bovios "listening" to Christians.

On the upper graffito, written in a different hand by someone other than the author of the lower graffito, little more can be said beyond the apparent reference to wine (Latin *vina*) and the presumably Jewish name "Maria." The close proximity of this name with the lower graffito mentioning "Christians" is quite intriguing, leaving us to wonder about the possible relationship of the two inscriptions; could one have been written in response to, or "in conversation with," the other?⁵⁵ Was Maria a Jewish woman somehow associated with the group of *Christianos* to whom Bovios was listening? Unfortunately, the graffiti are simply too fragmentary to be certain. Similar uncertainty surrounds the third line of the upper graffito, which contains two letters at the end separated by a mid-point dot suggesting an abbreviation, but without more context it is difficult to determine the precise meaning.

⁵⁴ Given typical orthographic variations, it is possible that the author of the graffito intended -ones, which would have a significant effect on the meaning but little effect on the potential nouns used to reconstruct the lacuna.

⁵⁵ On the practice of nearby graffiti being in conversation with each other, see Kristina Milnor, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 164.

In summary, a careful comparison and analysis of the eyewitness transcriptions suggests that the graffito found at Pompeii by Fiorelli makes the most sense as a reference to an individual named Bovios who was listening to Christians, and who was apparently ridiculed for it by the author of the graffito (who used “outsider” terminology in mentioning the group). Furthermore, the graffito may refer to some kind of Christian preaching, particularly if the restoration of the word “oration” is credible, and it appears that a Jewish(?) woman named Maria somehow figured into the adjacent graffito. Obviously, there is much we do not know about the full content and meaning of this fragmentary graffito. However, if this reading is accurate, then it is important to consider its possible implications for the presence of Judeans and Jesus followers in the region and their relationship with the building in which the graffito was discovered.

Part II: Reexamining the “Hotel of the Christians”

Having shown that the *Christianos* graffito can reasonably be read as a reference to Jesus followers, it is now necessary to assess the claims that the building in which the graffito was discovered was associated with a community of Christians in Pompeii. Such claims regarding this building have, from the beginning, been made in tandem with the interpretation of the graffito, thus leading to the popular dubbing of Region VII Insula 11.11,14 as the *Hospitium Christianorum*, or “Hotel of the Christians.” Naturally, speculations on the nature of this structure quickly became as sensational as the interpretations of the graffito, resulting in a variety of claims regarding the building’s ownership, use, and relationship to Christian activity. Although Giuseppe Fiorelli, the excavator of the building, simply described it as a “grande *caupona*” (“large inn”) without speculating on its relationship to the *Christianos* graffito,⁵⁶ his colleague Giovanni de Rossi was the first to claim that building was a meeting place for Pompeii’s purported Christian community. In particular, de Rossi asserted that the *Christianos* graffito discovered in its atrium was evidence of the building’s use as a Christian “school” in which an apostolic figure taught his disciples similar to the way Paul taught the message of Jesus from a rented room in Rome (see Acts 28:30–31).

⁵⁶ Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 25. Of all the eyewitnesses to the graffito, Fiorelli seems to have been the most hesitant to identify the building as “Christian” in his later reports. Fiorelli’s associate, Alfred Kiessling, originally referred to the structure as “una bottega” (“a store”); see Kiessling, “Scavi di Pompei,” 92–98, and Mallardo, “La questione dei cristiani a Pompei,” 139.

De Rossi supported this suggestion by referring to other graffiti which were clustered around the *Christianos* graffito on the southwest wall of the atrium; these included the phrase MVLVS HIC · MVSCELLAS (“This mule, to the little flies”),⁵⁷ which he read as a pagan derision of the disciples gathered around a Christian teacher, and the line MENDAX VERACI UBIQUE SALUTE (“liar salutes truth everywhere”),⁵⁸ which he understood as a derision of the Christian teacher himself. De Rossi also suggested that a graffito outside the building’s *taberna* (Insula 11.13) warning idlers to not loiter at that establishment—OTIOSIS LOCVS HIC NON EST DISCEDE MORATOR (“This is not the place to linger, move along, idler”)⁵⁹—was the owner’s attempt to dispel pagan neighbors who might be suspicious of the Christian activities being conducted inside the “apostolic school,”⁶⁰ thus presenting an elaborate scenario of Christian presence and interactions in the city of Pompeii.

This description of the building and its use as a Christian gathering place had a far-reaching impact and was generally accepted in subsequent decades.⁶¹ Perhaps the most influential scholar in perpetuating and expanding upon this hypothesis in the mid-20th century was Matteo Della Corte, who may have been the first to dub Insula 11.11,14 the “Hotel of the Christians.”⁶² Della Corte championed the claim that the building and its graffito (along with numerous other graffiti and artifacts throughout the city) indicated the presence of a robust Christian community in Pompeii.⁶³ In regard to the “hotel,” he added the claim that a small crystal fish (which he viewed as a Christian symbol) was

⁵⁷ *CIL* IV.2016.

⁵⁸ *CIL* IV.2018c.

⁵⁹ *CIL* IV.813.

⁶⁰ De Rossi, “Una memoria dei Cristiani,” 72.

⁶¹ For example, see de Feis, *Alcune Memorie*, 12–14, who, following de Rossi, considered the building’s atrium to be the place where Christians gathered for instruction and prayers. Newbold, “Aramaic Inscriptions,” 294, similarly imagined Christian converts spending long hours listening to an apostolic missionary in the same room where pagan observers wrote their derisive graffiti. One contemporary scholar who was open to a Christian reading of the graffito but critical of de Rossi’s description of the building as an early Christian house church was Bernard Aube, *Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* (Paris: Seance du Juin, 1866), 184–91.

⁶² Matteo Della Corte, “Sigillum-Devotio,” *Rendic. R. Accademia di Napoli* 16 (1938): 6.

⁶³ See Matteo Della Corte, “L’Albergo Dei Cristiani a Pompei,” *Civiltà* 3.9 (1942): 73–80; and *Case ed Abitanti di Pompei* (3rd ed.; Napoli, 1965), varia.

found in the insula, further attesting the use of the building for Christian meetings.⁶⁴ In his later writings, Della Corte elaborated upon this reconstruction by suggesting that the owner of the hotel was a Jewish man who was sympathetic to Christians and allowed them to meet on his premises.

This claim was prompted by the discovery in the adjacent *taberna* (Insula 11.13) of a bronze food warmer (*foculus authepsa*), the lid of which was decorated with a statuette of a bearded prisoner whose hands were tied behind his back and whose face looked up in defiance. By pointing to a similar image on coins minted by Gaius Sosius to commemorate the conquest of Jerusalem in 37 B.C.E., Della Corte argued that the statuette represented a Jewish prisoner, perhaps taken captive in the first Judean revolt against Rome. The rebellious attitude depicted on the statuette convinced Della Corte that its owner (assumed to be the owner of both the hotel and the adjacent *taberna*) was a Judean who still took immense pride in his recently subdued nation. It was this “Hebrew innkeeper,” according to Della Corte, who brought Christians (fellow Jews?) into his hotel for their gatherings.⁶⁵

Variations on these claims have persisted into the late 20th century and occasionally still appear in the academic literature. For example, the popular study of Carlo Giordano and Isidoro Kahn refers to Insula 11.11,14 as both the “Hotel of the Christians” and the “Hotel of the Jews,” and fully endorses the reconstruction of the hotel being owned by a Jew and used for Christian gatherings.⁶⁶ Similarly, Paul Berry recently maintained that Christians met in the building’s living rooms to practice their secret rituals.⁶⁷ Apart from these uncritical repetitions of previous claims, many academic references to the insula since the mid-20th century have simply referred to the building by its traditional name—the “Hotel of the Christians”—without commenting on the socio-historical implications of that title.⁶⁸

Unfortunately, most published descriptions of Insula 11.11,14 have been extremely brief and selective, typically offered by those writers who have

⁶⁴ Della Corte, “L’Albergo Dei Cristiani,” 79.

⁶⁵ Della Corte, “L’Albergo Dei Cristiani,” 80. The food warmer, which had a receptacle for heated charcoal, was supported by four lion feet and was decorated with bronze images of lambs and Medusa heads along its side. An image of the statuette and the possible *comparanda* on the Gaius Sosius coins can be seen in Giordano and Kahn, *Jews in Pompeii*, 68–69.

⁶⁶ Giordano and Kahn, *Jews in Pompeii*, 66–69, 83–88.

⁶⁷ Berry, *Christian Inscription*, 7.

