

Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World



Approaching Religious Transformations
from Archaeology, History and Classics

Edited by

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Barbara E. Borg

Does religion matter?

Life, death, and interaction in the Roman *suburbium*

Abstract: This paper discusses the first emergence of epitaphs and images indicative of Christian and Jewish affiliation and identity in Rome and its surroundings. It starts from the observation that unambiguous markers of Christianity only begin to emerge in the early 3rd century, and become more widespread towards the end of that century and in the 4th century. It further argues that, with very few exceptions, the same is most likely true also for indications of Jewish identity, and concludes that this lateness cannot be explained by fear of hostility in either case. Instead, it is suggested, this phenomenon must be seen in the wider context of a new desire emerging around the same time to form groups based on ethnic identities that engage in communal activities such as burial or dedications, and of those groups to make their ethnicity known. If this chronological coincidence could be confirmed by future research, it would not only support the view that religious identity grows out of identities originally conceived of in ethnic terms, but it would also suggest that we need to look at wider socio-historical factors for an explanation of this process.

Studying “lived ancient religion” – as opposed to its philosophical and theological underpinnings, for instance – inevitably entails attention to socio-historical questions, since no religion can be “lived” in complete isolation from the realm of more mundane activities, or outside social networks and human interaction, without which life would simply be impossible. The exploration of the space and social context of religious activity and self-identification also informs parts of my larger project that aims at “Mapping the Social History of Rome”.¹ By exploring the varied, closely interconnected, and changing uses of land in a key area of the Roman *suburbium*, and by linking the activities there to their agency via epigraphic and literary sources, it seeks a better understanding of the actual interactions between different social, economic, ethnic, and religious groups, not only in this area but in Roman society more generally. In this way, I not only hope to fill some gaps in our literary records, but also to

¹ This project was generously funded by a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship.

offer a kind of “reality check” to the latter. In this paper, I am interested in the role of religious affiliations and beliefs within the funerary realm, focusing in particular on the chronology and processes involved in the delayed introduction of (Christian and Jewish) references to religious beliefs into the commemorative space of metropolitan Roman cemeteries.

1 The Roman catacombs

The search for evidence of early Christianity in Rome had long been a rather marginal issue, but came to the center of attention during the Counter-Reformation in the second half of the 16th century. The rediscovery of the catacombs in the early 17th century, and their systematic exploration from the 1860s onwards,² were met with great excitement, not least because it was believed that their establishment went back to the 1st century CE. Within the vast networks of galleries, evidence for obviously pagan (here: “traditional polytheists”) burials was largely lacking, while both images and texts occasionally referred to biblical figures and stories, and Christian eschatological beliefs. The highly inconspicuous nature of the galleries when they were found, and the assumption that Christians were segregated from their surroundings and more or less constantly under threat, led to the view that they were not only burial spaces but also places of cult and worship, and hiding places during the persecutions.

Many of these views have by now been discarded for some time. There is no evidence for any cult activity in the catacombs except for the cult of the dead; the persecutions are now believed to have been intermittent, often not affecting the ordinary Christian but office holders; and the catacombs are utterly unsuitable as hiding places. Their locations are normally close to Rome on the major consular roads, and at least some entrances were clearly designed to be seen and to impress. There is no evidence for catacombs before the late 2nd century; there is a growing amount of evidence of features that can hardly be reconciled with Christian faith (at least the Christian faith that the church fathers promoted); and an increasing number of scholars now agree that the catacombs

² On the early history of excavation and study: Osborne 1985; Caldelli and Ricci 1999, 567; Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti and Mazzoleni 1999, 9–13 (V. Fiocchi Nicolai); Bowes 2008, esp. 582–586.

must have been used by a mixed group of people that included both Christians and non-Christians.³

I have proposed elsewhere a more specific model for the organization of a mixed use of the 3rd-century catacomb nuclei (Borg 2013, 72–121). One key observation, generally passed over in silence, is that the largest catacombs were situated on land that was already imperial property when the first galleries were excavated. Why would Christian communities choose such locations, especially when they may have been regarded with suspicion by the authorities? Accordingly, literary sources attest that Christian burial space was normally acquired from private benefactors. Moreover, a careful mapping of the catacombs' developments demonstrates that they typically originated in several independent hypogea, which were only merged in the 4th century. Why would Christians maintain multiple independent hypogea with their own entrances, all situated on the land of a common owner, when their purpose was to offer the Christian community a *communal* burial space, as is often claimed? In the area of the later Praetextatus Catacomb, for instance, Area G – which is also the only one with pre-4th-century Christian wall paintings in a rather remotely situated cubiculum –, Area F, and the so-called “Spelunca Magna” with its extensions all remained separate spaces until the 4th century (Spera 2004; Borg 2013, 80–96) (Fig. 1). In the later Pietro e Marcellino Catacomb, the same applies to Regions X, Y, and Z (Guyon 1987).

It is also noticeable that these original nuclei were often of rather different character with regard to size, efforts expended, and range of grave types. The structure, organization, and pattern of usage of the underground were essentially the same as in the *sub divo* cemeteries. Epigraphic evidence from the latter frequently suggests a significant presence of imperial staff among tomb patrons, who were organized in *collegia* subdivided into *decuriae*, and I have argued that such divisions also made up a significant number of those buried in the early nuclei of the catacombs (Borg 2013, esp. 91–96, 119–121). At Praetextatus, for instance, catering staff are prominent in the *sub divo* necropolis and in Area E

³ E.g. Harries 1992, 61; Johnson 1997; Rebillard 2003 = Rebillard 2009; Bodel 2008; Borg 2013, 72–121. I would like to stress from the outset that I fully subscribe to Jaś Elsner's warning that, during the period we are studying here, pagans, Christians, and Jews did not exist as discrete entities or identities, and that it is dangerous to conclude from a specific image the religious affiliation of its patron: Elsner 2003; cf. also Rebillard and Rüpke 2015, esp. the introduction and Rebillard's ch. 11; Raja and Rüpke 2015, esp. Rebillard's ch. 32. The material presented here would need much fuller discussion along the lines of these works than this paper allows. Since I am interested here in larger trends and group identities, fuzzy as they may be, rather than individual objects or people, I shall still use these terms without adding qualifications in every case where they may apply.

