

EUTYCHUS IN TROAS: THE ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHAEOLOGY OF HIS FALL

A familiar Mother Goose nursery rhyme concerns a fall: “Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall; Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; All the king’s horses and all the king’s men, Couldn’t put Humpty together again”. Acts 20,9 mentions a similar fall during Paul’s third journey in Alexandria Troas ¹. But this story has a happy ending: Eutychus was put back together again after Paul raised him from the dead. This article discusses the lexical problem related to the architecture behind that fall and suggests a preferred translation of the verse. It then examines from what type of urban structure Eutychus might have fallen. It has been suggested that the believers in Troas were meeting in an *insula*. *Insulae* have been discovered in Rome and Ostia, and the architectural and sociological dimensions of these structures are discussed. However, were *insulae* part of the urban fabric of cities like Troas in Roman Asia? The archaeological evidence for such structures is examined next. The article closes with a brief discussion about what the meeting place in Troas might tell us about the socio-economic status of the believers there.

I. EUTYCHUS’S FALL AND THE PROBLEM OF TRANSLATION

The address of this author’s apartment in Antalya, Turkey, is Kat 2 (Floor 2), but it is located on the third storey. My wife and I also own an apartment in Norfolk, Virginia, whose address is B2, that is, located on the second storey. Yet a distinction of one floor exists between the designated addresses of these apartment. Why is this? The ground floor of our building in Turkey houses several businesses, but following the European system, this level is not counted in the floor numbering. However, our apartment in the USA follows the American system, which counts the ground floor as the first floor. Bearing these structural differences in mind, the account of Eutychus’s tragic fall took on a personal interest for me.

American English versions in their translations of Acts 20,9 (ἔπεσεν ἀπὸ τοῦ τριστέγου κάτω) state that Eutychus was taken up dead after he

¹ Other accounts of falls in ancient literature include an eight-year-old slave in P. Oxy. 3, 475; also Aelian, *Var. Hist.* 3,4, and Plutarch, *Per.* 13,7-8.

fell “from the third story” (NIV, ESV, NLT) or “three floors” (NRSV). Interestingly, translations geared for a British English audience — Phillips, REB, NIVUK, or ESVUK — likewise have the same wording: that Eutychus fell “from the third storey”. The King James Version, translated long before the elevator was invented by George Otis in 1853, reads “third loft”. This suggests the floor directly under the roof of the building. As Deer notes, “So somebody has to be wrong when translations on both sides of the Atlantic translate ‘the third stor(e)y/floor’ in Acts 20:9”². He further describes the confusion that has resulted in Bible commentaries and dictionaries regarding this point of translation and concludes that American versions should translate as “third story”, while British English and European translations should read “second storey/floor”³.

Naden subsequently responded. While noting that Deer had hit on a small but genuine translation problem, Naden claims that Deer’s analysis still promulgates confusion and points out that the North American and European systems both count the storeys of a building similarly. However, in the UK a three-storey building would have three floors: ground, first, and second. He concludes by suggesting how the account in Acts 20,9 should be described in British English: “There was a meeting in Ephesus (sic) in a three-storey building (or it might have been taller, since we are not told that the meeting was on the top floor). The meeting was held in a second-floor room, and Eutychus was therefore sitting in a second-floor window when he fell asleep and fell three storeys (that is, from the third storey) to the ground”⁴. While such an extended description may work for a Bible commentary, it is untenable for a translation gloss. And Naden’s interpretation of the text must still be questioned. Nevertheless, he makes an important point: the number of storeys in a building are identical whether in the American or British reckoning. For the sake of clarity, “floor” will be used instead of “storey” in the translation of Acts 20,9, despite both terms being used interchangeably in popular writing.

II. GREEK LEXICONS, TEXTS, AND ΤΡΙΣΤΕΦΟΝ

The etymology of the word, according to Thayer, is τρεῖς and στέγη, the latter translated “roof” in Matt 8,8; Mark 2,4; and Luke 7,6. Friberg

² D.F. DEER, “Getting the ‘Story’ Straight in Acts 20.9”, *Bible Translator* 39 (1988) 246-247, here 246. Deer names other British versions along with French, German, and other translations that present the same translation problem.

³ DEER, “Getting the ‘Story’ Straight in Acts 20.9”, 247.

⁴ T. NADEN, “Another stor(e)y...”, *Bible Translator* 41 (1990) 238-243, here 243. He incorrectly situates the event in Ephesus rather than in Troas.

further defines it as a “covering for a room or house”⁵. Lexicons of the Greek New Testament, such as Thayer’s, uniformly note that the word τρίστεγον means “third story”. However, the Friberg and Louw – Nida lexicons note further that the translation means “third floor” in American usage or “second storey” in British usage. But why the American system is regarded as the standard is not discussed. The European convention for numbering building floors goes back at least to the medieval period, but could go back even further into the Roman period. And the genesis of European condominium law can be traced to Roman housing and its ownership under classical Roman law. From a legal perspective this suggests continuity between ancient and modern housing in Europe⁶. This suggests that the priority for interpretation should be given to the European system of reckoning floors.

BGAD suggests other usages of τρίστεγον in Dionysius, Josephus, and Genesis. However, the context of each must be carefully considered. Dionysius of Halicarnassus (3,68,2) describes the Circus Maximus that Tarquinius (r. 535-509 BCE) built as having porticos three storeys high (στοαὶ τρίστεγοι). Humphrey calls this phrase “particularly obscure”, but that it apparently means “colonnades at the level of the third storey”⁷. He offers two possible explanations of what this might have looked like, yet throughout refers to these “storeys” as sections of seating. These “storeys” consisted of three decks of seats that rose as in a theater, with the first made of stone seats and the two upper decks containing wooden seating. Here τρίστεγον describes levels of seating tiers rather than actual storeys of a building. However, Humphrey doubts Dionysius’ description, believing it highly unlikely that such porticoes existed in the circus of the late sixth century. Dionysius was instead attributing an architectural element to the young Tarquin using Augustus’ circus of his own day as a model. Humphrey summarizes: “That circus evidently contained covered porticoes around the whole of the Circus except at the carceres”⁸. Dionysius thus does not describe a multi-storey building but rather seating areas of the Augustan circus and the portico that surrounded it.