⁶⁸ For example, see Eugene J. Dwyer, *Pompeii’s Living Statues: Ancient Roman Lives Stolen from Death* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 37.

promoted the more sensationalistic claims outlined above. Yet, despite the significant implications of these claims, no study to our knowledge has offered a critical analysis of the building and its surrounding neighborhood—i.e., the physical setting of the *Christianos* graffito—in order to properly assess the assertions that the building was a hotel used by Christians as a place of gathering, teaching, and prayer. Since we have shown that the graffito likely does refer to Christians, it is now important to sort through the various claims about the building in an attempt to determine its function and socio-religious dynamics. We will begin with a regional contextualization and physical description of the insula itself, followed by an evaluation of the claims that it was associated with Jews or Jesus followers.

Region VII Insula 11.11,14

The “Hotel of the Christians” is located in Pompeii’s business district immediately to the east of the forum, central marketplace, and forum baths, and slightly to the northwest of the prominent Stabian baths off the Via dell’Abbondanza. One of the oldest sections of the city, Region VII originally consisted of large aristocratic domestic structures, many of which were, over time, extensively renovated for commercial use. Between the earthquake of 62 C.E. and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 C.E., this region was characterized by irregular urban backstreets, narrow alleyways, and dense housing that distinguished it from the more elite residential areas of the city.⁶⁹ Region VII is particularly noteworthy for its industrial activities, with a high concentration of bakeries and textile workshops.⁷⁰ Among the latter were over a dozen facilities

⁶⁹ For general surveys of Region VII, see Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 23–26; Amedeo Maiuri, *Pompeii* (trans. V. Priestly; 4th ed.; Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 57–60; Angelo Amoroso, “L’ultima fase di vita dell’insula VII 10 di Pompei. Analisi stratigrafica e prime proposte di ricostruzione,” in *Pompei, Capri e La Penisola Sorrentina*, ed. Felice Senatore (Capri: Oebalus, 2004), 391–427; and Ray Laurence, *Roman Pompeii: Space and Society* (2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 2007), 15–16, 52.

⁷⁰ According to the analysis in Laurence, *Roman Pompeii*, 67–71, Pompeii’s highest concentration of bread production was found in Region VII, including seven bakeries along the Via degli Augustali just one block to the north of Insula 11.11,14. This distribution of bakeries suggests that the bread produced in this area was sold throughout other regions in the city. For a listing and description of at least 14 textile workshops in the region, see Walter O. Moeller, *The Wool Trade in Ancient Pompeii* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 29–56.

with vats, furnaces, and loom weights used for processing, washing, fulling, and dyeing wool, several of which existed along the Vicolo del Balcone Pensile (the street shared by Insula 11).⁷¹ Graffiti indicate that many of the workers and managers of these workshops also lived within the region and in close proximity to the “hotel.”⁷²

The location of Region VII near the forum, markets, and public baths also contributed to its transient and less reputable character.⁷³ Spatially separated from the city’s more respectable residential quarters, Region VII included numerous taverns (*tabernae*) and smaller stands for food and drinks (*popinae* and *thermapolia*),⁷⁴ as well as several small prostitute rooms (*cella meretricia*) and larger brothels, the most famous of which was the *lupanar* (Region VII Insula 12.18–19) directly across the street to the northwest of Insula 11.11.⁷⁵ To accommodate the many travelers coming through Pompeii to conduct business in the city’s forum and central market, Region VII also had up

⁷¹ See Moeller, *Wool Trade*, 54–56, and Laurence, *Roman Pompeii*, 71–73. There is a debate over the intended clientele of the region’s textile production, with Moeller claiming that the wool products were exported, and Willem Jongman, *The Economy and Society of Pompeii* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1988), 155–86, arguing that they were intended for the local market.

⁷² See Amoroso, “L’ultima fase,” 391–427.

⁷³ In this part of the region, the east-west streets all dead-end into the backs of the Macellum (marketplace) and the Temple of Vespasian on the east side of the forum. Therefore, most of the traffic to this area would have come from the north of the forum or from the south near the Stabian baths. Without a major thoroughfare connecting it to the rest of the city, this part of the region was largely isolated from the more respectable residential neighborhoods to its north, south, and east (see Laurence, *Roman Pompeii*, 120–26, 132). For the types of weekly market activities that would have drawn travelling merchants from the forum area to the lodgings of Region VII, see Joan M. Frayn, *Markets and Fairs in Roman Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 38–46.

⁷⁴ For a listing and description of 35 identifiable restaurants, taverns, and wine shops in Region VII (most of which were located east of the forum in the vicinity of the “Hotel of the Christians”), see Sharon Marie Ruddell, “The Inn, Restaurant and Tavern Business in Ancient Pompeii” (MA thesis, University of Maryland, 1964), 98–109, and John DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality: The Professional Women of Pompeii* (Warren Center: Shangri-La Publications, 2001), 260–85.

⁷⁵ For a listing and description of almost 30 possible brothels and *cella meretricia*, see Thomas A. J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 277–82, 291–94. Laurence, *Roman Pompeii*, 83–92, points out that, although there was no official moral zoning in Pompeii, Region VII had an unusually high concentration of such buildings and rooms.

to five hotels (*hospitia*) and smaller inns (*cauponae*).⁷⁶ These included at least three buildings in the immediate vicinity of the “Hotel of the Christians”—the smaller *Hospitium* of Sittius (Insula 1.44–45) across the Vicolo del Lupanare to the northeast, a large adjacent *hospitium* in the shared insula to the southwest (Insula 11.6, 8), and a medium sized *hospitium* to the west across the Vicolo del Balcone Pensile (Insula 12.34–35). Together, these establishments added to the region’s disreputable atmosphere of gambling, drinking, dancing girls, and prostitution which typically accompanied temporary lodgings.⁷⁷

Considering the larger context of Region VII, therefore, the designation of Insula 11.11,14 as a “hotel” (*hospitium*) is not unreasonable and is, in fact, well supported by the extant remains of the building. Unfortunately, the building is a casualty of the early excavations at Pompeii for which no detailed stratigraphic reports, architectural analysis, or records of small finds were provided by its excavators.⁷⁸ Instead, we only have general descriptions of the building’s layout and main features as they existed at the time of its destruction, mostly based on the initial report of Fiorelli, who excavated the entire insula in 1862.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ For a listing and description of these buildings, see Ruddell, “Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business,” 98–109, and DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality*, 260–85. Laurence, *Roman Pompeii*, 91–101, discusses the high concentration of hotels and taverns in Region VII and, as a result, the region’s less respectable reputation. Local graffiti confirm that travelers sought accommodations in this region; for examples of travelers in the famous *lupanar* (Insula 12.18–19), see *CIL* IV.2183. Cf. Alison E. Cooley, *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 114–15.

⁷⁷ For discussions of the many disreputable activities associated with hotels and inns in ancient Roman literature, see Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, “A Pompeian Copa,” *The Classical Journal* 59.8 (May 1964): 337–38, 347–48; DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality*, 23–27, 34–38, 92–99; and Laurence, *Roman Pompeii*, 91–101.

⁷⁸ For laments over the deplorable condition of the excavation reports for most of the early excavations at Pompeii, see Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Houses and Society in Pompeii and Herculaneum* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 65, and Laurence, *Roman Pompeii*, 1–2.

⁷⁹ See Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 25–26 and Table 8, which is the earliest report on the insula. A more detailed description of the building (apart from its sensational interpretation) can be found in Della Corte, “L’Albergo,” 74–79. The most thorough documentation of the building (given without interpretation) is by Valeria Sampaolo in *Pompeii: Pitture e Mosaici. Vol. 7 Pt. 2* (Roma: Istituto della Enc. Italiana, 1997), 463–77 [cited hereafter as *PPM*]. Because of Fiorelli’s role as the building’s excavator, Della Corte’s work in

Nevertheless, the available descriptions allow for a modest reconstruction of the building's final phase between the earthquake of 62 C.E. and the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 C.E., the phase to which the *Christianos* graffito belongs.⁸⁰ Although there is no precise typology for hotels in first-century Campania (no two buildings identified as such are exactly alike), features consistent with the general function of lodging establishments support the traditional identification of Insula 11.11,14 as a hotel with reasonable certainty.⁸¹ These features include the presence of multiple dining rooms, a garden *triclinium*, a kitchen, numerous bedrooms (both in the lower and upper levels), and associated *tabernae*, all of which are found in Insula 11.11,14 (see below).