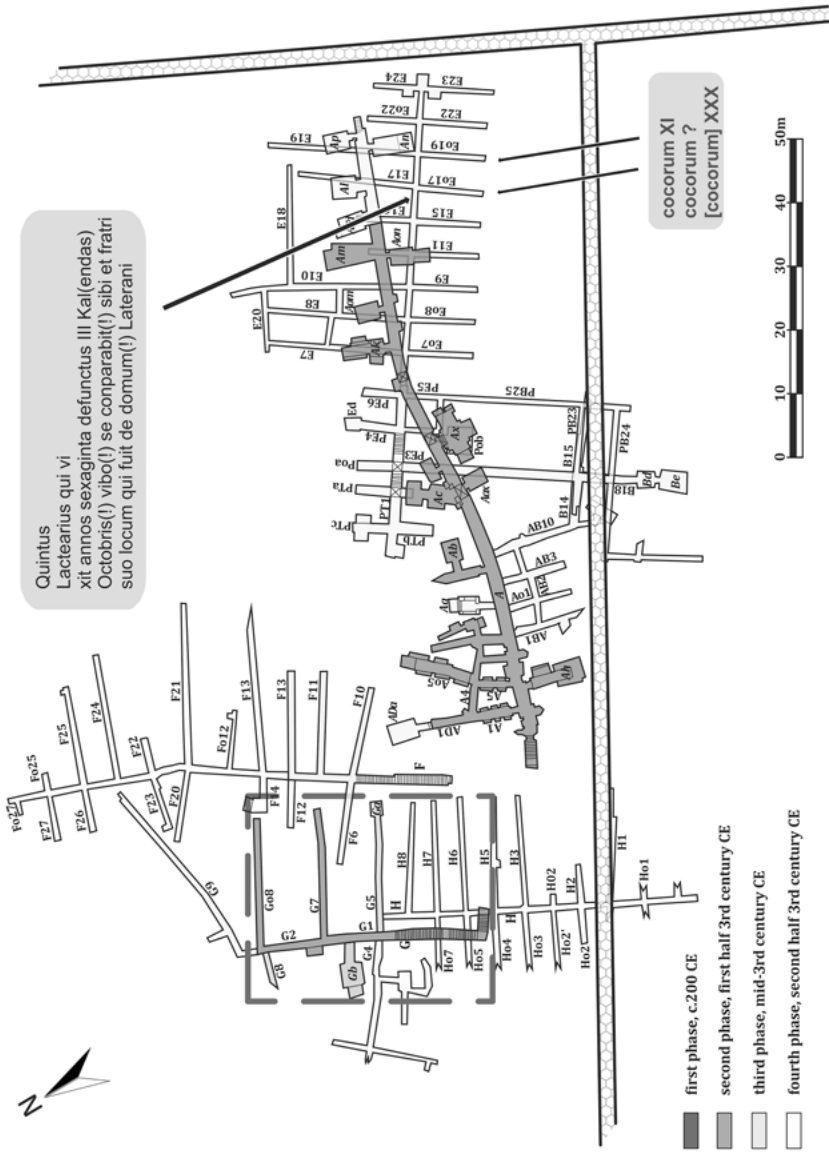


Fig. 1: Phases of the three earliest nuclei of the Praetextatus Catacomb (© Barbara E. Borg).

underneath, where three sections were marked off for three *decuriae* of imperial cooks. Other parts of the galleries or individual *cubicula* must have been sold or donated to a range of different patrons, as was the case with space above ground. By statistical probability alone, we can assume that Christians featured among both imperial staff and other patrons, and the rare biblical paintings confirm this view. These burial patterns point to a far more natural relationship between Christians and non-Christians than some ancient and modern authors suggest, at least in the funerary realm, where it was not segregation along religious lines that normally determined the physical context of burial and commemoration, but social ties such as vocational associations or membership in a *familia*.

2 Christians *ad catacumbas*

This conclusion is supported also by one of the most controversial sites on the Appia, the area of a former pozzolana mine now underneath the church of S. Sebastiano, known in antiquity as “*ad catacumbas*”. It has long been noted that the first three miles of the Appia featured a relatively large number of tombstones for members of élite military corps such as the Praetorian Guard, Praetorian Fleet, and the *equites singulares*. Somewhere between S. Sebastiano and the tomb of Caecilia Metella, the praetorians also maintained a *statio*, which was later turned into a proper *castrum peregrini* (Latteri 2002). Moreover, the necropolis that started to develop within and above the former mine featured a striking number of burials of imperial slaves and freedmen, which suggests again that the land may have been imperial property.⁴ It is therefore all the more surprising that, in the mid-3rd century, a Christian place of worship and congregation was established in this cemetery, a walled-in piazza conventionally called “*memoria*” (see esp. Tolotti 1953) (Fig. 2). Graffiti on the wall of a simple portico flanking the piazza (the so-called “*triclia*”) commemorate the apostles Peter and Paul, and confirm literary records according to which an official festival for Peter and Paul was established in 258 and celebrated *ad catacumbas* as well as in the Vatican and on the via Ostiense.⁵

⁴ For the *sub divo* cemetery, see Taccalite 2009; Nieddu 2009, 257–281.

⁵ Graffiti: Styger 1918, 57–90; *ICUR* V 12907–13090; graffito potentially dating to 260: Nieddu 2009, 11 with n. 66. The lower date is suggested by the “Innocentii” buried in Mausoleum Y, which was destroyed by the *memoria*, who were named after the emperors of 238, Gordian,

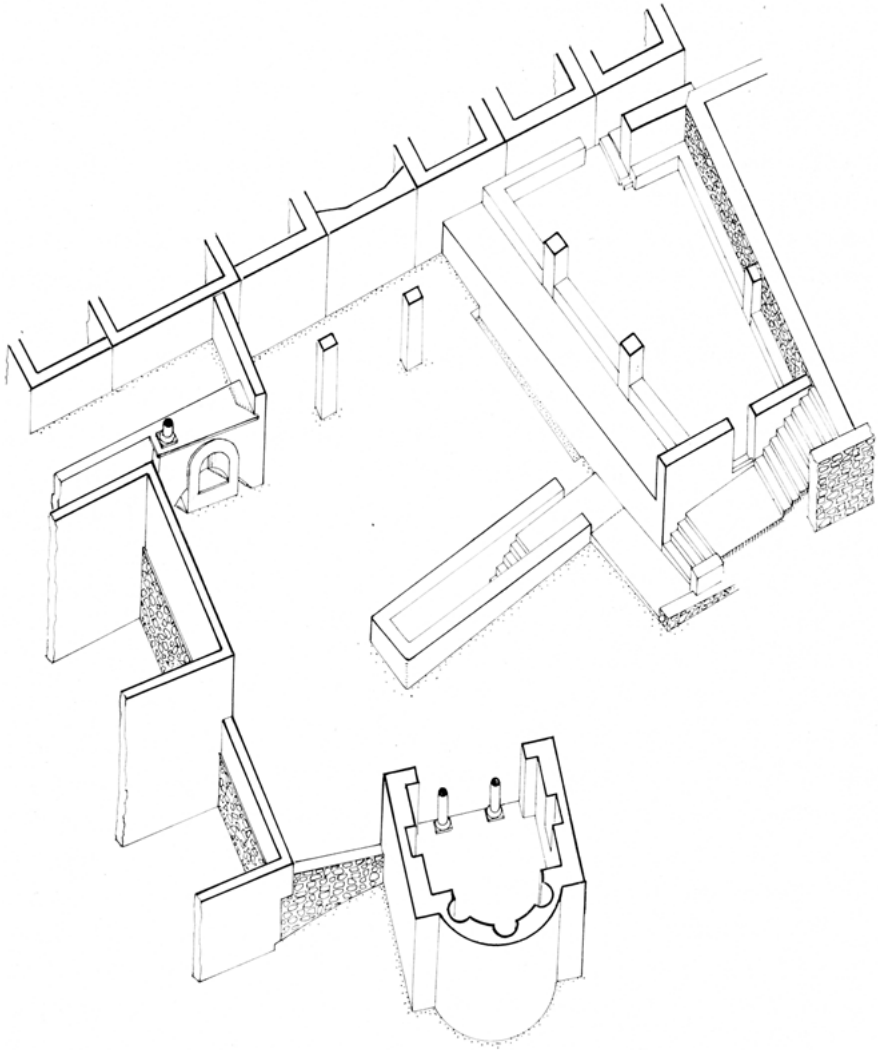


Fig. 2: Axonometric reconstruction of the Triclia (memoria), with the loggia featuring Christian graffiti on its back wall (Tolotti 1953, 195, fig. 43).