Dionysius (3,68,4) also describes another portico of one storey outside that had shops on the ground level and habitations, or dwellings, above

⁵ See LIDDELL – SCOTT, s.v., for additional glosses, such as “ceiling” and “storey of a house”.

⁶ C.G. VAN DER MERWE, *European Condominium Law* (Cambridge 2015) 12-13.

⁷ J.H. HUMPHREY, *Roman Circuses*. Arenas for Chariot Racing (Berkeley, CA – Los Angeles, CA 1986) 73-74. He labels Dionysius’s description as anachronistic stating that these seating tiers made of stone for important citizens and wood for the masses were built much later by Julius Caesar and Augustus.

⁸ HUMPHREY, *Roman Circuses*, 66.

it (ἐτέρα στοὰ μονόστεγος ἐργαστήρια ἔχουσα ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ οἰκήσεις ὑπὲρ αὐτά) ⁹. Humphrey confirms that a one-storey portico existed in Augustus' day "containing shops with dwellings above" and suggests that these shops were rented to small shopkeepers "who lived above them in mezzanines" ¹⁰. What is described is a structure with two floors identified as μονόστεγος ¹¹. An inscription recently found in Sardis mentions a two-storey (δίστεγος) portico in the agora there ¹².

Josephus (*B.J.* 5,220) reports that there was a living area for priests around the temple consisting of small cubicles on three levels (οἴκοι τρίστεγοι πολλοί) ¹³. Ritmeyer has done much research on the architecture of the temple and notes that there were "thirty-eight cells built in three stories around the inner Sanctuary (*Middot* 4.3-4)" ¹⁴. In his reconstruction he places five cells in three layers on the north and south sides with two layers of three cells on the west, with the top layer having only two cells. The chambers rested on wooden ledges and were interconnected with openings on either side as well as to the unit above. Stationary or mobile ladders were used to move between the stories. Josephus is therefore not describing a building but a housing arrangement within a larger structure.

Josephus (*A.J.* 1,3,2) also observes that God suggested to Noah that he should make an ark four storeys high (τετράστεγον). Josephus is recounting the description found in Gen 6,16 where the LXX uses τριώροφα as a synonym of τρίστεγος ¹⁵. Clearly the canonical account differs from that of Josephus by one level. However, architecturally speaking, this usage relates not to storeys or floors but to "decks", as all English translations of Genesis record. These decks were to house the animals in Noah's ark, which rested on the water, not on the land.

A cognate is used again by Diodorus Siculus (20,85,1), who recounts that Demetrius mounted on two ships two towers each with a height of four storeys (τετραστέγους). These were used in his attack on the harbor

⁹ W. SMITH, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (London 1875) 286, seems to describe this portico mistakenly as having the shops above it, while within its vaults local women found a place to occupy.

¹⁰ HUMPHREY, *Roman Circuses*, 75.

¹¹ Strabo (17.1.39) provides the only other textual use of μονόστεγος, wherein he describes the height of the roof of the Labyrinth at Lake Moeris as only one storey.

¹² G. PETZL, *Sardis: Greek and Latin Inscriptions. Part II: Finds from 1958 to 2017* (Cambridge, MA 2019) 61 no. 365.

¹³ The LXX translates this upper level as τριώροφα; see 1 Kgs 6,8; Ezek 41,7.

¹⁴ L. RITMEYER, *The Quest — Revealing the Temple Mount in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem 2006) 393-394. Illustrations of these levels around the sanctuary with a cutaway of the cells can be seen on pp. 383, 395.

¹⁵ The LXX text describing the three decks is κατάγαια διώροφα καὶ τριώροφα; all were under one roof (στέγην, Gen 8,13).

at Rhodes. No lexical evidence exists for cognate variations like πεντά-στέγον to signify higher levels.

III. MEDICAL RESEARCH AS A FACTOR IN INTERPRETING EUTYCHUS'S FALL

Luke's description of the circumstances surrounding Eutychus' fall might also assist in determining its height. Paul is giving a homily that has extended past midnight. Many lamps fueled with low-grade olive oil are illuminating the room. The smoke from the lamps would have made breathing difficult, so a window was opened to provide fresh air. Eutychus, while sitting on the sill and trying to stay awake, finally succumbs to sleep and falls from the open window ¹⁶. Beebe poses the question: "Was Eutychus' fall from a third-story window a distance great enough to kill him instantly (Acts 20:9)?" ¹⁷. His discussion of domestic architecture, however, fails to answer this question. Looking elsewhere, can medical research into free-fall trauma assist in determining how far Eutychus might have fallen? The relationship of height to the extent of trauma injuries from free-falls is related to four factors: 1) landing surface; 2) whether the fall was broken; 3) distance of the fall; and 4) body orientation on landing ¹⁸. As a person falls, the kinetic energy continues to increase due to acceleration and is maximum at the point of impact. Assuming that one storey equals 4.6 metres, a two-storey free fall generates an impact velocity of 48.3 kph; a six-storey fall results in an impact velocity of 85.3 kph ¹⁹. The surface upon which Eutychus landed was probably a stone pavement typical for a Roman street. Although not known, his fall was apparently unbroken by something below like a cart or animal.