As is typical of other hotels in the city, Insula 11.11,14 seems to have been an old aristocratic domestic structure that was renovated for commercial use after the earthquake of 62 C.E.⁸² During its final phase (see fig. 3, p. 145), the hotel had two entrances which provided access to its lower level: the main entry to the northwest off the Vicolo del Balcone Pensile (doorway no. 11, directly across the street from Pompeii's most famous brothel) and a secondary entrance to the east off the Vicolo del Lupanare (doorway no. 14, not far from the Stabian baths; see photo 1, p. 145).⁸³ Past doorway no. 11 (a) is the hotel's atrium (b)

systematically recording Pompeii's excavated remains, and Sampaolo's descriptions of otherwise unpublished details, we will heavily rely on these reports in our description of the building, noting any relevant differences or divergences.

⁸⁰ See Guarducci, "La più antica iscrizione col nome dei Cristiani," 116.

⁸¹ For the classic treatment of hotels and inns at Pompeii, see Tönnies Kleberg, *Hôtels, Restaurants et Cabarets dans L'Antiquité Romaine* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1957), 34, who accepts Della Corte's designation of Region VII Insula 11.11,14 as a *hospitium*. For further discussion of features consistent with hotel architecture in Pompeii, see Ruddell, "Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business," 1–4; J. E. Packer, "Inns at Pompeii: A Short Survey," *Cronache Pompeiane* 4 (1978): 5–53; and DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality*, 16–38.

⁸² Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 23–24; Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 74; *PPM* 7.2:463.

⁸³ For the sake of convenience and consistency, in our top plan (fig. 3, p. 145) we have designated the main features of the building with the numbers and letters assigned to them by Fiorelli in his initial report (see Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 25–26 and Table 8). This system was also adopted by Ruddell, "Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business," 105–106 (no. 107) and *PPM* 7.2:463–77, but was altered by Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 74–79. The description that follows generally reflects the reports of Fiorelli and *PPM*, noting where Della Corte, Ruddell, and other scholars either supplement them or diverge from them in their identification of specific features. These divergences serve as a reminder that additional research needs to be done on the building in order to clarify the precise function of each room. However, for the purposes of this article, the most important

which may have contained a small *impluvium* with a well and a cistern (though few traces survive). The atrium was decorated with a black plinth and was likely an area of high traffic in the hotel, as guests came in and out of the building and gathered for the types of social activity often associated with ancient hotels.⁸⁴ It was on the southwest wall of this atrium that the *Christianos* graffito was written along with the derogatory graffiti mentioned previously.⁸⁵ Additional graffiti found in the atrium included two erotic references (one of which preserves the Egyptian name Rete),⁸⁶ a graffito with a crude sketch of the Emperor Vespasian,⁸⁷ and mention of an Ἀθηνοδῶρος whose name is written in Greek rather than Latin letters.⁸⁸ Some of these graffiti attest to the transient and multi-ethnic character of the hotel's guests.⁸⁹

At the north/northwest of the atrium and flanking door no. 11 are “two little rooms” (c and d) which likely served as guest bedrooms.⁹⁰ In the north

observation is that the cumulative evidence seems to support the scholarly consensus that the building operated as a hotel in its final phase.

⁸⁴ For descriptions of the entryway and atrium see *PPM* 7.2:465 (no. 1), which indicates that the entryway was paved with *cocciopesto* (lime mixed with crushed pottery). For discussion on the activities typically associated with hotel atriums, see the references in n. 77 above.

⁸⁵ See *CIL* IV.813, 2016, and 2018c.

⁸⁶ De Rossi was the first to note that there were two erotic graffiti in this room, but he did not describe their contents; see de Rossi, “Una memoria dei Cristiani,” 72. These probably refer to *CIL* IV.2010, which depicts a phallus alongside the name “Rete,” and *CIL* IV.2013, which may refer to “Nicerate,” a “treacherous slut” (or “vain little pig”) who seduces her lover(s?); see Antonio Varone, *Erotica Pompeiana: Love Inscriptions on the Walls of Pompeii* (trans. Ria Berg; Roma: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2001), 116.

⁸⁷ *CIL* IV.2014.

⁸⁸ *CIL* IV.2017.

⁸⁹ Several dozen other graffiti were found in or near Insula 11, but imprecise (and likely incomplete) reports in the *CIL* make their exact location difficult to determine with certainty; see *CIL* IV.677–679, 812–815, 1996–202IV, 3579–3580, and 9062–9077a. In any case, most of the graffiti associated with Insula 11 or discovered on one of the three adjoining streets deal with mundane matters such as greetings, names, and dates.

⁹⁰ Della Corte, “L’Albergo,” 75, mentions two beds found in these rooms, leading Ruddell, “Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business,” 105–106, to identify them as “bedrooms.” This is a reasonable identification but, as far as we can determine, no traces of the beds survive.

corner of the atrium is the hotel's kitchen (e),⁹¹ and another room which may be a decorated bedroom (f).⁹² South of these is a staircase (g) leading to the upper level, under which is a small prostitute room (*cella meretricia*) with a concrete bed (see photo 2, p. 146), an entrance (no. 12) opening onto the Vicolo del Lupanare to the east, and a carved tufa phallus above the entrance.⁹³ To the south of the atrium is what might be a small decorated *triclinium* (h),⁹⁴ a small room for wine storage built from the earlier passageway/*fauces* (i),⁹⁵ and what is either a larger *triclinium* or *tablinum* that provided access to the southern portion of the building (k).⁹⁶ Along a northeast-southwest passageway (l) is a latrine (n) that provides access to a windowed *triclinium* to the southwest (o),⁹⁷ and to the northeast is another room used for wine storage (p) and possibly a small decorated *oecus* (q).⁹⁸

⁹¹ *PPM* 7.2:466 (no. 3). The kitchen is a triangular area with a high window opening to the Vicolo del Lupanare. In the original building, this room opened up to the Vicolo del Lupanare on the east, but the entrance was sealed after the renovations in 62 C.E.

⁹² Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 25, and Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 75, refer to this as a "storage room," but Ruddell, "Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business," 105–106, describes it as a "bedroom" without further explanation. *PPM* 7.2:463, 466 (no. 4) calls it both a "little room" and a bedroom, and describes the room's now faded decoration.

⁹³ Fiorelli, Della Corte, Ruddell, and *PPM* 7.2:476–477 (nos. 31–32) all agree that the small room under the staircase (accessed by doorway no. 12) was a *cella meretricia*. In addition to the concrete bed with pillow (which is still extant), Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 75, and idem, *Case ed abitanti*, 204–205, points to the phallus carved by the room's entrance to support this identification. The common use of phallic symbols for apotropaic purposes complicate this part of Della Corte's argument, but most scholars still acknowledge the room's likely association with prostitution (see DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality*, 117–18).

⁹⁴ Fiorelli and Ruddell both agree on this identification, whereas Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 75, simply identifies it as a "little room." *PPM* 7.2:466–67 (nos. 5–6) calls it a *cubiculum* and describes the traces of its poorly executed decoration, including a stucco cornice.

⁹⁵ For the post-62 conversion of the earlier *fauces* into storage rooms (i) and (p), see and *PPM* 7.2:463.

⁹⁶ Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 25, only mentions a "little table" and passageway, while Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 75, describes it as a "grand dining room"/*triclinium*. Ruddell, "Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business," 105–106, refers to it as a *tablinum* which functions as a walkway. *PPM* 7.2:463, 467 (nos. 7–9) also refers to the room as a *tablinum* and describes its décor, which included painted panels of black, red, and white.

⁹⁷ Fiorelli and Ruddell both refer to this room as a *triclinium* (cf. *PPM* 7.2:463), while Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 75, merely calls it a "small room."

⁹⁸ *PPM* 7.2:463. Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 25, suggests that, after the building was renovated into a hotel, this room was used for dyeing cloth. However, he does not provide evidence to support this claim. *PPM* 7.2:469 (nos. 11–13) identifies this room as a *cubiculum* and

Further to the southeast is the secondary doorway, no. 14, along with two staircases (r) leading to the upper level and a (servants?) sleeping area (s) with a latrine.⁹⁹ To the west of these features is a small enclosed garden (m),¹⁰⁰ which provided access to a large uncovered area (t), another small (bed?)room (u), and a large vegetable garden (v) used both for growing produce for the hotel and for guests to dine in an outdoor garden setting.¹⁰¹ This garden had three alcoves (y) along its northwest wall,¹⁰² which were all decorated with painted panels, large candelabras (which may have been adorned with theater masks), birds, and nature scenes.¹⁰³ The rest of the garden's northwest wall was decorated with First Style wall paintings along with plant designs.¹⁰⁴ The southwest wall of the garden similarly had painted panels and garden scenes, along with a semicircular *lararium* niche and altar (x; see photo 3, p. 146).¹⁰⁵ The *lararium*, built for honoring the household gods, included a depiction of the family Genus (or possibly the emperor Claudius) holding a large cornucopia and Jupiter, who has rays radiating from his head, a red tunic covering his left

describes its faded decoration, which included Fourth Style wall painting, a stucco cornice, and scenes depicting swans.