Pupienus, and Balbinus. The *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* records for 29 June 258 cult for Peter and Paul *ad catacumbas*.

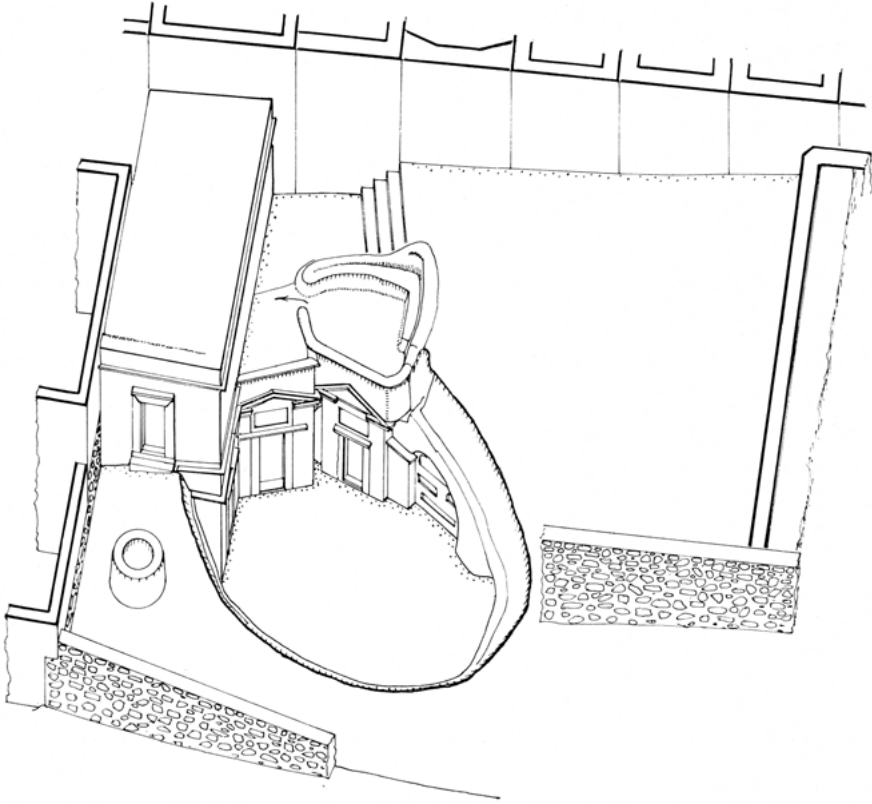


Fig. 3: Axonometric reconstruction of the so-called ‘piazzaola’ with mausolea built into the former mine’s walls (Tolotti 1953, 147, fig. 34).

The physical changes to the area around this time were considerable. In the early 2nd century, parts of the defunct pozzolana mine had caved in and tombs had been built into its walls, which were used by praetorians and people very closely connected to the imperial household (see esp. Mancini 1923) (Fig. 3). This cave had to be filled in to level the ground for the *memoria*, a measure which also buried the existing mausolea, only leaving a staircase for access to an enigmatic “well” (Tolotti 1953, esp. 156–157). All this required good planning and engineering skills, the movement of large amounts of soil, and doubtless permission from the authorities. It is inconceivable that this work was done under false pretenses or in secrecy. This is not the place to discuss the significance of the *memoria*, and the related question of the apostles’ burial place. Yet one popular narrative can be ruled out from the start: that the Christian community translated to this place

the relics of the apostles to hide and protect them from their persecutors.⁶ I shall discuss elsewhere more plausible explanations for the developments *ad catacumbas*. For the time being, it is significant that there was, in the mid-3rd century, at a time of heightened tensions between the Christian community and the imperial administration, a Christian cult place established in the middle of a busy necropolis frequented by imperial staff and élite military, just meters away from a main road, and just across from an imperial villa and a *castrum* of praetorians.⁷ The history of this location – which I believe shows the range of official reactions to Christian cult, from active toleration (if not support) to persecution of its protagonists – cannot be traced here in any detail. But the existence of the cult site in its given environment over the second half of the 3rd century alone discounts narratives of an early Christianity under constant threat. Rather, neither these Christians nor their pagan surroundings appear to have taken offense from each other.

3 Invisible Christianity

The *memoria ad catacumbas* is extraordinary in many respects, but not least in that it provides the earliest securely dated epigraphic evidence for Christians in Rome. Considering the mixed usage of the catacombs, it is nearly impossible to identify a specifically Christian epigraphic habit before the 4th century, when we start to find the Chi-Rho sign and references to Christ or uniquely Christian ideas (ditto Carletti 2006). Biblical images go back in time a little further, but are still extremely rare in the 3rd century, when we also see the first Christian hypogea emerging.⁸ The most uncontroversial and important one is Area I of the later Callixtus catacomb, which was established on a plot of land originally belonging to Zephyrinus, Bishop of Rome 199–217, and which contained the graves of later bishops, from Pontianus († 235) to Eutychianus († 283), with the exception of Cornelius who died in exile (Fiocchi Nicolai and Guyon 2006b, 133–144, 153–155) (Fig. 4).

⁶ Nieddu 2009, 11–13, and Lampe 2015, 287–289, for a summary of views with ample bibliography.

⁷ For the villa see Pisani Sartorio and Calza 1976. It had become imperial under Caracalla at the latest: *CIL* VI 1215, with p. 4336; see also *CIL* VI 1107, pp. 844, 3071, 4324, for Gallienus.

⁸ Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti and Mazzoleni 1999, ch. 2 (F. Bisconti); Borg 2013, 252–260, for overviews.