¹⁶ J.B. POLHILL, *Acts* (Nashville, TN 1993) 361, surmises that for Eutychus, called a *neanias* and a *pais* (20,9,12), it was "probably long past the lad's normal bedtime". Luke fails to suggest age as a factor in the accident, and translations such as "young man" more correctly place his age in the late teens or early 20s.

¹⁷ H.K. BEEBE, "Domestic Architecture and the New Testament", *Biblical Archaeologist* 38 (1975) 89-104, here 89. He does mention that apartment houses in Rome rose to six stories (p. 97) but fails to connect this to Eutychus' fall.

¹⁸ C.R. SCHERMER, "Injuries Due to Falls from Heights", *American College of Surgeons Subcommittee on Injury Prevention and Control* (Chicago, IL 2002) 1-21, here 1.

¹⁹ The velocity at impact is intrinsically related to the distance of the fall by the equation: $v = 2gh$, where v is the velocity at impact, g is the gravitational constant of 9.8 m/s^2 , and h is the vertical distance of the fall. For other physical and biomechanical principles and the equations related to them, see S. TAN – K. PORTER, "Free Fall Trauma", *Trauma* 8 (2006) 157-167, here 158-159.

A truism of fall research is that the severity of the injuries is related to the height of the fall. If Eutychus had fallen from the third floor and the ground floor is counted as the first, Haenchen would be correct to say, “A fall from such a height is not necessarily fatal”²⁰. If it were the fourth floor instead, the window ledge upon which Eutychus was sitting, using Augustan height calculations (see below), was at least 16.2 metres above street level. If Eutychus’s fall was from one floor lower, as current translations suggest, the distance of the fall would be approximately 11 metres, that is, 5.2 metres less. Tan and Porter note: “The risk of dying increased tenfold after falling four storeys as opposed to one storey”²¹. They cite a study by Velmahos that survival is rare after free falls of over 12 metres. They themselves conclude: “The distance of a fall is perhaps the strongest single predictor of mortality with falls from three storeys carrying a 50% risk of death and those from five storeys or more rarely being compatible with survival”²². So Eutychus’ chances of survival would have been greater if he had fallen from a lower height.

A final factor in fall injuries concerns how the person lands. Since Eutychus fell from a window ledge, his upper body would be oriented downward. A fall over 15 metres is “a reasonable boundary height beyond which the injuries of two or three body regions are generally associated”²³. Granhed et al. note that “the higher the fall, the greater is the chance of landing on the head”²⁴. In their study of free-fall injury Tan and Porter write: “Massive head injury is a major cause of immediate death following free fall [and] head/face injury represented the single most fatal injury”²⁵. Yet Kumar and Srivastava note that 36.6% of the fatal falls in their study resulted from injuries to the side of the body and that the “side of the body was seen as the site of primary impact in falls from greater heights”²⁶. If Eutychus had landed on his head, he would have been bloody, since head injuries bleed a lot²⁷. Yet Acts does not

²⁰ E. HAENCHEN, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA 1971) 585.

²¹ TAN – PORTER, “Free Fall Trauma”, 160. Since they reckon three storeys to be 40 feet/12.19 metres, they must be using the American system of counting since the average height of a storey is around 14 feet/4 metres.

²² TAN – PORTER, “Free Fall Trauma”, 165.

²³ T.C. ATANASIJEVIC – N.S. SLOBODAN – D.N. SLOBODAN – V.M. DJOKIC, “Frequency and Severity of Injuries in Correlation with the Height of Fall”, *Journal of Forensic Science* 50 (2005) 608–612, here 608.

²⁴ H. GRANHED – E. ALTGÄRDE – L.M. AKYÜREK – P. DAVID, “Injuries Sustained by Falls – A Review”, *Trauma Acute Care* 2:38 (2017); doi: 10.21767/2476-2105.100038.

²⁵ TAN – PORTER, “Free Fall Trauma”, 161.

²⁶ V.K. KIRAN KUMAR – A.K. SRIVASTAVA, “Patterns of Injuries in Fall from Height”, *Journal of the Indian Academy of Forensic Medicine* 35 (2013) 47–50, here 47.

²⁷ I owe this insight to Dr. Cynthia Burdge.

mention blood either on Eutychus or Paul who “threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him” (20,10 NIV). It seems Eutychus had extended his arms while falling to protect himself and instead died of an injury to his side.

This section concludes by suggesting that the proper translation of τρίστεγον in Acts 20,9 is “fourth floor” in American English and “third floor” in British English. Medical research supports this conclusion, showing that such a greater height is consistent with a fatality in a free fall. As Paul and the believers rushed down four flights of stairs, the apostle undoubtedly knew the victim’s prognosis — death. When he stared at the dead young man, Paul perhaps remembered the story of Elijah who had once stretched himself upon the corpse of a dead boy (1 Kgs 17,21-22). Instinctively, pneumatically, Paul fell on the young man, and behold, Eutychus redivivus! The apostle had put this young disciple back together again.

IV. *INSULAE* AND THE FALL OF EUTYCHUS

What kind of multi-storey building might have existed at Troas in the mid-first century CE from which Eutychus fell? The most common type found in urban Italy was apartment buildings called *insulae* (“islands”) ²⁸. These, according to Boozer, “are multi-story housing complexes that served as lodging or tenement houses for multiple individuals and families” ²⁹. Such structures provided affordable, practical housing amidst costly land valuation and dense populations. Vitruvius describes apartment living in Rome: “Consequently, as the ground floors could not admit of so great a number living in the city, the nature of the case has made it necessary to find relief by making the buildings high. In these tall piles reared with piers of stone, walls of burnt brick, and partitions of rubble work, and provided with floor after floor, the upper stories can be partitioned off into rooms (*cenaculorum*) to very great advantage. The accommodations within the city walls being thus multiplied as a result of the many floors high in the air, the Roman people easily find excellent places in which to live” (*De Arch.* 2,8,17, Krohn trans.).