⁹⁹ Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 25, suggested that this was the servants room but provided no supporting evidence for this claim (cf. *PPM* 7.2:463). The report that this room contained a latrine is found in Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 75.

¹⁰⁰ The walls of this enclosed garden were decorated in a similar manner as the atrium and were encircled by a low partition wall (*pluteo*), likely used for the planting of the garden's vegetation; see *PPM* 7.2:468 (no. 10).

¹⁰¹ While this large garden may have originally served as a pleasure garden, by the time the building was converted into a hotel the garden was used to grow produce for the hotel's guests. This is indicated by the rectangular plots of cultivated rows (used for irrigation) and trellises of varying heights preserved in the northern part of the garden. See Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 75; Jashemski, "Pompeian Copa," 344–46; and idem, *The Gardens of Pompeii, Herculaneum, and the Villas Destroyed by Vesuvius* (New York: Caratzas, 1979), 171–72.

¹⁰² *PPM* 7.2:463 suggests that at least two of these alcoves were used as garden *triclinia* for guests of the hotel, clients of the small prostitute room at doorway no. 12, or customers of the tavern at doorway no. 13. For other identifications of the three features along the northwest wall, including as storage compartments or arbors, see Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 25; Ruddell, "Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business," 105–106; and Jashemski, *Gardens*, 172.

¹⁰³ See *PPM* 7.2:472–76 (nos. 21–29).

¹⁰⁴ *PPM* 7.2:470 (no. 14).

¹⁰⁵ See *PPM* 7.2:470–73 (nos. 15–20).

shoulder, and sandals on his feet. Jupiter is also shown holding a scepter and lightning bolt, and is pouring out a libation on a cylindrical altar.¹⁰⁶

There is clear evidence that the hotel also had an upper level, including the three staircases, traces of the second story walls and windows, extant portions of a sloping roof over doorway no. 11, and remains of a spacious balcony along the east wall overlooking the Vicolo del Lupanare. However, without additional evidence it is difficult to reconstruct the precise layout of this upper level. Based on the few remaining features, Della Corte estimated that the relatively cramped second story contained at least 15 rooms for the lodging of guests. Along with the 8 rooms on the lower level that may also have been used for sleeping (presumably rooms c, d, f, h, o, q, s, and u), Della Corte suggested that the hotel may have had a total of 23 bedrooms accommodating up to 50 guests, making it one of the largest hotels in the city.¹⁰⁷

In addition to the main sections of the hotel entered by doorways nos. 11 and 14, several rooms in the insula to the east along the Vicolo del Lupanare may have been part of the larger establishment (see photo 1, p. 145). This includes the small prostitute room (*cella meretricia*) accessed by doorway no. 12 (above which is a carved phallus that served either as an advertisement for the room or as an apotropaic symbol to ward off evil),¹⁰⁸ and a small three-room tavern (*taberna*) with a latrine accessed by doorway no. 13. Outside this tavern there were depictions of Mercury with a bird (meant to invoke blessings upon the establishment) and two entwined serpents meeting at a circular altar (a

¹⁰⁶ George K. Boyce, *Corpus of the Lararia of Pompeii* (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1937), 69 (no. 310), pl. 14.1; cf. *PPM* 7.2:470–71 (no. 17).

¹⁰⁷ Della Corte, “L’Albergo,” 75, 78. Ruddell, “Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business,” 105–106, seems to have misunderstood Della Corte’s statement by claiming that there were 50 *bedrooms* between the two levels of the building (unfortunately, no locations are given for these rooms). Similarly, *PPM* 7.2:463 claims that there were a total of 50 *beds* in the hotel (also without indicating their location in the building). Based on our assessment of the building and reports, it seems that Della Corte’s more modest estimate is the most realistic and, in fact, may be slightly too high. His count of eight potential guest rooms on the lower level include three rooms that Fiorelli identified as either *triclinia* or an *oecus* (h, q, and o), one room that Fiorelli identified as a sleeping area for servants (s), and one room that Della Corte himself identified as a storage room (f). With the limited data given in the excavation reports, it is possible that any of these could have served as guest rooms. However, if any of them did not function in this way, Della Corte’s estimate of 23 bedrooms and 50 guests would need to be lowered.

¹⁰⁸ See n. 93 above.

common Pompeian symbol of prosperity).¹⁰⁹ A two-room storage area or shop was accessed by doorway no. 15,¹¹⁰ and a second (larger) two-room storage area or shop was accessed by doorway nos. 16 and 17.¹¹¹ It is difficult to determine if all of these rooms were owned and utilized by the hotel, leased out by the hotel owner, or were owned independently of the hotel.¹¹² In any case, they all likely interacted with the hotel and its guests in important ways, both socially and economically.

A “Jewish/Christian” Hotel?

Now that we have established the context of the *Christianos* graffito by examining Region VII Insula 11.11,14, we are in a position to consider the various scenarios proposed for the nature of this building and its socio-religious

¹⁰⁹ PPM 7.2:477 (nos. 33–34). Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 26, described this tavern as a “little store” with a side room for provisions and a latrine. In a rare report of small finds, Della Corte, “L’Albergo,” 78, noted that five bronze stamps decorated with shells and pastries were found within. In addition to the depictions just mentioned, signs in front advertised that fine wine (“lympha Romanensis”) was served here (CIL IV.815), that the tavern keeper’s name was possibly Drusus (CIL IV.814), and that loitering in front of the tavern was forbidden (CIL IV.813); see Ruddell, “Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business,” 106 n. 108. Accompanying the depiction of Mercury on the pilaster between the entrances of the hotel (no. 14) and the tavern entrance (no. 13) there is a graffito which mentions the name of the god, MERCVRIVS (CIL IV.812); see Boyce, *Corpus of the Lararia of Pompeii*, 111 n. 21.

¹¹⁰ Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 26, referred to this room as a “little store” with a storage area. Della Corte, “L’Albergo,” 75, cannot confirm if it was used as a tavern or store, but suggests that after the earthquake of 62 C.E. it might have been enlarged as a part of Insula 11.16–17 immediately to its south.

¹¹¹ Fiorelli, *Gli Scavi*, 26, identifies these rooms as two stores with a large storage area. Della Corte, “L’Albergo,” 75, suggests that this large spacious area was for the use of the hotel, either for storing wood or coal, or possibly as a garden or winery.

¹¹² If, as has been suggested, the sign forbidding loitering outside of the tavern in Insula 11.13 (CIL IV.813) refers to clients waiting on the street for their turn with a prostitute in Insula 11.12, then it would seem that the tavern keeper and the owner of the *cella meretricia* had competing business interests (see DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality*, 118). However, it is not clear whether this is the case and what their relationship might have been to the owner of the hotel. Perhaps the *cella meretricia* in Insula 11.12 was an extension of the tavern in 11.13, and the sign forbidding loitering was directed to potential clients of the large *lupanar* across the street (Insula 12.18–19).

dynamics. As mentioned previously, such scenarios have ranged from seeing the building as a hotel owned by a nationalistic Judean who allowed Christians to meet there, to the hotel serving as an “apostolic school” in which a Christian teacher gathered his disciples for instruction, prayer, and secret rituals, thus leading to the names “Hotel of the Jews” or (more famously) the “Hotel of the Christians.” As also mentioned previously, these claims are almost completely based on the presence of the *Christianos* graffito in the hotel’s atrium with little consideration of the building’s other features or functions. It is this flawed methodology, which starts with the graffito in isolation and then reconstructs the dynamics of the hotel based on a single decontextualized artifact, that has resulted in the highly speculative, sensationalistic, and idiosyncratic claims of the past 150 years.