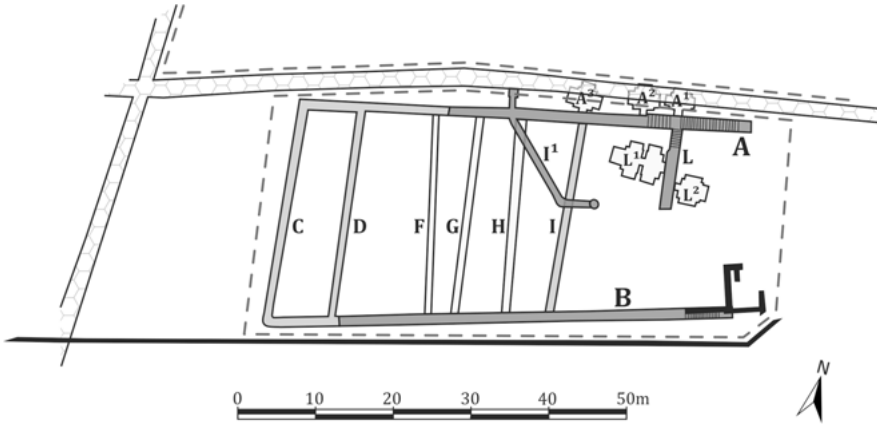


Fig. 4: Phases of Area I in the later Callixtus Catacomb, with the Crypt of the Popes (L1)
(© Barbara E. Borg).

Over a century, it developed on a limited plot of just 0.23 ha (i.e. less than a tenth of the contemporary Praetextatus area of 2.9 ha) and was integrated into a wider network of galleries only during the 4th century (Borg 2013, 75–76, with bibliography). The identification of this hypogeum as Christian is based, however, on a combination of literary sources and the 4th-century epitaphs of the bishops, while the rest of the galleries are no different from non-Christian ones elsewhere, with the exception of six *cubicula* with biblical paintings in a marginal position of the system. The earliest stages of the Novatianus and Calepodius catacombs may equally have belonged to Christian patrons but did not feature any biblical imagery at all. The large mid-3rd-century double *cubiculum* called “Cappella Greca” with its lavish decoration of biblical imagery is therefore highly unusual, and at the same time the most limited in size as it was not initially part of a larger gallery system but integrated into the Priscilla catacomb only in the 4th century (Borg 2013, 76–79, 103–104, 255–257, with bibliography). If we accept a much more relaxed relationship between Christians and non-Christians for most of the time, this absence of a Christian epigraphic habit and extreme rarity of Christian symbols and imagery can no longer be explained by their desire to keep a low profile, as it were, in order not to attract the attention of their potentially hostile surroundings. Why then are we having such great difficulty in identifying them in the material and epigraphic record? I would like to approach this question via a detour.

4 Jews in Rome and Ostia

Unlike the Christians, or so it is often implied, already by the early 3rd century Jewish communities had left hundreds of epitaphs and images of liturgical objects such as the menorah, the Torah shrine, or the shofar in six different catacombs and hypogea that seem to have been dedicated primarily, if not potentially exclusively, to practitioners of this religion. Epitaphs are mostly written in Greek, sometimes in Latin, and occasionally contain Hebrew or Aramaic elements; they use certain formulae that are unique to them; and they also deploy images (Noy 1995; Rutgers 1995; Cappelletti 2006). It is particularly this evidence that makes the absence of similarly overt Christian statements, and the rarity of exclusively Christian hypogea, so striking, not least because it is believed that a substantial number of early Christians were in fact converted Jews.

But the Jewish practices merit closer inspection before we rush to conclusions. Virtually all the evidence for Jewish self-identification comes from the Jewish catacombs,⁹ which in all probability started to be established only around the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.¹⁰ This is considerably later than the first attestations of Jews in Rome, which date to the 2nd century BCE. Their numbers in the imperial period are hotly debated, with Rutgers suggesting as few as 6,000, and others assuming up to 80,000 individuals.¹¹ While the matter is fraught with methodological difficulties and cannot be discussed here, both extremes are highly unlikely. What is normally agreed and can hardly be doubted is that Jews lived in Rome in considerable numbers, noticeable enough to feature in our literary sources. No fiddling with numbers can explain the discrepancy between the virtual absence of material and epigraphic evidence for

⁹ For the present argument, it is irrelevant whether we think that the catacombs in question were used exclusively by Jews or also by pagans (and Christians?). I am using the designation “Jewish catacombs” here as a shorthand for catacombs with a significant Jewish presence. For inscriptions that may not be from any of the catacombs, see Noy 1995, 415–468. According to their style and formulae, they all date to the same timeframe as those from the catacombs.

¹⁰ Borg 2013, 107–110 for an overview and bibliography. Early dates proposed for the Monteverde catacomb (Müller 1912 and Williams 1994, 176) could not be confirmed by evidence (cf. n. 25). Rutgers 2009, 21–22, suggested an early date for the Villa Torlonia catacomb based on three radiocarbon dates from charcoal particles in the mortar of *loculi*. But details of where exactly these samples have been taken, and how his dates could be reconciled with the other evidence from the place, have not been explained. Moreover, as Vismara 2013, 1862, points out, for charcoal from mortar special calibration needs to be carried out, as the process of calcination affects the C14 ratio.

¹¹ Solin 1983, 698–701; Barclay 1996, 295; Noy 2000, 257–258; Gruen 2004, 15; Rutgers 2006; Pacchiani 2009, esp. 14–23; for a recent review of the debate see Vismara 2013.

their existence before c. 200, and its abundance after that time. In fact, I am not aware of any Jewish inscription or image from Rome that can be shown to date before the late 2nd century, although three Ostian inscriptions probably can (see below). Since we only start to see Jews in epigraphy from around 200 at the earliest, when also the first catacombs were established, it could be suspected that there is a causal connection. Was it the more secluded environment that allowed them to dare exhibit their symbols? After all, like the Christians, Jews were not uncontroversial in Roman society.

This is highly unlikely. Jews had been a visible entity in Rome for a long time, and even benefited from imperial protection and privileges.¹² Erich Gruen has argued forcefully that the episodes of Jewish expulsion from Rome recorded in our literary sources were no more than that – episodes, with little long-term impact – and joined those who argue that Jews generally participated in the life of the communities they lived in (Gruen 2004, esp. 15–53, 122–132). Even if he may be accused of downplaying somewhat the evidence of anti-Jewish sentiment and measures, as several of his reviewers have suggested, these recurring incidents of anti-Jewish actions demonstrate that the expulsions cannot have been comprehensive and/or permanent (ditto e.g. Barclay 1996, 300–306), and the respective edicts were normally directed not at Jews alone but also at other marginal groups.¹³ Derogatory comments by Roman authors were typically marked by ridicule and puzzlement, but by neither anxiety nor aggression.¹⁴

Even after the Great Revolt and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70, while the Jewish tax may have been humiliating and the years under Domitian uneasy, Jewish life continued to prosper at Rome. Non-Jews carried on adopting Jewish practices or even became Jews, with all the obligations this entailed,¹⁵ demonstrating that the disparaging remarks of some ancient writers do not reflect the Romans' view at large. We do not hear of any concerted violence or animosity against Jews, and not even of anti-Jewish agitation, as is recorded for some places in the eastern Mediterranean.¹⁶ While the degree to which Jews were assimilated to their gentile surroundings is still debated, it is

12 The literature on Roman Jews is enormous, but see e.g. Rutgers 1995; Barclay 1996; Gruen 2004, 15–53; Cappelletti 2006, all with bibliography.