²⁸ For a brief bibliography on apartment buildings, see I. UYTTERHOEVEN, “Housing in Late Antiquity: Thematic Perspectives”, in *Housing in Late Antiquity. From Palaces to Shops* (eds. L. LAVAN – L. ÖZGENEL – A. SARANTIS) (Leiden 2007) 23-66, here 44-45.

²⁹ A.L. BOOZER, “Apartment Buildings”, *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, vol. 1 (eds. R.S. BAGNALL et al.) (Oxford 2013) 515.

Insulae housed their tenants in apartments called *cenacula*. The *cenaculum* form first appeared in Rome in the second century BCE ³⁰. Latin authors write about such apartments. Comparing living conditions in Capua with Rome, Cicero (*Agr.* 2.96) writes that the latter is “raised aloft, amid garrets” (*cenaculis*). Livy (21,62,2-3) mentions that one of the prodigies seen in Rome was an ox that had climbed from the street in the Forum Boarium to the third storey of a house (*tertiam contignationem*) and then jumped to its death. Martial (*Epigr.* 1,117,7) mentions that he lived in such a building in Rome at the top of three steep flights of stairs (*Et scalis habito tribus, sed altis*). Meiggs identifies it as a “third-floor apartment”, which would be reckoned according to the European system if it was reached after climbing three staircases ³¹. Martial (*Epigr.* 7,20,20) also mentions the greedy and gluttonous Santra who had to climb two hundred steps (*ducentas scalas*) to his garret (*cella*).

In the first century CE Augustus placed a height restriction of 70 Roman feet (20.7 m.) on building heights because of the dangers of fires and earthquakes ³². Laws promulgated in the capital would likewise be followed in the provinces, especially in Roman colonies like Alexandria Troas. After the fire in Rome in 64 CE Suetonius (*Nero* 16, Thomason trans.) writes that Nero “devised a new style of building in the city, ordering piazzas to be erected before all houses both in the streets and detached, to give facilities from their terraces, in case of fire, for preventing it from spreading; and these he built at his own expense”. Despite such precautions, fire remained a concern even into the second century CE. Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights* 15.1, Rolfe trans.) describes an occasion when, while walking with friends to the Cispian Hill, “we saw that a block of houses (*insulam*), built high with many stories, had caught fire, and that now all the neighboring buildings were burning in a mighty conflagration”. Early imperial *insulae* posing the most significant fire risk were built in a style called *opus craticium* — wattlework that was plastered over ³³. Vitruvius (*De Arch.* 2.8.20, Krohn trans.) decries such construction: “As to wattled walls, would they had never been invented, for though convenient and expeditiously made, they are conducive to great calamity from their acting almost like torches in case of fire”. Because

³⁰ FRIER, *Landlords and Tenants*, 6. *Cenacula* did not appear in Ostia until Trajan’s reign. The Latin Vulgate translation of Acts 20,9 is *tertio cenaculo*.

³¹ R. MEIGGS, *Roman Ostia* (Oxford 1973) 238.

³² Because of the high risk of collapse, the height of buildings was lowered to 60 Roman feet (17.7 m.) by Trajan in the second century.

³³ This is likened to the British style called “wattle and daub”; cf. C.M. HARRIS, *Dictionary of Architecture and Construction* (New York 42005) 1061-1062.

it was light, inexpensive, and quick, this “jerry-built” technique was commonly used for vertical construction both in urban and rural contexts. Timber framing was adopted for partitions to reduce loads in the upper floors of domestic architecture. Regarding the use of this light construction technique on structures at Ostia, Hermansen writes, “In many cases the solid houses of which we now can see the two bottom storeys — three at the most — may have had a couple of storeys built with *opus craticium*, with woods, reed, and stucco”³⁴. After the fire in Rome in 64 CE, new regulations changed construction techniques. How quickly such changes were made in colonies like Troas is unknown. Gates observes: “Flame-resistant materials predominated; the use of wood diminished”³⁵. Because of the organic nature of its materials, experts today know little about the technique. That classical authors like Martial mention it has caused Laumain to conclude that “*opus craticium* was widely used at the *insulae*”³⁶.

The *insulae* seen today are made from Roman brick and usually date to the early second century CE. Their size varied like apartment buildings today; shops, businesses, and *tabernae* usually occupied the ground floor³⁷. Frier writes: “Excavations at Ostia, the port city of Rome, have revealed [...] a pattern of urban housing which literary sources also associate with Rome of the High Empire: sturdy four- and five-story apartment blocks (*insulae*)”³⁸. The *Insula* of Diana and the *Insula* of Serapis in Ostia date to the early second century CE during the housing boom under Hadrian³⁹. Examples from Rome date as early as the first century CE⁴⁰.

³⁴ G. HERMANSEN, *Ostia. Aspects of Roman City Life* (Edmonton, AB 1981) 214. The so-called “House of Opus Craticium” in Herculanaeum still exists because it is actually built in a technique called *opus incertum* – timber framework with walls infilled with stones in mortar. See A. WALLACE-HADRILL, *Herculaneum Past and Future* (London 2011) 262–265.

³⁵ C. GATES, *Ancient Cities* (New York 2003) 356.

³⁶ A. LAUMAIN, “The Roman Timber Framework: a Neglected Construction Method”, in *Structures and Architectures. Concepts, Applications and Challenges* (ed. P.J.S. CRUZ) (London 2013) 2240–2247, here 2245.

³⁷ Many excellent images of *insulae* can be viewed on the internet. These usually show cutaways depicting life at the various levels starting with the shops on the ground floor. Most depict a third storey from which Eutychus fell, as argued above.