A more responsible interpretation of the hotel would begin with viewing the building in its entirety in order to understand its broader socio-religious dynamics, and then proceed to situate the *Christianos* graffito as one part of those dynamics. Since the graffito likely does contain a reference to Jesus followers and possibly a Jewish woman named Maria, we must also consider the potential scenarios that could account for these references, assess the relative likelihood of these scenarios within the larger context of the building, and determine if the results would justify calling the building a “Hotel of the Jews” or “Hotel of the Christians.” Simply put, was this hotel a likely setting for Jewish or Christian activity and, if so, to what extent? In theory, the range of scenarios that could explain the Jewish or Christian associations with the hotel include: (1) the hotel was owned by Jews or Christians (a claim made by the more sensationalistic scholarship surveyed in this article); (2) that Jews or Christians were prominent guests in an otherwise “pagan” hotel and gathered for religious purposes in that setting; or (3) that “pagan” guests of the hotel had simply encountered Jews or Christians (either in Pompeii or somewhere nearby) and made mention of the encounter through graffiti in the hotel’s atrium.

The major challenge to the first and possibly the second scenario is the fact that the hotel is saturated with elements common to Greco-Roman society but not conducive to typical Jewish or Christian sensibilities in the first century. As seen in the previous section, these elements include the honoring of Roman deities by the owners of the hotel and adjacent tavern such as the household *lararium* in the large garden depicting Jupiter and honoring the family Genus, the references to Mercury between doorways 13 and 14 to invoke the deity’s blessing on the establishment, and the depiction of entwined serpents around a

circular altar to symbolize the establishment's prosperity.¹¹³ Similarly, there are traces of emperor veneration in the hotel shown by a possible depiction of Claudius in the household *lararium* and a sketch of Vespasian in the hotel's atrium.¹¹⁴ Finally, the hotel reflects the associations with prostitution and erotic behavior typical of Roman hospitality establishments, with a small prostitute room under a staircase in the hotel (no. 12),¹¹⁵ two phallic images associated with the building (pointing either to erotic or magical interests),¹¹⁶ and graffiti in the hotel's atrium that have erotic overtones.¹¹⁷ These elements suggest that the owners and presumably most of the guests of the hotel were fully immersed in the social, civic, and religious life of Pompeii in a way that appears discordant with the cultural and religious attitudes of most Judeans and Jesus followers in this period.¹¹⁸

These features make the first scenario—that Jews or Christians owned the hotel—an extremely unlikely possibility. In fact, the only artifact presented by Della Corte, Giordano, and Kahn as evidence for a Jewish owner (the statuette on the bronze food warmer) itself seems to undermine that claim. If, indeed, the statuette depicts a Jewish prisoner (an interpretation which remains

¹¹³ Della Corte, "L'Albergo," 78, notes that 47 bronze and terra cotta lamps with relieved figures were found in association with the hotel. Although he did not describe the scenes depicted on the lamps, they were presumably decorated with pagan motifs.

¹¹⁴ For the possible depiction of Claudius in the *lararium*, see Boyce, *Corpus of the Lararia*, 69 (no. 310; pl. 14:1). For the graffito and sketch of "Vespasian," see *CIL* IV.2014. An additional reference to "Caesar" may be found in *CIL* IV.9076 ("C[a]sareo"?).

¹¹⁵ In addition, DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality*, 118, suggests that the prostitutes who used this room or worked in the *lupanar* across the street may have lived in rented rooms in the hotel.

¹¹⁶ One was the phallus carved in tufa above the *cella meretricia* at doorway no. 12 (see n. 91 above), and the other was associated with the "Rete" graffito in the hotel's atrium (*CIL* IV.2010).

¹¹⁷ DeFelice, *Roman Hospitality*, 117, suggests that *CIL* IV.2013, 2015, 2016, and 2021 have sexual overtones, but of these only IV.2013—the mention of Nicerate and her lover(s)—seems to contain an overtly sexual reference. He may have omitted from the list *CIL* IV.2010 (the phallus accompanying the "Rete" graffito) because of his argument that Pompeii's phallic images were apotropaic rather than erotic symbols.

¹¹⁸ Mallardo, "La Quistione dei Christiani," 160–63, also pointed out that the erotic graffiti and disreputable nature of Region VII cast doubt on the claims that Christians met in the hotel.

uncertain), then it more likely reflects a Roman sense of triumph *over* Judea—similar to the sentiment expressed on the JUDEA CAPTA coins—than the supposed Judean nationalism of its owner. Furthermore, the Medusa heads and other figural images depicted on the artifact suggest that its owner (Drusus?) was Roman and not Jewish.¹¹⁹ Therefore, without any compelling evidence, there is simply no reason to think that the food warmer, tavern, or hotel were owned by Judeans or Jesus followers. Rather, the cumulative evidence strongly suggests that the establishment was owned by a common Roman innkeeper who honored the local gods, venerated the emperor, promoted (or at least benefitted from) prostitution as part of his business, and may have actually held *anti*-Judean sentiments.

In these aspects of Greco-Roman life, Judeans and Jesus followers were notorious for not acculturating to their surrounding society. Unlike the owners and presumably most guests of the hotel, Jews and early Christians typically rejected Roman polytheism, refused to pay ritual homage to the Roman emperor, and shunned the sexually deviant behavior common in Roman culture, making the atmosphere of the hotel an unlikely setting for Jewish or Christian gatherings. To be sure, not all Jews and Jesus followers maintained the same level of cultural resistance traditionally attributed to them;¹²⁰ some Jews and Christians were more open to honoring and praying for Roman government officials than others,¹²¹ some Jesus followers were known to engage in sexual

¹¹⁹ For descriptions and images of the food warmer and its decoration, see Della Corte, “L’Albergo Dei Cristiani,” 80, and Giordano and Kahn, *Jews in Pompeii*, 68–69. Despite the pagan imagery on the artifact, both of these studies argue in favor of Jewish ownership for the item and the building. “Drusus,” according to Zangemeister’s *CIL* entry (IV.814), was the name of the individual who owned the tavern (no. 13) in which the food warmer was found, although his relationship to the larger hotel is uncertain.

¹²⁰ Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 8–14, 182–95, shows that while virtually all Judeans and Jesus followers rejected the offering of imperial cult honors, there were varying degrees of acculturation on other social issues. This broad spectrum of responses included sectarian resistance, extensive accommodation, and moderate positions, which encourages us to be cautious when assigning moral positions to an entire social group.

¹²¹ For example, unlike the *Apocalypse of John*, which strongly prohibits any form of emperor veneration (see Rev 2:13–23; 13:1–18), the writer of 1 Peter—a letter traditionally understood to have been written in Rome (1 Pet 5:13)—encourages Jesus followers to pray for the emperor and other government officials (1 Pet 2:13–17; cf. Rom 13:1–7).

immorality,¹²² some Jewish women (slaves?) may have been part of Pompeii's prostitution industry,¹²³ and some Judeans in first-century Italy were highly acculturated into Roman society.¹²⁴ Therefore, it is possible that some Judeans or Christians would have been more comfortable gathering in this building than their compatriots. It might also be possible that small groups of Jews or Christians gathered to meet in the hotel's otherwise "pagan" setting.¹²⁵ However, with no positive or compelling evidence for the presence of such groups in the hotel, it is best not to draw any hasty conclusions regarding Jewish or Christian religious activity there. The mention of the potentially Jewish name "Maria" in the second line of the *Christianos* graffito is intriguing and may suggest that at one time she was a guest or servant of the establishment, but this portion of the graffito is too fragmentary to know for sure.

As far as we can determine, there is also no evidence in the literary sources that early Christian teachers or communities operated out of Roman

¹²² For Jesus followers who, from the perspective of New Testament writers, apparently engaged in sexually immoral activity, see 1 Cor 5:1–13 and 6:12–20 (Christians who were associating with prostitutes in Corinth) and Rev 2:13–23 (Christians in Asia Minor who committed acts of fornication).

¹²³ Among the likely Jewish slave women attested at Pompeii (see below), three different women sharing the name Maria may have been forced into prostitution as a part of their captivity (*CIL* IV.1840; IV.7866; IV.8224); see McGinn, *Economy of Prostitution*, 299.

¹²⁴ See below for references to individual Judeans in Roman imperial circles, Jewish actors in Italy, and possible evidence for Jewish gladiators in Pompeii. At Herculaneum there was a Jewish(?) slave girl named Maria who fulfilled a vow at the temple of Venus (Cooley and Cooley, *Sourcebook*, 129–30 [E29]). Also in Campania during the eruption of Vesuvius was a young Judean elite named Agrippa, who was the son of Felix (the Roman procurator of Judea) and Drusilla (a Herodian princess); see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.141–44. These examples show that there were some individuals in the region who were ethnically Judean yet highly acculturated to Roman life.