13 For a new and intriguing explanation, see Wendt 2015.

14 For the Romans' views of the Jews, see Hidal 2001; Gruen 2004, 42–132; Stern 1974, for a full list of sources; for Judeophobia, see Schäfer 1997, esp. 180–195 on Rome. For a similar view as Gruen's, see e.g. Barclay 1996, 292–306; Mitternacht 2003.

15 Cohen 1999, 141–162. See also the contribution by Katell Berthelot in this volume with further bibliography.

16 Barclay 1996, 310–319; Gruen 2004, 42, who also notes that the Roman Jews were not taking part in the insurrections.

clear that they were well integrated and participated in society, without hiding or losing their sense of their Jewishness.¹⁷ A 1st- or 2nd-century epitaph from via Gabina in Rome specifies the location of the workplace of a non-Jewish fruit vendor as at “the rampart by the synagogue”, suggesting that this synagogue was a well-known topographical reference point.¹⁸ The Ostian synagogue, perhaps existing already in the second half of the 2nd century, while outside the city walls, was located close to the Porta Marina near the harbor on the important via Severiana, surrounded by *insulae* and villas, and thus in a fairly conspicuous place.¹⁹ Three 2nd-century Jewish inscriptions from around Ostia proudly refer to Jewish institutions while otherwise fitting in perfectly well with the epigraphic habit prevailing in the rest of Roman society. The dedication of, among other things, a Torah arc for the wellbeing of the emperors (*pro salute Augustorum*) was most likely set up in a synagogue,²⁰ confirming that a practice reported by Philo (*Leg.* 133; *Flacc.* 49) continued into at least the advanced 2nd century, and it recalls the practice of naming Roman synagogues after rulers and influential people.²¹ The epitaph of the gerusiarch C. Iulius Iustus from Castel Porziano south of Ostia was the tomb’s main *titulus*. It starts with the evocation of the synagogue (?) of the *Iudaioi*, mentions its patron’s

17 Cf. e.g. Cohen 1999; Gruen 2004, *passim*, who stresses that the dichotomy of either resistance against their gentile surroundings or far-reaching assimilation misses the point that for most, “(m)aintenance of a Jewish identity and accommodation to the circumstances of diaspora were joint objectives” that did not result in them “forever grappling with dissonance in their daily lives” (p. 6), but could be reconciled for most of the time. Whether the lack of a distinct and visible Jewish material and visual culture must be interpreted as a sign of temporary loss of Jewish identity, as Schwartz 2001 proposes, is therefore doubtful. That onomastic patterns and some general features of Jewish epitaphs resembled very closely those of their non-Jewish contemporaries had already been observed by Rutgers 1995, esp. 136–138, 170–175.

18 Noy 1995, 487, n° 602. The synagogue in question is often suspected to be the Siburesian, named after the *subura* region of the city.

19 Olsson, Mitternacht and Brandt 2001; Mitternacht 2003, 533–556; Simonsohn 2015, 381–382, with extensive bibliography in n. 25. The building has recently been shown to date to no earlier than the mid-2nd century (personal communication Douglas Boin and Cuyler 2018, who generously shared her paper with me before publication), and it featured unambiguous elements of a synagogue only after its 4th-century renovation. Yet since the 2nd-century building already contained a large meeting room, and some features apparently continued in use in the final phase, it is possible that the building was already a synagogue at that time; cf. also the inscriptions mentioned in nn. 20 and 22, which may or may not refer to the building at issue. For the area around the synagogue, see Heinzlmann 2001.

20 Noy 1993, 22–26, n° 13, pl. 6; Olsson, Mitternacht and Brandt 2001, 85–88, fig. 105. The inscription was found re-used in the floor of the Ostian synagogue’s vestibule.

21 Leon 1960, 140–166; Richardson 1998, on the Synagogue of the Augustans (*Augustesioi*), the Agrippesians, and the Herodians.

office as a matter of pride, and the *gerusia* as giving permission for the erection of the tomb, probably because the plot belonged to the community (Noy 1993, 32–35, n° 18, pl. 10; Olsson, Mitternacht and Brandt 2001, 88–89, fig. 106). In the third inscription, from a tomb on a road of Ostia's Pianabella, the deceased's office of *archisynagogos* is again proudly stressed, while names and the dedicatory formulae of the Latin inscription are entirely conventional and religious symbols absent.²²

These examples suggest that, while religious affiliation did not need to be concealed, it was also only in rare circumstances that it became apparent, and such circumstances had to do more with technicalities or pride in an office than with any religious statement. They also confirm that Jews did not necessarily have their own necropoleis, but chose their burial sites for a range of different reasons, with no qualms about being buried among pagans and Christians.²³ The triangular plot of land where the Jewish Randanini Catacomb is situated was right on the most prestigious road, and in one of the busiest areas of the *suburbium*, just a stone's throw from an imperial villa, and underneath a necropolis that had been used by pagans for over two hundred years.²⁴ While the epitaphs with explicitly Jewish elements from underground galleries raise questions about their target audience, it is clear that we need to look elsewhere for explanations of the onset of a Jewish epigraphic habit (which may in turn explain, at least partly, its lacking in the centuries before).

5 Dates

One aspect that seriously affects the argument is the difficulty in dating these epitaphs. While both the epitaphs and the symbols are normally treated as if they were representative of the 3rd and 4th centuries, strictly speaking they only possess a *terminus post quem* in the foundation of the catacombs, which however continued to be used well into late antiquity. It cannot therefore be excluded that, like overtly Christian epitaphs in other catacombs, the majority in fact belong to the 4th century and later. For the Monteverde Catacomb, a

²² NSc 1906, 410–415 (E. Ghislanzoni); Noy 1993, 26–28, n° 14, pl. 7; Olsson, Mitternacht and Brandt 2001, 91–92, fig. 107.

²³ Ditto Noy 1998, 81–85, who further assumes that Jews may not normally have had any epitaphs at the time.

²⁴ Spera 1999, 259–265, UUTT 430–447; Nuzzo 2000, 135–138; on the catacomb most recently Laurenzi 2013. On the villa, see above n. 7.

recent review of dated evidence, lamps in particular, suggests its establishment only in the mid-3rd century, while just 13.8% of epitaphs are dated to the late 3rd century, and lamps and gold glass with Jewish symbols only date from the 4th century onwards.²⁵