³⁸ B.W. FRIER, *Landlords and Tenants in Imperial Rome* (Princeton, NJ 1980) 3. On p. 4 n. 6, Frier corrects Packer’s description of the “Second Floor” in *Insula degli Aurighi* (ca. 140 CE) which he says is more properly the mezzanine floor.

³⁹ The standard work is J.E. PACKER, *The Insulae of Imperial Ostia* (Rome 1971).

⁴⁰ Remains of *insulae* were built into later structures such as the Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo on the ancient Clivus Scauri and the Basilica di Sant’Anastasia al Palatino. Parts of two *insulae* lie under the latter church, which are dated to the mid-first century CE, then rebuilt and renovated during the second to fourth centuries; see A. CLARIDGE, *Rome an Archaeological Guide* (Oxford 1998) 261–262.

One notable example is the *Insula dell'Ara Coeli* (sometimes called *Via Giulio Romano*) next to the Victor Emmanuel Monument on the west side of the *Piazza del Campidoglio* in Rome. Dating from Hadrian's reign in the early second century CE, it consists of a ground-floor *taberna* with a mezzanine reached by a wooden staircase. The second floor had one or two large apartments⁴¹, while the third and fourth floors contained many small rooms sized about 10 square metres for occupancy by small families⁴². Pervo observes that the meeting room in Troas "was unlikely to have been larger than fifty square meters"⁴³. While true, this greatly overestimates the size of these upper rooms in *insulae*. Traces of a fourth storey survive, which might not have been its uppermost floor. Frier concludes: "The building obviously became more crowded and more lower-class in its upper stories"⁴⁴. Coarelli estimates that the *insula* would house about 380 occupants, "making this a veritable dormitory for the poor"⁴⁵. Stevens has noted that water facilities and latrines were present in the lower levels of Ostia's Garden Houses⁴⁶. This suggests a higher social status for the residents of these apartments. Residents in the upper floors of an *insula* obtained their water from fountains in the central courtyards. Patterson summarizes: "[T]he higher up the building one went, the cheaper and more squalid the property; water-supply was only likely to be available on the ground floor. Both the comparatively well-off, and the comparatively poor, might well therefore have occupied rented apartments in the same *insula*"⁴⁷. Since the Christians in Troas were meeting in an upper storey, this statement has direct relevance for their socio-economic status.

⁴¹ FRIER, *Landlords and Tenants*, 14-15, likens this storey to the *piano nobile* of Renaissance buildings in which the main reception rooms were usually in the storey immediately above the ground floor.

⁴² For a discussion of the *insula* with its floor plans, see A. WALLACE-HADRILL, "Domus and *Insulae* at Rome: Families and Housefuls", in *Early Christian Families in Context. An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (eds. D.L. BALCH – C. OSIEK) (Grand Rapids, MI 2003) 3-18, here 14-17.

⁴³ R.I. PERVO, *Acts. A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN 2009) 510 n. 50.

⁴⁴ FRIER, *Landlords and Tenants*, 15.

⁴⁵ F. COARELLI, *Rome and Environs. An Archaeological Guide* (Berkeley, CA – Los Angeles, CA 2007) 41.

⁴⁶ S. STEVENS, "Reconstructing the Garden Houses at Ostia: Exploring Water Supply and Building Height", *BABesch Annual Papers on Mediterranean Archaeology* 80 (2005) 113-123, here 116.

⁴⁷ J.R. PATTERSON "Living and Dying in the City of Rome: Houses and Tombs", in *Ancient Rome. The Archaeology of the Eternal City* (eds. J. COULSTON – H. DODGE) (Oxford 2000) 259-289, here 276.

V. *INSULAE* IN CITIES OF THE EASTERN EMPIRE

The presence of *insulae* is well documented archaeologically in Italy. But were they present in the Greek East ⁴⁸? Keener asserts that such multi-storeyed apartment buildings “spread to other densely populated cities, certainly including those following the Roman model” ⁴⁹. Thus McRay writes: “In all probability, Eutychus fell from such a window in an *insula* in Troas” ⁵⁰, while Pervo suggests that the building was an “urban tenement” ⁵¹. Jewett also posits: “It is likely that the majority of early Christian converts lived in the *insulae* of the inner cities rather than in private villas” ⁵². The Roman colony of Alexandria Troas, located in northwestern Turkey, is a large archaeological site with few visible remains today ⁵³. Even when Clairac visited the site in 1726, he saw only a few ruins of public monuments ⁵⁴. Since Troas has no *insulae* remaining, examples from Rome and its port of Ostia help us to understand such buildings. However, first an issue of terminology must be addressed. In archaeological circles the word *insula* has two senses: 1) “A rectangular block of buildings surrounded by streets”; and 2) “an apartment complex with several storeys” ⁵⁵. As McKay elaborates, “the term *insula*, no doubt originally applied to a plot of land bounded by streets, was gradually extended to multiple dwellings which included older homes which had been subdivided into rooming-houses or *pensioni* and the larger, more commodious multi-storeyed apartment

⁴⁸ While LAUMAIN, “Roman Timber Framework”, 2242, notes that *opus craticium* was used as a building technique throughout the Roman Empire, he gives no example from the archaeological record in the Greek East.

⁴⁹ KEENER, *Acts 15:1–18:35*, 3.2717. For this view Keener cites J.S. JEFFERS, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era* (Downers Grove, IN 1999) 55, a non-specialist in Roman architecture writing a general background handbook with no footnotes.

⁵⁰ J. McRAY, *Archaeology & the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI 1991) 84.

⁵¹ R.I. PERVO, *Acts. A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN 2009) 510, citing MEIGGS, *Roman Ostia*, 236–251, as his source.

⁵² R. JEWETT, “Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church: The Implications of a Form-Critical Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10”, *Biblical Research* 38 (1993) 23–43, here 26.