¹²⁵ David L. Balch, "Rich Pompeiian Houses, Shops for Rent, and the Huge Apartment Building in Herculaneum as Typical Spaces for Pauline Churches," *JSNT* 27.1 (2004): 27–46, considers the Pompeian *domus* as a theoretical setting for early Christian assemblies. Curiously, he does not include the hotel in Region VII Insula 11.11,14 in his discussion. Nevertheless, Balch does consider the tensions that could exist between households who honor the family gods with *lararia* and the Jewish/Christian veneration of the "one true God." The inclusion of Isis worship in some traditional Roman households suggests that such households were open to the introduction of foreign deities, but whether this could have included the monotheistic veneration of the God of Judea is uncertain.

hotels, as opposed to the well attested gatherings of Jesus followers in synagogues, workshops, or privately owned houses.¹²⁶ The second-century *Acts of John* tells a story of the apostle spending one night in a deserted inn near Ephesus, but this falls far short of the scenarios often proposed for the “Hotel of the Christians.”¹²⁷ Instead, early Jewish and Christian literature tends to speak disparagingly of the atmosphere that typically attended Roman hospitality establishments.¹²⁸ Again, it is not impossible that individual Judeans or Jesus followers stayed in the hotel on occasion, but there is simply no positive evidence to suggest that groups of them gathered in or operated out of the hotel in any significant way.¹²⁹ Therefore, the titles “Hotel of the Jews” or “Hotel of the

¹²⁶ There is literary and epigraphic evidence that groups of like-minded people gathered in Roman hotels (including at Pompeii) to discuss politics, business, or other common interests (see Ruddell, “Inn, Restaurant, and Tavern Business,” 58–59), but specifically Christian gatherings in hotels are not attested in ancient sources. However, it is interesting to note that the region in which Insula 11.11,14 is located (with its many textile workshops) fits well with the early descriptions of lower class Jesus followers gathering in parts of Roman cities with a high concentration of “workers in wool and leather, and fullers” who met in “leather shop(s) or fuller’s shop(s)” to discuss Christian teachings (see Origen, *Contra Celsus* 3.55). Since such trade networks fostered the spread of early Christianity within urban contexts, Region VII at Pompeii may provide a valuable case study on the type of social setting in which some Christian communities seem to have developed, even if there is no positive evidence for Christians meeting in Insula 11.11,14. For discussion of the spread of Christianity among the guilds and occupational networks of Roman cities, see Harland, *Associations*, 2–7, and idem, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 29–36.

¹²⁷ *Acts of John* 60:1.

¹²⁸ For example, Philo, *Vit. Cont.* 40–41 and *Flaccus* 136–37, denounces the revelry, drunkenness, and debauchery that attended Greco-Roman banquets and drinking parties. Similarly, Tertullian, *Apology* 39.5–6, states that Christians were opposed to spending their money on “feasts, drinking-bouts, and eating-houses,” each of which were commonly associated with Roman hotels. For a larger discussion on Jewish and Christian moral critiques of such behaviors among Greek and Roman associations, see Harland, *Dynamics*, 176–78.

¹²⁹ As far as we can determine, the only find beside the graffiti that has been used as evidence for Christian gatherings in the hotel was the small crystal fish mentioned by Della Corte, “L’Albergo Dei Cristiani,” 79. Della Corte assumed this fish was a Christian symbol, but subsequent scholarship has shown that fish images were not used by Christians in this way until after the first century; see Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2003), 11, 13, 30–35.

Christians” for Insula 11.11,14 appear to be misleading and are completely unjustified.

However, the cumulative evidence does suggest that the third scenario is highly plausible—that one of the guests of the hotel (Bovios) had encountered Christians and had listened to Christian teachings, for which he was ridiculed by a friend or fellow guest. This scenario would account for the thoroughly Roman character of the hotel, its owner, and its guests, as well as the derogatory nature of the *Christianos* graffito and the accompanying graffiti in the hotel’s atrium. As shown previously, if the *Christianos* graffito was properly transcribed its most reasonable meaning is that “Bovios is listening to the Christians.” There is no indication that Bovios was necessarily a Christian himself, although he seems to have been interested in the Christian message. As also discussed previously, the graffito’s use of the word “Christian”—a disparaging term originally used by outsiders to designate Jesus followers—suggests that its author was amused by Bovios’s interaction with such a peculiar minority group.

This scenario might also make sense of the other graffiti surrounding the *Christianos* graffito. According to de Rossi, in close proximity on the same wall were scrawled the phrases “this mule, to the little flies” and “liar salutes truthfulness everywhere.”¹³⁰ Both graffiti are difficult to interpret on their own, but it is possible that they were written “in conversation” with the *Christianos* graffito, meaning that later guests responded to the name “Christian” written on the wall with their own unflattering feelings toward Jesus followers.¹³¹ In this light, it is also possible that the name Maria—written in a second hand directly above the word “Christians”—was inscribed “in conversation” with the graffiti by a guest who knew a Jewish-Christian woman (or a Jewish woman he mistook

¹³⁰ *CIL* IV.2016 and 2018c; see de Rossi, “Una memoria dei Cristiani,” 72, who describes the close proximity of these graffiti on the wall and notes the graffiti’s derogatory attitude toward Christians, but then inexplicably uses this graffiti cluster as evidence that the room was used for Christian meetings. If anything, the “pagan” jokes seem to be evidence that most of the hotel’s guests were *not* Christian.

¹³¹ For other clusters of graffiti “in conversation” with each other at Pompeii, see Ruth Benefiel, “Pompeii, Puteoli, and the status of a *Colonia* in the mid-first century AD,” in *Pompeii, Capri e la Penisola Sorrentina*, ed. Felice Senatore (Capri: Oebalus, 2004), 356–57, who discusses different visitors in the *lupanar* (Insula 12.18–19) expanding upon an original graffito with their own comments. Cf. Milnor, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape*, 164.

as a Christian) by that name. Of course, with the fragmentary and enigmatic nature of the graffiti, this reconstruction is admittedly conjectural.

In any case, the discernable graffiti and the larger Roman context of the hotel all suggest that the most likely scenario supported by the evidence is that one or more of the hotel's guests had encountered Christians and that others were amused by this interaction, thus showing a clientele that was generally derisive toward the early Jesus movement. With no positive evidence that such encounters occurred in the hotel itself, the final remaining question is where these guests would have encountered Christian teaching—in the city of Pompeii itself, or elsewhere in the region of Campania?

Conclusion: Implications for Judeans and Jesus Followers in Campania

In this article we have suggested that, despite much of the sensationalism that has surrounded it, the *Christianos* graffiti likely contains a reference to an individual listening to a group of Jesus followers, a possible reference to Christian preaching, and a mention of the potentially Jewish name Maria. Unfortunately, the fragmentary nature of the graffiti prohibits us from saying much more about its contents, and a careful analysis of the building in which it was found has provided no evidence of Jewish or Christian activity associated with the hotel. Nevertheless, although the more elaborate and speculative claims regarding the find have not been substantiated, the discernable content of the graffiti still has potential significance for our understanding of Jewish and Christian dynamics in first-century Campania.

In recent decades, numerous scholars have examined the evidence for the presence of Jews in ancient Italy, with a particular focus on the Jewish community in the city of Rome. Jewish presence in Rome began at least by the second century B.C.E. and continued throughout the first century C.E., with diplomatic envoys being sent to the city from Jerusalem, Jewish communities developing in less affluent neighborhoods of the city, Judean elites studying, living, and working in the imperial court (such as Josephus and various Herodians), the influx of prisoners of war as slaves following the conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C.E. and the suppression of the First Judean Revolt in 70 C.E., and possibly the establishment of early synagogues.¹³² Additional work has been

¹³² See the sources and discussions in Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960), 1–45, 135–42; John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 282–319; Karin Hedner-Zetterholm, “The Jewish Communities of Ancient Rome,” in *The Synagogue of Ancient*

done on the spread of Christianity in the region, again with an emphasis on Rome, with evidence for the presence of Jesus followers in the city by the mid-first century. Such evidence includes the political disturbances involving Christians in the 40s and 60s C.E., the journeys of Paul and Peter to Rome during the reign of Nero, and gatherings of believers (both Judeans and Gentiles) that may have composed the communities behind several New Testament writings, including the Letter to the Romans, the Gospel of Mark, and the letter of 1 Peter.¹³³ Therefore, we can confidently say that groups of Judeans and Jesus followers had spread to the capital of the empire in the decades leading up to Pompeii's destruction in 79 C.E.