Whether the chronology of other Jewish catacombs is consistent with that of Monteverde is less clear, ironically enough since this least well preserved of the larger Jewish catacombs is the best published. The particular frequency of Jewish symbols depicted, and synagogues mentioned there, as well as the fact that only at Monteverde do we find Hebrew/Aramaic words or phrases, could be the result of its being slightly later than the other catacombs.²⁶ Differently from Monteverde, some nuclei of the Villa Torlonia and Randanini catacombs show characteristics of the earlier 3rd century. Based on Donatella Nuzzo's typology and dating, the early galleries of Area E of the lower Torlonia catacomb should date to the first half of the 3rd century (Nuzzo 2000; cf. Fasola 1976, esp. 43–44) (Fig. 5). A date around 230 is suggested for *cubiculum* 14 in the Randanini catacomb (Fig. 6), and the building with its many *arcosolia* on the via Appia Pignateli, which later formed a monumental entrance into the catacomb (M), is likely to also be of early 3rd-century date.²⁷ Assuming that they were already used for members of the Jewish community at this stage therefore raises the possibility that also some of the inscriptions and depictions of menoroth may be earlier and just badly executed. The type of menorah featuring in the Roman evidence is elsewhere first attested in dated contexts in the mid-3rd-century Doura Europos synagogue. This could, but by no means must, indicate that the Roman examples are no earlier than this. On the other hand, few if any lamps with Jewish symbols from Rome (and most other Diaspora locations) date to before the 4th century; the four sarcophagi with menoroth from Rome, and the painted *arcosolia* and *cubicula* in the Torlonia and

²⁵ Rossi and Di Mento 2013, 328–340, 346–350. Noy 1995, 4, notes that the rarity of Aurelii “might suggest that the full effects of the Constitutio Antoniniana of 212 were not yet felt”, but it could as well support a late dating of the epitaphs, since Aurelii become rare again in the 4th century.

²⁶ 19 of the 26 epitaphs naming synagogues with known provenance come from Monteverde, where also the highest percentage of offices and almost twice the number of religious symbols than in the Randanini catacomb were found. Against the suggestion that the Monteverde Jews represent a contemporary but more conservative group of Jews (e.g. Leon 1960, 243–244), see convincingly Rutgers 1995, 139–143.

²⁷ Laurenzi 2013, 43–47, 55–66. The earliest parts of the Monteverde catacomb near its entrance(s) were already destroyed when the site was discovered and may equally predate the late galleries that were documented, as Rutgers 2009, 23–24, notes. Yet there is no reason to believe that the catacomb was founded in the early imperial period or even earlier.

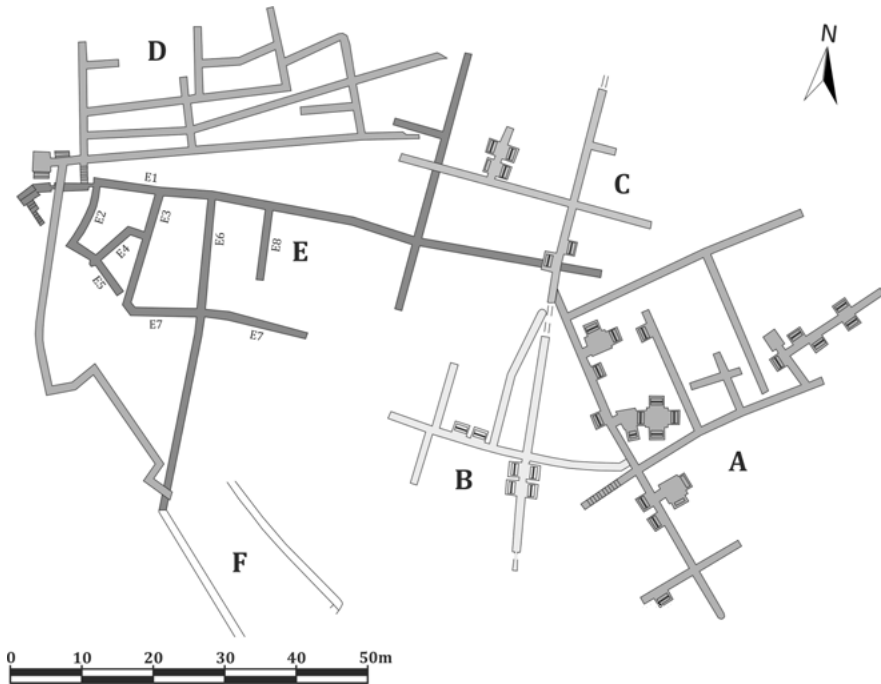


Fig. 5: Jewish 'Torlonia' catacomb on via Nomentana with indication of individual hypogea and extension phases (© Barbara E. Borg after Fasola 1976, pl. 1).

Randanini catacombs which feature Jewish symbols, equally belong to the (early and later) 4th century.²⁸

The Torlonia catacomb originated in two separate nuclei with their own entrances from a secondary road near via Nomentana (Fig. 5). While the earliest, western parts of the lower catacomb (galleries E1-3) with their first extensions (E4, 5, 7) featured nine inscriptions but only a single painted menorah, the system's later extension, Area D, boasted 35 inscriptions as well as Jewish symbols (Fasola 1976, 43-47, 53-59; Noy 1995, 341-387). Potentially, this pattern is partly due to the plundering of the catacomb before its formal "discovery", which may have been more thorough in its more accessible parts. Yet it is those parts of Area D closest to the entrance that also boast the majority of inscriptions, suggesting that chronology may have played a part too. Area A of the

²⁸ Hachlili 1998, 275-282 (*cubicula*), 285-287 (*arcosolia*), with bibliography; on the Randanini *cubicula*, see also Laurenzi 2013, 49-66, figs. 22-47.

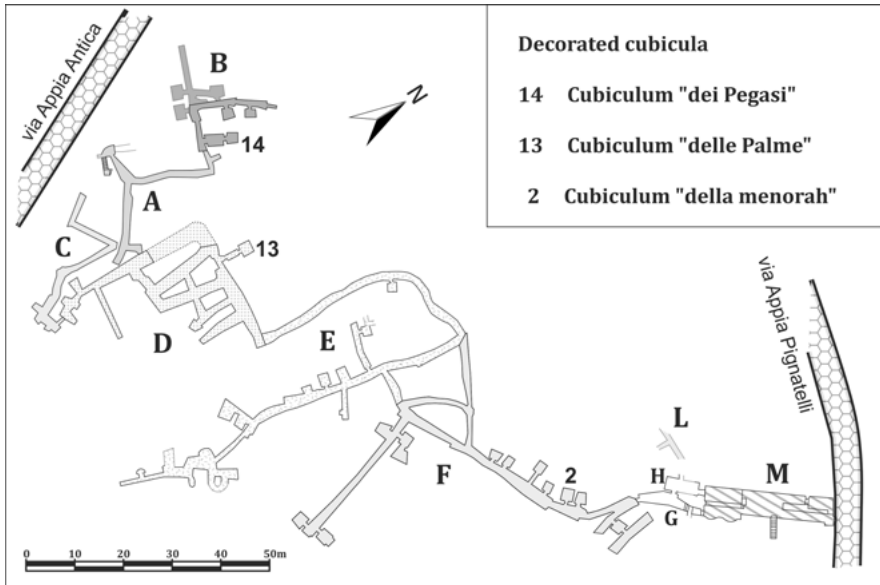


Fig. 6: Jewish 'Randanini' catacomb on via Appia with indication of individual hypogea and extension phases (© Barbara E. Borg after Laurenzi 2013, 30, fig. 7).

