
The present book serves as a companion volume and catalogue for an exhibition under the same title, held in Germany in various places in 2005/06. It is also a good survey of the discovery of Herculanenum (H.), of the discoveries made at H. and of its fascinating history, both ancient and modern. Following the prefaces by the editors and by different representatives of the museums involved in the exhibition, the first part contains nineteen essays, all generously illustrated, on the history of the discovery of H., the various sites where discoveries were made, the various buildings and objects that were discovered and on the Rezeptionsgeschichte of H. in European art, architecture, literature and music:


Interspersed between the essays are various ancient and modern sources: ten ancient sources on H. and the Gulf of Naples, J. J. Winckelmann on the so-called Dresdner Herkulaneinrinnen (photographs on p. 274); the reports on the eruption of Mount Vesuvius by Pliny the Younger in his Epistulae (vi,16 and 20, pp. 41–43) and an instructive list (drafted on the basis of inscriptional evidence) of the about five hundred inhabitants of H. that are known by name (of an estimated total of four thousand inhabitants, though not all five hundred of them will have lived at the time of the city’s destruction). The list is arranged alphabetically according to family names and distinguishes (through the use of different colours) between free citizens, freedmen and women. The high number of freedmen is noteworthy, in particular when it is taken into consideration that they will probably not have been mentioned in inscriptions in proportion to their real percentage of the population. In addition there is a fine selection of contemporary travel reports from 1739–1847, especially of the visits to the subterranean theatre of H. These reports tell as much about the discovery of H. (what was known of H. at what time) as of the mindset of the various Europeans encountering this unique window into the ancient world.

The second part of this volume is the actual catalogue for the exhibition. Eleven sections contain photographs of highest quality and descriptions of the exhibits, each section starting...
with a brief introduction. The sections cover the skeletons discovered at the boathouses of H. (cf. the essay listed above, pp. 45–55), the “House of Granianus” (an interesting survey of the inventory of an upper-class house, containing a signet-ring, cradle, table, various cameos, dices, different kinds of tableware, pots and containers, a plate for burning incense), the theatre, the Villa dei Papiri (named after the charred papyri that were discovered there), the terrace of Marcus Nonius Balbus, the Augusteum, the so-called “House of the Stags” and further objects of H. These include charred remnants of food like different types of beans, peas, chick-peas, figs, wheat, their storage containers and even the shelves made to hold them. Various species of poultry appear on the wall paintings in the “House of the Stags” (164). Further sections are devoted to replicas and design inspired by H. which illustrate the reception of H. in Northern European literature and art, to objects from H. in German museums and to various views of Mount Vesuvius (depicting different levels of activity of the volcano).

The text throughout is of high scholarly quality and at the same time readable. The plethora of colour photographs (341), other illustrations (25 in black and white) and a number of computer assisted reconstructions of the city and buildings are of a high standard. Both the introductory essays as well as the catalogue offer outstanding descriptions and illustrations for understanding the material and social surroundings of the New Testament. This is due to the special (or better tragic!) circumstances of the destruction of the city by various pyroclastic waves and clouds following the volcano’s eruption. Due to these circumstances, houses, their interior decoration and furniture, food and even human remains from the first century have been preserved in a quality unmatched by other archaeological discoveries. Thus H. offers a unique insight into a Roman city of the first century C.E. With the necessary awareness that the setting and discoveries of H. cannot be transferred to the Eastern Mediterranean world without reflection and care, readers still get a good impression of what the cities of Paul’s missionary churches in Syria, Asia Minor and Greece, may have looked like, including their day-to-day living circumstances and the kind of houses in which some early Christians met. Of course, readers need to keep in mind that the material remains of H. are mostly those belonging to the privileged upper class, while the skeletons offer unique insights into the society at large. Out of the wealth of material covered in this volume that is of interest to New Testament studies a few examples need to suffice.

It is fascinating to see the interior decoration (including the quality and contents of the frescos) of various houses that were unearthed, the many wooden objects (panelling, interior fittings, doors, furniture and other objects), the food items and the conclusions they allow for the nutrition of the populace (see also below for the evidence for nutrition derived from skeletons), the private library in the Villa dei Papiri which contained more than 1800 (!) rolls of papyrus – specially prominent are the works of the philospher Philodemus of Gadara from the first century B.C.E. (cf. KP IV, 759–63); in view of this, Paul’s few books and parchments referred to 2 Tim 4:13 are hardly worth mentioning! Many of the objects found in H. support the evidence of written sources (and the claim of much scholarly literature) by amply providing evidence of the way in which the day-to-day living in the ancient world was permeated by Hellenistic-Roman religion and magic in what has been termed domestic and personal religion (for a survey of private religion and piety within the household see E. Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity [3d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003] 177–82; 213–51); cf. for example the various statues of deities from house altars (309–13) or the many such scenes depicted in wall paintings. Among the skeletons discovered at the boathouses was a necklace which is described as follows: “Some of the pendants have the form of scarabs, little birds, frogs, turtles, axes, male and female genitals (vulva and phallus) and of the Egyptian god Hapokrates with a cornucopia. All of these are to be seen as amulets” (258, all translations CS).

Of particular value for understanding the population structure of the Roman Empire are the over three hundred skeletons which have been discovered at H. They are studied by the archaeological sub-disciplines of palaeo-demography and palaeo-pathology. In addition to revealing the