For the region of Campania and for Pompeii in particular, however, the historical, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence for the presence of both groups has been much sparser. Josephus indicates that a sizeable Judean community existed in the port city of Puteoli/Dicaearchia by the time of Augustus,¹³⁴ and there is evidence that some Jews were brought to the Neapolis (Naples) region as slaves after the Judean revolt in 70.¹³⁵ Because of the close proximity and regional interaction of these cities, it is not improbable that some sort of Jewish minority population lived in Pompeii and its vicinity before 79 C.E.¹³⁶ Indeed, epigraphic evidence found throughout Pompeii seems to support

Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies, ed. Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht, and Olof Brandt (Stockholm: Svenska institutet i Rom, 2001), 131–40; and Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 86–88, 98–100.

¹³³ See Esler, *Conflict and Identity*, 100–108, and Bernard Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 1–59.

¹³⁴ Josephus, *War* 2.104; *Ant.* 17.328. Harland, *Dynamics*, 114–16, discusses the evidence for other ethnic minorities (such as Syrians and Tyrians) who had also established communities in Puteoli during the first century.

¹³⁵ For example, a first-century epitaph found near Naples (*CIL* X.1971) mentions a young Jewish woman, Claudia Aster, who was taken prisoner after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and brought to Campania, where she eventually integrated into Roman society; see David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe Vol 1: Italy (except for Rome), Spain and Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 43–45. Also relevant may be the presence of a Hebrew or Aramaic inscription found in the “Villa of Poppaea” at Oplontis; see Tibor Grüll and László Benke, “A Hebrew/Aramaic Graffito and Poppaea’s Alleged Jewish Sympathy,” in *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62.1 (Spring 2011): 37–55.

¹³⁶ There are hints that some Jews lived in nearby Herculaneum, including an inscription mentioning a man (or perhaps alluding to the biblical king) named David (*CIL* IV.10584;

this scenario; this includes the appearance of several Semitic names which may be Judean (such as Jonas, Jesus, Ieshua, one or two Marthas, at least four Marias, and two references to the name “Youdaikos”),¹³⁷ traces of Hebrew and Aramaic graffiti,¹³⁸ possible indications of kosher fish sauce (garum),¹³⁹ a reference to *Sodom[a]* and *Gomor[a]* from the Hebrew Bible,¹⁴⁰ and possibly other items.¹⁴¹

Noy, *JWE*, 1:60), and a slave woman named Maria, who seems to have become fairly acculturated by fulfilling a vow to Venus on behalf of her master (Cooley and Cooley, *Sourcebook*, 129–30 [E29]). In Stabiae, a marble sarcophagus was found dedicated to a Iulius Longinus by his wife Iulia Maria (*CIL* IX.966), possibly a Jewish slave who was freed and married to her master. Josephus also mentions the presence of a Judean elite named Agrippa (the son of Felix and Drusilla), who lived in Campania when Vesuvius erupted (*Ant.* 20.141–44).

¹³⁷ See *CIL* IV.2402–2404, 2406 (Jonas/Ionas); 4287 (Jesus/Iesus); 8010 (Ieshua); 3763 and 5224 (Martha); 1507, 1840, 7866, and 8224 (four attested Marias, not including the Maria mentioned in the *Christianos* graffiti); 6990 and 9757 (Youdaikos). For a brief discussion on the Jewish origins of these names, see Grüll and Benke, “A Hebrew/Aramaic Graffito,” 38–40. Gunderon, “Inscribing Pompeii,” 36–65, offers a more detailed but also more skeptical evaluation.

¹³⁸ A mostly indecipherable Aramaic inscription was found at Pompeii in the House of the Cryptoporticus (Region I Insula 6.2, 16; *CIL* IV.8010). Also, in Region I Insula 11.14 was found an inscription of the Hebrew word *cherem* (either חרם or כרם) written in Latin letters alongside a five pointed star, possibly serving an apotropaic function in the house’s vestibule; see Noy, *JWE*, 1:58–59. For a fuller treatment of the Aramaic graffiti at Pompeii, see Giancarlo Lacerenza, “Graffiti aramaici nella casa del Criptoportico a Pompei (Regio I, insula VI, 2),” *Annali dell’Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli* 56 (1996): 166–88.

¹³⁹ For references to “*castum* (pure)” garum inscribed on amphorae found at Pompeii, see *CIL* IV.2569, 2609, 2611, and 5660–5662. There has been a significant debate over the nature of this phrase, with some scholars arguing that it reflects a form of “kosher” fish sauce meant for Jewish consumption (cf. Pliny, *Natural History* 31.95) and others arguing for interpretations apart from a Jewish context; see Cooley and Cooley, *Sourcebook*, 159 (E98); P. Berdowski, “Garum of Herod the Great: A Latin Greek Inscription on the Amphora from Masada,” *Qumran Chronicle* 16.3–4 (2008): 117–18; and Hannah Cotton, *Masada II: The Latin and Greek Documents* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989), 166.

¹⁴⁰ *CIL* IV.4976; see Noy, *JWE*, 1:57–58, and Cooley and Cooley, *Sourcebook*, 159 (E99). It is likely that this charcoal graffito was written after the eruption of Vesuvius by a Jewish individual who, returning to Pompeii after its destruction, recalled the biblical story of the cities’ destruction by fire from heaven (Gen 19:24–25).

¹⁴¹ For example, Samuel Rocca, “A Jewish Gladiator in Pompeii,” in *Materia giudaica: bolletino dell’Associazione italiana per lo studio del giudaismo* 11.1–2 (2006): 287–301, argues that a gladiator helmet found in the large barracks belonged to a Judean gladiator

Much more work needs to be done in order to properly contextualize and evaluate each one of these artifacts, but among them there are almost certainly legitimate and insightful glimpses into the experiences of Judeans who lived in the city before its destruction, even if there is no evidence for a robust and well organized Jewish community as has often been suggested.

As to whether or not some of these Judeans in Pompeii had heard about Jesus (either in Palestine before the revolt or from local preaching) and had joined the Jesus movement, the extant evidence is much more tenuous. In theory, of course, the existence of a sub-group of Judeans who believed in Jesus is a real possibility,¹⁴² though little positive evidence can be identified as pointing to a Christian presence in the city. Unfortunately, most of what has been presented as evidence for Christians in Pompeii has been extremely dubious, including several imagined “crosses,”¹⁴³ two ROTAS-SATOR squares thought to be Christian anagrams,¹⁴⁴ and a host of enigmatic symbols and

based on its prominent depiction of a seven-branched date palm (a symbol typically associated with Judea). Much more dubious are the claims that an insula at Pompeii contained paintings depicting biblical stories of Solomon and Jonah; see J. Gutmann, “Was there Biblical Art at Pompeii?” *Antike Kunst* 15 (1972): 122–24, and T. Feder, “Solomon, Socrates, and Aristotle: In Earliest Biblical Painting, Greek Philosophers Admire King’s Wisdom,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 34.5 (September/October 2008): 32–36.

¹⁴² Harland, *Associations*, 2–3, discusses the networks of Jewish communities throughout the Roman Empire and their importance for the spread of Christianity in these regions.

¹⁴³ See, for example, the claims regarding the “living cross” symbol (*CIL* IV.10062) and an imagined cross at the “Christian bakery” in Della Corte, *Case ed Abitanti*, 115, and H. Kähler, “Christliche Kreuze aus Pompeji und Herculaneum,” *Bollettino dell’ associazione internazionale degli amici di Pompei* 1 (1983): 279–308. Similarly, some scholars have argued for the presence of Christian *Chi-Rho* symbols on various amphorae found throughout the city (e.g., *CIL* IV.10477; cf. 6175); see Della Corte, *Notizie degli Scavi*, 156. In response, Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 8, points to another amphora marked with a *Chi-Rho* that is unequivocally pagan (*CIL* IV.9812).

¹⁴⁴ E.g., *CIL* IV.8623. Scholars who have argued that this word play is Christian include Jerome Carcopino, “Le Christianisme secret du ‘carré magique,’” *Museum Helveticum* 5 (1948), 16–59; Giordano and Kahn, *Jews in Pompeii*, 76–83; and Berry, *Christian Inscription*, 10. Duncan Fishwick, “On the Origins of the Rotas-Sator Square,” *Harvard Theological Review* 57.1 (1964): 47, has instead claimed that it is Jewish. Scholars who argue more persuasively that the squares simply represent a Roman word play adopted centuries later by Christians include Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 8, and Cooley and

inscriptions that have been read as references to Christian worship.¹⁴⁵ Since most of these symbols and supposed references are not attested in Christian contexts until centuries later, these claims have all proven to be highly questionable at best.¹⁴⁶ In fact, the only artifact in the city that appears to be a legitimate reference to Christianity is the *Christianos* graffito considered in this article. Unlike the dubious items listed above, this graffito provides reasonable evidence by its use of a well-attested word and thus should not be simplistically dismissed as “pious imagination.”