upper catacomb equally featured numerous inscriptions and Jewish symbols as well as two painted *cubicula* and several painted *arcosolia* with Jewish symbols, which are all dated to the 4th century.²⁹ While these painted features belong to a second phase after the floor of the original galleries was lowered, there is little indication that much time passed before this was done, so that the upper catacomb may not have been established before the late 3rd or early 4th century. Unfortunately, locations of the epitaphs coming from this area are unknown and documentation of the exact features of the phases, such as *loculus* shapes, is still lacking. Moreover, there is no complete visual documentation of

²⁹ Fasola 1976, 13–28. His dates for the development of the catacomb from the earlier 3rd century onwards are based, however, on stamped bricks which were almost certainly re-used, and on an outdated assessment of the painted *cubiculum* Aa. Cappelletti 2002 is even more optimistic in using brick stamps for the dating, and proposes a starting date in the mid-2nd century and its most extensive use in the 3rd. These dates are, however, unsustainable due to the widespread re-use of bricks and tiles (cf. Rutgers 1998, 50–54), and the paintings as well as the typology of the *cubicula* and *arcosolia* in Area A clearly point to the 4th century (Rutgers 1998, 59–66).

the epitaphs that would allow for comparison of the epigraphic features, which in turn could underpin new efforts in their dating.

The case of the Randanini catacomb is particularly interesting (Fig. 6). A double *cubiculum* (14) decorated in the standard Roman linear style, including figures of Victory crowning a youth and Fortuna, can be dated to the earlier 3rd century (the date normally suggested is around 230). A further two *cubicula* (13 and 2) featuring Jewish symbols such as the menorah, however, were only decorated in the 4th century. Since individual parts of the catacomb once constituted separate hypogea, it is possible that parts of Area B were originally pagan, and only later used by Jews when they were integrated into the catacomb, just as was the case for pagan hypogea in the “Christian” catacombs.³⁰ Yet this later use does not only demonstrate that Jews did not have a problem with such decoration. If it is accepted that the large “Christian” catacombs started off as mixed cemeteries, and became “Christianized” only with changing demographics and/or their passing into Church administration over the course of the 4th century, the situation was quite different for the Jewish catacombs. Given their initially rather limited size, they may well have been far more restrictive in terms of their patronage. While they may have admitted the burial of non-Jewish individuals, it is hard to see why, in the 4th century, they should have integrated into their communal burial grounds hypogea of patrons who had nothing to do with the Jewish community. Also considering the use of “pagan” imagery in Jewish cemeteries such as Beth Shearim (Schwartz 2001, 153–158, with bibliography), it is perhaps likely that hypogeum B was patronized by Jews from the start, and that they just felt no need to use any Jewish symbols. Even if we admit that the bulk of explicitly Jewish evidence originates from the 4th century, it is therefore possible that we see the first clustering of Jewish burials already in the 3rd century.

6 Collective burial in the 3rd century

Looking at burial customs in Rome more generally puts these observations into context. A significant change starting around the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries is a return to communal burial after about a hundred years during which this was extremely rare. From the Augustan period until the end of the 1st

³⁰ Thus the explanation by e.g. Rutgers 1995, 54–55; Laurenzi 2013, 47. The later use by Jews is attested by the *kochim*. For pagan hypogea in the later Christian catacombs, see Borg 2013, 72–121.

century, there is plenty of evidence for communal burial in smaller or larger *columbaria*, which were organized and owned by the *familiae* of noble families (including the imperial), or by groups who shared a common occupation, such as the musicians and other entertainers in Vigna Codini 2.³¹ As Dirk Borbonus has demonstrated, the large *columbaria* went out of use towards the end of the 1st century, and I argue in detail elsewhere that the typical occupants of these *columbaria* now opted to found their own family tombs, which were designed to be used by subsequent generations of their family or *familia*.³² The 3rd century seems to see a return to 1st-century practices, with communal or, to adopt John Bodel's cautious terminology, collective burial spaces (Borg 2013, 273–275; cf. Bodel 2008). Reasons are likely to have varied, and included financial constraints in the wake of the various crises that marked the 3rd century, which probably most affected the lower and middling strata of society.

The decision for communal burial obviously raised the question of who one should liaise with for that purpose, and the *familiae* of wealthier families clearly became one option again.³³ Yet there is evidence for other groupings as well, which are likely often to have been *collegia*. *Collegia* did of course flourish throughout the 2nd century, and they had also always involved a prominent funerary element.³⁴ But during the 2nd century, there is little evidence that they also maintained shared burial grounds, and the financial contributions they paid out when a death occurred were rather to support activities around an individual's burial in a family mausoleum, and the celebration of anniversaries.

Around the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century, however – dating is notoriously difficult – we start to see evidence again for such *collegia* using shared burial sites. There is now a new way of marking such tombs, namely by a name in the genitive plural, such as *Eutyriorum*, *Gaudentiorum*, *Melaniorum*, and so on (several listed in *CIL* VI 10268–10285). Some of these genitives are derived from *nomina gentilia*, such as the Melanii (*CIL* VI 10277) or the Graptii, whose inscription features on the door lintel of *cubiculum* H in the Flavii Aurelii region of the Domitilla catacomb (Pergola 1983, 222 n. 96). Others are formed on *cognomina*, such as the Eplegii, whose name was inscribed on the door lintel of

31 Borbonus 2014, *passim*, with cat. 3 on Vigna Codini 2.

32 Borbonus 2014, esp. 142–146 (with different interpretation from my own); Borg 2019, ch. 3.

33 This includes not only the imperial family, but probably also private ones: Borg 2013, 98–105.

34 For sources and extensive annotated bibliography, see Ascough, Harland and Kloppenborg 2012.

cubiculum P in the same hypogeum.³⁵ Others again evoke some general positive notion, such as the Eutyctii, who occupied a large *cubiculum* in the Soter region of Callixtus.³⁶ The inscription again featured over the door of this late 3rd-century *cubiculum*, which was laid out for some 30 individuals and was later extended to accommodate about 50 bodies. Differently from what has sometimes been suggested, they were not Christian support groups but, as Eric Rébillard argued already in 1999, they formed the equivalent of patrons of *sub divo* mausolea – although in this case perhaps not of families and *familiae*, but of *collegia* of uncertain character (cf. Rebillard 1999, 280). Moreover, they are also not necessarily (all or exclusively) Christian. Positive evidence for this assumption is lacking, and there are non-Christian *sub divo* parallels. The Pancratii are a well-known example, who re-used a Flavian senatorial mausoleum from around 270 onwards, set up sarcophagi in the vestibule of the tomb chamber, and excavated galleries around the original tomb to cater for their members.³⁷

7 Ethnic pride and clustering

What is most interesting in our context is that, for the first time, we now also find indications of ethnic groupings. The Pesidii, who inscribed a large block found on the Appia (*CIL* VI 10285), may well be people from Pisidia, since the name of the region is sometimes spelt with an “e”. There is also a notable cluster of Pannonians buried in the area of the later church of S. Sebastiano,³⁸ which continued to attract Pannonian burials even after the *Basilica Apostolorum* had been built.³⁹ The name of the *Coemeterium Iordanorum* or Catacomb of the Jordanians on the via Salaria, established in the mid-3rd century, is ancient, and suggests

³⁵ *ICUR* III 6662: Rebillard 1999, 280; cf. Marucchi 1909, 134–135; Pergola 1983b, 221–223, for the proposal that the name is formed after the *cognomen* of the family.