⁵³ For a brief history of Troas and its significance for Paul, see G.L. THOMPSON – M. WILSON, “Paul’s Walk to Assos: A Hodological Inquiry into its Geography, Archaeology, and Purpose”, in *Stones, Bones and the Sacred. Essays from the Colloquia on Material Culture and Ancient Religion in Honor of Dennis E. Smith* (ed. A. CADWALLADER) (Atlanta, GA 2016) 269–313, here 270–278.

⁵⁴ J.-P. LAPORTE, “Alexandria Troas according to Louis-André de Lamamie, Chevalier de Clairac (April 1726)”, *Studien zum antiken Kleinasien VII* (ed. E. SCHWERTHEIM) (Asia Minor Studien 66; Bonn 2011) 247–276.

⁵⁵ T. DARVILL, ed., “Insula,” in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology* (Oxford 2008) s.v.

buildings”⁵⁶. In discussions of Christian meeting spaces, it is apparent that New Testament scholars occasionally confuse these definitions of *insulae* in their publications. We must next ask: Which cities in the eastern Roman Empire had populations dense enough to necessitate *insulae* for residences?

Jewett has suggested that believers not only in Thessalonica but in other Christian communities in Roman Macedonia such as Philippi met in *insulae*, which he calls “tenement churches”, rather than in *domus* churches⁵⁷. Harrison has suggested that Jewett’s argument about believers there meeting in *insulae* “merits consideration”⁵⁸. Excavation reports do reveal the presence of an *insula* from the early Christian period in Philippi⁵⁹, but as the excavator E. Gounari reports, “the term ‘insula’ is used as a translation for the Greek term οἰκοδομικὴ νησίδα, that is a block surrounded by roads, that could contain either one or more than one house”. She writes further: “The edifice with the ‘Circus mosaic’ has two levels at least, since we found in the excavation evidence that there was an upper floor, but there isn’t any evidence that it was an apartment-type *insula* as those in Ostia and Rome”. Regarding conclusive archaeological evidence, she notes that “for most of the edifices excavated in Philippi there is evidence that they had at least one more level but we cannot say if they were apartment type *insulae*, since the upper floor is not saved”⁶⁰.

Malherbe thinks the setting for Paul’s ministry in Thessalonica was a workshop within an *insula*, which he describes as a type of apartment complex serving most people in the large cities of the Roman Empire⁶¹. His statement on Roman Thessalonica seems to suggest the presence of such buildings there: “These enormous urban complexes were built near

⁵⁶ A.G. MCKAY, *Houses, Villas and Palaces in the Roman World* (Ithaca, NY 1975) 83. He fails to find any antecedents in the Near East to explain the appearance of such structures in Rome except at Ephesus (p. 84).

⁵⁷ JEWETT, “Tenement Churches”, 39. He also suggests that similar circumstances are implicit in the Galatian and Philippian letters; see JEWETT, “Tenement Churches and Pauline Love Feasts”, in *Paul the Apostle to America*. Cultural Trends and Pauline Scholarship (Louisville, KY 1994) 73-86, here 80. The socio-economic model that he proposes based around such tenement churches has been called into question; see, e.g., C.R. NICHOLL, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica*. Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians (Cambridge, UK 2004) 172-173.

⁵⁸ J.R. HARRISON, “The First Urban Churches: Introduction”, in *The First Urban Churches I*. Methodological Foundations (eds. J.R. HARRISON – L.L. WELBORN) (Atlanta, GA 2015) 1-40, here 34.

⁵⁹ See E. GOUNARI, “The Roman Mosaics from Philippi: Evidence of the Presence of Romans in the City”, *Bollettino di Archeologia On Line* 1 (2010) 27-38, here 29, 33-34.

⁶⁰ E. GOUNARI (personal correspondence 1/3/2018).

⁶¹ A.J. MALHERBE, *Paul and the Thessalonians*. The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care (Minneapolis, MN 1987) 17-18

the forum in the centre, and in the east of the city, in *insulae* that had not been built up during earlier centuries”⁶². However, Malherbe bases his observation on a statement by Adam-Veleni whose context is urban villas set in *insula* blocks, not multi-storey buildings. As Gounari again observes: “For Thessaloniki, there is no evidence, as far as I know, for multi-level tenement/apartment-type *insulae*”⁶³. For the province of Macedonia multi-storey buildings in which church meetings were held can only be postulated, because neither archaeological nor textual evidence exists.

Moving south to the province of Achaia, its capital was the Roman colony of Corinth. Paul ministered there for almost two years during two visits (Acts 18,1-18; 20,2-3) and wrote two canonical letters to the believers there. Extrapolating data from Herculaneum and Pompeii, Crossan and Reed suggest that house churches in Corinth might have met on the ground floor of a five-storey building⁶⁴. But regarding the possibility that such *insulae* provided domestic space in Roman Corinth, Schowalter observes that “no evidence for this kind of housing has been found”⁶⁵. One suggested reason is that “[s]eismic activity is common, with frequent and sometimes violent earthquakes”⁶⁶, with such earthquakes occurring every 15-20 years. However, Rome also had notable earthquakes in 83 BCE, 72 BCE, 15 CE and 51 CE⁶⁷. Despite being in a severe earthquake zone, builders in Rome nevertheless continued to construct multi-storey buildings there. So earthquakes may only be a minor factor for their absence in Corinth. It must be noted too that only a small percentage of the city’s residential area has been excavated. At Corinth’s northern harbor Lechaion, aerial photography has revealed the existence of six *insulae* each with a width of one actus (35.5 m.)⁶⁸. But these are city blocks, not buildings. However, the current director at Lechaion, P. Scotton, writes: “In my excavations, we have found evidence of buildings to the south of the area where these roads are found but oriented consistent with them”⁶⁹. Whether these

⁶² P. ADAM-VELENI, “Thessaloniki: History and Town Planning”, in *Roman Thessaloniki* (ed. D.V. GRAMMENOS) (Thessaloniki 2003) 121-176, here 160.