However, from the content of the graffito it is difficult to know if its reference to “Christians” attests the presence of Jesus followers in Pompeii, reflects the activities of itinerant Christian teachers passing through the city, or simply indicates an encounter with Christians in the larger region of Campania. Although the evidence is too limited to know with certainty, there is good reason to believe that a community of Jesus followers had developed in nearby Puteoli at least by the early 60s C.E. For example, the book of Acts reports that a group of believers in Puteoli invited Paul to stay with them for a week before he began his final journey to Rome (Acts 28:13–14); assuming that this narrative is historically reliable, it indicates that groups of Christians lived in Campania for over 15 years before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 C.E.¹⁴⁷ Therefore, it is reasonable to postulate that some Jesus followers came to live in Pompeii, visited Pompeii for teaching or trading purposes, or that individuals like Bovios and

Cooley, *Sourcebook*, 107–108 (D100). See also Rebecca R. Benefiel, “Magic Squares, Alphabet Jumbles, Riddles, and More: The Culture of Word Games among the Graffiti at Pompeii,” in *The Muse At Play: Riddles and Wordplay in Greek and Latin Poetry*, ed. J. Kwapisz, D. Petrain, and M. Szymanski (Munich: de Gruyter, 2012), 65–80.

¹⁴⁵ For example, Lorenzo Falanga, “Sul significato di ‘Fidelis in p’ e su altre iscrizioni pompeiane,” *Rivista di Studi Pompeiani* 1 (1987): 209–19, has pointed to over 200 symbols found in Pompeii graffiti, including various triangles, stars, palms, and crosses, that he claims could indicate a robust Christian community in the city. He also argues that the word FIDELIS appearing in graffiti (e.g., *CIL* IV.520, 1812, and 4812) refers to an early Christian liturgy; cf. Della Corte, *Notizie degli Scavi*, 180; idem, “L’Albergo,” 73–74; and Berry, *Christian Inscription*, 9–12, 37.

¹⁴⁶ See the discussion in Erich Dinkler, *Signum Crucis* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1967), 141–45.

¹⁴⁷ Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 7, suggests that the mention of a Christian community in Puteoli in Acts 28 comes from a pre-Lukan source, since its details appear superfluous to the overall narrative of Paul’s journey.

other hotel guests in Pompeii had encountered Christians elsewhere in the region.¹⁴⁸

Such interactions are especially plausible in light of Puteoli's centrality to the regional trade network, which included Pompeii; as Italy's major port before the development of Ostia further north, Puteoli was the main distribution center of commodities imported from the eastern Mediterranean to the cities of Campania. The strong economic interactions between Puteoli and Pompeii in particular is evident from the large amount of pottery produced in Puteoli that was found in Pompeii, as well as the numerous graffiti in Pompeii left by travelling merchants from Puteoli.¹⁴⁹ Socio-religious dynamics likely followed similar patterns of regional interaction, making it likely that Christian presence or at least stories about Christians made their way to Pompeii from Puteoli in the years (or even decades) before the eruption of Vesuvius.¹⁵⁰ These interactions provide an important context for the *Christianos* graffito in Pompeii.

Although its insights are not vast, the *Christianos* graffito joins Acts 28:13–14 in providing valuable confirmation for the presence of Christians in the Campania region, even if not conclusively in Pompeii, before 79 C.E. If we have read its fragmentary contents and intentions correctly, the graffito also hints at how some Romans in Pompeii viewed Jesus followers; as expected, the graffito and possibly the graffiti surrounding it appear to be disparaging of this peculiar foreign minority group. Furthermore, even though the hotel in which the graffito was discovered contains no positive evidence for Jewish or Christianity activity, the industrial region of Pompeii in which the building was located (Region VII) can provide a valuable case study for the type of urban

¹⁴⁸ Tertullian's statement in *Apology* 40.8 that there were no Christians in Pompeii when Vesuvius erupted is clearly apologetic and should not be taken as conclusive evidence; see Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Laurence, *Roman Pompeii*, 63–65, discusses the large amount of *terra sigillata* pottery found at Pompeii that was produced in Puteoli, as well as the central role of Puteoli in the Campanian trade network. Benefiel, "Pompeii," 354–57, examines the connections between Puteoli and Pompeii as seen in Pompeian graffiti, which reflect business transactions and merchant travel between the two cities. Some of these graffiti were found in the famous brothel (Region VII Insula 12.18; *CIL* IV.2183) and an inn (Region VII Insula 12.35; *CIL* IV.2152) near the "Hotel of the Christians." Other graffiti at Pompeii that mention Puteoli include *CIL* IV.1472, 3525, 3890, and 4262.

¹⁵⁰ See Frend, *Rise of Christianity*, 113, and Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 7–10.

social setting in which some Christian communities developed during the first century.¹⁵¹ We hope that by sorting through the speculative claims and polemics surrounding the graffito and hotel, by carefully examining and contextualizing both, and by considering their socio-historical implications, this study has brought some balance to the debate over the presence of Jesus followers in the Pompeii region, provided a helpful reassessment of a key piece of evidence in that debate, and opened some potential avenues for future research on the topic.

Images

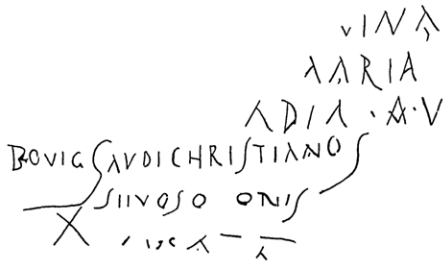


Fig. 1: Line drawing of the *Christianos* graffito made in 1862 by Giulio Minervini and published in 1864 by Giovanni de Rossi. (Back to text)

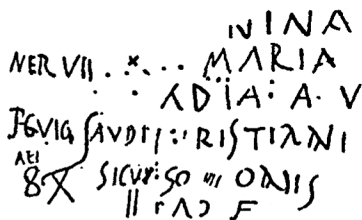


Fig. 2: Line drawing of the *Christianos* graffito made and partially printed in 1862 by Alfred Kiessling. (Back to text)

¹⁵¹ See n. 126 above.

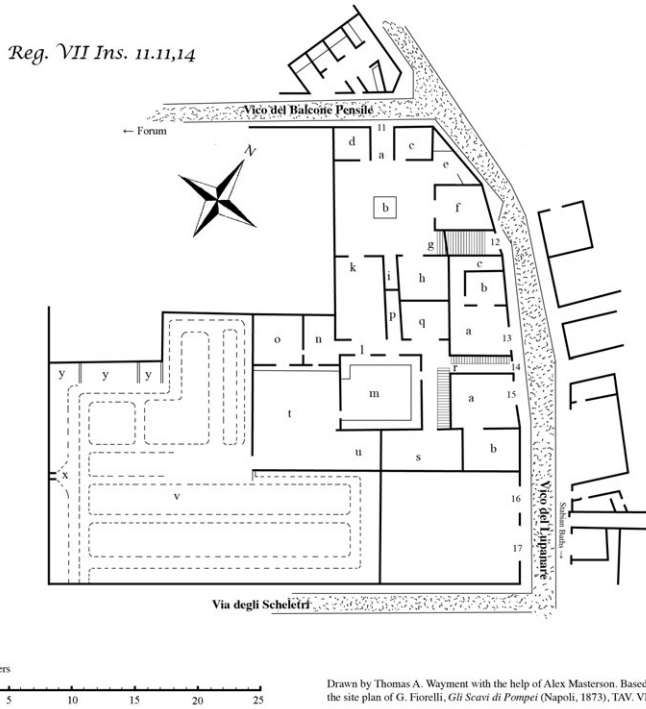


Fig. 3: Top plan of Region VII Insula 11.11,14. (Back to text)



Photo 1: View of Region VII Insula 11.11,14 (including entrances no. 12 and 13) from the Vico del Lupanare. (Back to text)



Photo 2: The *cella meretricia* in Region VII Insula 11.12. (Back to text)



Photo 3: The household *lararium* in Region VII Insula 11.11,14, with its depiction of Jupiter and possibly the family Genus.¹⁵² (Back to text)

¹⁵² All photos were taken by Thomas A. Wayment with the permission of the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Pompei, Ercolano e Stabia. Every effort has been made to secure rights for the images included in this article. If there are any questions about permissions, please contact the editor-in-chief.