⁶³ GOUNARI (personal correspondence 1/3/2018).

⁶⁴ J.D. CROSSAN – J.L. REED, *In Search of Paul* (New York 2004) 329.

⁶⁵ D.N. SCHOWALTER, “Seeking Shelter in Roman Corinth”, in *Corinth in Context* (eds. S.J. FRIESEN – D.N. SCHOWALTER – J.C. WALTERS) (Leiden – Boston, MA 2010) 327-341, here 337.

⁶⁶ C.L. HAYWARD, “Geology of Corinth”, *Corinth, The Centenary 1896-1996*, vol. XX (eds. C.K. WILLIAMS II – N. BOOKIDIS) (Athens 2003) 15-42, here 16; cf. SCHOWALTER, “Seeking Shelter in Roman Corinth”, 334, 337 nn. 36-37.

⁶⁷ P.A.C. GALLI – D. MOLIN, “Beyond the Damage Threshold: The Historic Earthquakes of Rome”, *Bulletin of Earthquake Engineering* 10 (2012) 1277-1306, here 1280.

⁶⁸ D.G. ROMANO, “City Planning, Centuriation, and Land Division”, in *Corinth, The Centenary 1896-1996*, 279-301, here 294-295.

⁶⁹ P. SCOTTON (personal correspondence 22/1/2020).

building are *insulae* is uncertain, but perhaps future excavations might reveal multi-storey residences in the port area.

Moving to Asia Minor, and specifically the province of Asia, archaeological evidence exists for multi-storey buildings. The Romans used red-brick construction, similar to that used for *insulae* in Rome and Ostia. It is found in three monumental buildings dating from the early second century CE. The thick walls of the Red Hall in Pergamum's lower city stand approximately twenty metres high; it is the largest Roman brick building still standing in Turkey. At the Asclepium, the new temple of Zeus-Asclepius, modeled after the Pantheon in Rome, utilized considerable quantities of red brick. In Ephesus the Library of Celsus was similarly constructed of such brick. However, this is seldom seen because its restored marble façade is what tourists photograph today. As Mania writes, "In the rest of Asia Minor, bricks were used relatively seldom and primarily in the building of thermal establishments" ⁷⁰. At Ephesus McKay finds "entirely pertinent analogues, no doubt exemplary patterns, for Roman *insulae*" ⁷¹. These are residential building complexes excavated in the lower part of the city. When McKay refers to two specific *insulae* here, he is talking about blocks of housing rather than multi-storey buildings. Although the upper houses rest atop the lower ones, they rise along the natural slope, hence their name "Terrace Houses" ⁷².

Coming to Troas, Keener provides an extensive discussion of multi-storey buildings as well as the physical circumstances related to the fall of Eutychus — the open window, lamps, thick air, etc. In his discussion of the *insula* grid system in Miletus, he notes that the word "*insula*" has two meanings. He then claims: "Surviving evidence of multistory buildings in first-century Asia Minor suggests that they may have been better than the *insulae* of Rome and Ostia" ⁷³. However, in his footnote for this assertion he provides no supporting documentation. He then claims that there is "evidence of an appreciation for high buildings in Roman Troas and even in earlier Hellenistic sites in its vicinity". His source is Mitchell's summary of archaeological activity in Turkey in the 1990s. However, the 47 blocks discovered at Roman Ilium (Troy) are part of the city's *insulae*

⁷⁰ U. MANIA, "The Red Hall — A Pergamene Pantheon?", in *Pergamon. A Hellenistic Capital in Anatolia* (eds. F. PIRSON – A. SCHOLL) (Istanbul 2014) 524-541, here 532. Mania also notes the use of red brick in Pergamum at the two rotundas that flank the Red Hall and at the smaller domed temple of Zeus at the Asclepium, which all evidence the influence of the Pantheon in Rome.

⁷¹ MCKAY, *Houses, Villas and Palaces in the Roman World*, 84.

⁷² For a discussion, see S. LADSTÄTTER, *Terrace House 2 at Ephesos. An Archaeological Guide* (Istanbul 2013).

⁷³ C. KEENER, *Acts 15:1 – 23:35* (Grand Rapids, MI 2014) 3.2974 and n. 227.

grid plan, not multi-storey buildings. In Troas the only multi-storey building mentioned by Schultz (Mitchell's source) is "an almost square building of several storeys to the N of the Doric temple"⁷⁴. Since this structure is situated near the theater, agora, and several temples, it more likely had a civic rather than a residential function⁷⁵. Rathmayr notes: "When we examine the location of peristyle houses — the most common type of house for people of high rank in the Greek East — we find that they are located in the city centres, on principal thoroughfares and in the vicinity of important public (theatre, agora, and sports complexes) and sacred buildings"⁷⁶. *Insulae* were thus not located near villas or peristyle houses, hence not near the important public spaces of the city. According to Hanson's estimate, the area of Troas was 278 hectares, second in Asia only to Sardis (356 ha.). Extrapolating population size based on various densities (100, 150, 250, 400 persons/ha.)⁷⁷, he estimates that Troas at its upper range was inhabited by 69,500 to 111,200 persons⁷⁸. If the city had multi-storey housing, these structures were probably located between the port and the urban centre⁷⁹. However, no archaeological evidence exists for *insulae* in Troas.

VI. *INSULAE* AND EARLY CHRISTIAN SOCIAL STATUS

As mentioned in Section IV, the most expensive apartments of an *insula* were on the lower floors⁸⁰. The higher floors rented more cheaply because they were smaller and usually without heat, water, or bathrooms.

⁷⁴ KEENER, *Acts 15:1 – 23:35*, 2.974 n. 230; cf. S.M. MITCHELL, "Archaeology in Asia Minor 1990-98", *Archaeological Reports* 45 (1998-1999) 125-191, here 139.

⁷⁵ For a site plan of Troas, see THOMPSON – WILSON, "Paul's Walk to Troas", 277 fig. 12.3.

⁷⁶ E. RATHMAYR, "Identity in the Private Sphere: Interpreting Houses as Loci Reflecting the Identity of their Inhabitants", in *Cityscapes & Monuments of Western Asia Minor* (eds. E. MORTENSEN – B. POULSEN) (Oxford 2017) 109-121, here 110.

⁷⁷ The density of urban Rome is estimated to be 300 persons per acre for a population of 1.5 million; see J.E. STAMBAUGH, *The Ancient Roman City* (Baltimore, MD 1988) 337.

⁷⁸ J.W. HANSON, "The Urban System of Roman Asia Minor and Wider Urban Connectivity", in *Settlement, Urbanisation and Population* (eds. A.K. BOWMAN – A. WILSON) (Oxford 2011) 229-275, here 254 tab. 9.1. This estimate is controversial since it would make the population of Troas more than Ephesus, Smyrna, or Pergamum, something highly unlikely.

⁷⁹ Undoubtedly there existed a *rus in urbe* (countryside within the city), a phenomenon of Mediterranean settlements. The *rus* provided open land devoted to primary production as well as living space for those who worked in the countryside; see P. HORDEN – N. PURCELL, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford 2000) 110.

⁸⁰ C.K. BARRETT, *Acts 15–28* (London 2004) 2.954, thus wrongly asserts: "The dwellings of the poor were apartment houses of several storeys". As the archaeological evidence suggests, the tenancy was mixed.

Juvenal (*Sat.* 3.190-211) graphically describes the squalor and danger of fire for those living in a makeshift garret on the third floor (*tertia*) of such a building. Yet Gaston observes that the typical *insula* had “‘luxury apartments’ on the second and third floors (Acts 20:9!), and small, dark single or double rooms higher up”⁸¹. Jeffers similarly suggests that “Christian house congregations that met in the homes of believers probably met in private homes or first-floor ‘deluxe’ apartments, not in small, upper-story apartments”⁸². The gathering in Troas was clearly not in a lower luxury apartment, for after Eutychus was restored to life, Paul returned upstairs (ἀναβάς, Acts 20,11) to continue the meeting through the night⁸³. Instead, it occurred in a darker room higher up, particularly if τρίστεγον means the third floor in European reckoning. Witherington rightly concludes that “the hosts of this meeting were not among the social elite”⁸⁴. An indication may be Eutychus’ identification as a παῖς, usually translated as “youth”, “young man”, or “boy”. Yet in Luke’s five other uses of the word in Acts (3,13.26; 4,25.27.30), it is always translated “servant”. Therefore, this description of Eutychus might indicate his social status, not age. These factors suggest that the *ekklēsia* in Troas was comprised of individuals from the lower classes.

VII. CONCLUSION

This article has suggested a preferable translation for Acts 20,9 — fourth floor (American system), third floor (European system) — that is in accord with medical research related to a free fall such as Eutychus experienced. It also suggests that it was a multi-storey building called an *insula* from which he fell. Despite the paucity of archaeological evidence in Troas as well as in the Greek East for their existence, architectural expert I. Uytterhoeven’s comment is noteworthy: “I don’t think we should exclude the existence of multi-storied houses and apartments — it’s simply the state of preservation of the relatively few houses that have been investigated thus far that doesn’t allow us to say anything with certainty. Upper floors were certainly existing (e.g. in the remains of staircases at Sagalassos we

⁸¹ L. GASTON, “Reading the Text and Digging the Past: The First Audience of Romans”, in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity*. Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson (ed. M. DESJARDINS) (Waterloo, ON 2000) 35-44, here 37.

⁸² JEFFERS, *Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*, 56.

⁸³ C.H. TALBERT, *Reading Acts* (Macon, GA 2016) 183, notes that “nocturnal meetings were perceived negatively by Mediterranean society”. Such negative perceptions by outsiders included political conspiracy, human sacrifice, and sexual immorality.

⁸⁴ B. WITHERINGTON III, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI 1998) 607.

found several large fragments of mosaic floors that collapsed from the upper floor), but how many is unfortunately not clear”⁸⁵.

Insulae constructed from Roman brick have survived in Rome and Ostia; however, those built earlier in the *opus craticium* style have collapsed and/or burned, with their organic building materials leaving no trace in the archaeological record. The text in Acts 20,9 describing Eutychus’ fall may be the only historical testimony to the presence of an *insula* in Asia. This study has sought to avoid “the abuse of archaeological evidence” warned about by Schowalter, in which that evidence is interpreted “with an eye to explaining some aspect of the biblical text”⁸⁶. Rather it has attempted to examine and explain the evidence in a way that is contextually and archaeologically appropriate.

Department of Ancient and Biblical Studies
University of South Africa
Muckleneuk
0003 Pretoria
South Africa

Mark WILSON

SUMMARY

The account of Eutychus’ fall in Acts 20,9 poses both translation and archaeological challenges. “Third floor” is the preferable translation for τρίστεγος in the British system, “fourth floor” in the American system. A multi-storeyed *insula* was the likely building in which the believers met in Troas. While *insulae* dating to the early second century CE can be found in Rome and Ostia, none have yet found in the archaeological record in the Greek East. Since poorer people lived on the upper floors of *insulae*, the *ekklēsia* in Troas was largely comprised of individuals from a lower socio-economic class.

⁸⁵ I. UYTTERHOEVEN (personal correspondence 2/3/2018).

⁸⁶ SCHOWALTER, “Seeking Shelter in Roman Corinth”, 327, 330.