³⁶ *ICUR* IV 981: DeRossi 1877, 37–42; Rebillard 1999, 279–280; *LTURS* II (2004) 231–232, s.v. “*Eutyctiorum sepulcrum*” (V. Cipollone).

³⁷ *LTURS* III (2005) 165–167, s.v. “*Latina via*” (F. Montella); Borg 2013, 146–150, with further bibliography.

³⁸ Latteri 2002. While the presence of praetorians may be explained by their *castrum* on the other side of the road, the fact that Pannonia is the only *natio* mentioned is not. There is no evidence for Thracians, for instance.

³⁹ Esp. the large semi-circular late 4th-century Mausoleum (X; so-called “*Platonía*”) that was attached to the apse of the church: Nieddu 2009, 212–249; Nieddu and Heid 2008, with a different interpretation. Cf. also the sarcophagus dedicated in 375 by one Roscia Calcedonia for the *clarissimi* Simplicius, Didyme, and Innocentius: *ICUR* V 13109 = *CIL* VI 32045 = Bovini and Brandenburg 1967, 219; Bertolino 1997, 119–121, who further notes (p. 125 n. 26) that there are

that the entire hypogeum was originally dedicated to an ethnic group.⁴⁰ In other cases, there are indications of ethnic clustering without explicit self-identification. In the Pamphilus Catacomb, for instance, one gallery seems to have been reserved for foreigners, and it is possible that the African martyr Panphilus was translated to the *cubiculum* at this gallery's end because there was already a tradition of burying Africans there, as was the case with Quirinus and the Pannonians *ad catacumbas* (Mazzoleni 1990–1991).

These changes in ethnic clustering and self-identification are evident beyond the funerary realm. Migration into Rome, voluntary as well as involuntary, had been extensive ever since the Late Republic, but we hardly see these thousands of people of foreign origin in the epigraphic record anywhere before the late 2nd century (Noy 2000; Tacoma 2016). Yet suddenly we do see at least some. David Noy has noted that Thracian soldiers, and only Thracians, set up dedications exclusively in the name of their ethnic group during the 3rd century.⁴¹ A considerable number of *stationes*, which represented different groups of foreigners, mostly traders and *navicularii*, from outside Italy, set up inscriptions in Rome and Ostia. In Rome, several were found along the via Sacra close to the Forum, near the Temple of Faustina and Antoninus Pius, suggesting that their *stationes* were situated nearby, and thus in a very prominent location. Most of them date to the late 2nd and 3rd centuries (cf. Moretti 1958, 115–116; Noy 2000, 160–164). Similarly, at Ostia such *stationes* were located behind the theater in the so-called “Piazzale delle Corporazioni”, where the mosaics with their inscriptions date to the same period.⁴² The point here is not the existence of such *stationes*, which goes back to at least the time of Nero, but the fact that we can see them now for the first time proudly presenting their ethnicities to the public.⁴³

only four other Christian epitaphs for Pannonians in the whole of Rome, and they all come from different catacombs.

⁴⁰ Fasola 1972; *LTURS* III (2005) 89–93, s.v. “*Iordanorum coemeterium*” (P. De Santis).

⁴¹ Noy 2000, 219, e.g. *CIL* VI 32582 = 2807. It is worth noting here that it had always been a habit of the praetorians to record their origin in inscriptions (Noy 2010, 151), but the point here is about clustering and communal activities by specific ethnic groups.

⁴² General chronology: Carta, Pohl and Zevi 1987, esp. 167–193 (I. Pohl); mosaics: Becatti 1961, 64–85, nn° 83–136, pls. 139, 173–190; *CIL* XIV 4549. Inscriptions name foreign *collegia* from North Africa, Sardinia, southern France, and Alexandria.

⁴³ It may thus not be mere coincidence that the few well-preserved earlier mosaics do not feature inscriptions with their ethnic origin, although they do feature hints of the latter in their imagery: Becatti 1961, 74–77, nn°. 108–109, pls. 93 and 184; 82–83, nn°. 128–129, pls. 101 and 138; 84–85, nn° 136–137, pl. 81.

Viewing the emergence of early identifiably Christian and Jewish evidence in this wider context suggests that we are looking here not at a process specific to these groups, but at one of wider application. From around the turn of the 2nd and 3rd centuries, we see people organizing their burials in distinct groups which share a common purpose and identity. Some of them we can identify as *familiae* (or parts thereof), some as sharing a common vocation. Others again do not disclose what holds them together, but they not only self-identify as a group (e.g. through inscriptions above entrances or inscribed member lists), their members also identify as such in their own epitaphs.⁴⁴ What is entirely new (and reaches beyond the funerary sphere) is visible clustering according to ethnic affiliation. It may be objected that, since ethnic signifiers were almost entirely absent in the previous period, such clustering may have occurred but gone unnoticed. There is no way to exclude such a practice, but what evidence we have seems to suggest that this was rare at best. Not only did Christians and Jews bury their dead among the rest of the population, as discussed, but also the praetorians, who regularly indicate their origin, did not previously cluster according to this criterion. We may therefore suspect that burial groups formed on common ethnicity were a largely new feature of the 3rd century.

I suggest that it is here that also the first Christian and Jewish hypogea best fit. Recent scholarship has made it abundantly clear that Jewish identity never conceived of itself as a religious identity disembedded from its cultural heritage, kinship ties, and origins from Judaea; that is, that it was, and remained throughout antiquity, an ethnic identity, albeit one that may have been shaped by religious beliefs and rites to a greater extent than some other ethnicities.⁴⁵ This may explain why even the late epitaphs are largely lacking references to explicit religious doctrine.⁴⁶ Epitaphs mentioning their patrons' Jewish offices appear to be primarily a

⁴⁴ For the former, see nn. 35, 36, and 37 above, and e.g. the member list from the Pancratii tomb *CIL* VI 10282; for the latter, see e.g. the inscription on the sarcophagus of C. Severienus Demetrius and his wife from the Pancratii tomb (*CIL* VI 10281), or the commemorative inscription for Aurelius Petrus, a member of the Pelagii (*ICUR* IX 25005).

⁴⁵ Boyarin 2008, with bibliography; see also n. 51. There has been some debate over Boyarin's claim that, even in the later 4th and 5th centuries and under the pressure of Christianity, there was no Judaism as a separate, religious entity in Jewish self-perception. But this need not worry us for the present purpose.

⁴⁶ Explicitly religious statements such as prayers or quotations from the Bible are extremely rare (Noy 1999; Cappelletti 2006, 183–186), and may well be among the latest of epitaphs (cf. the gold glass Noy 1998, 471–477, n° 588).

matter of pride in status rather than of religious piety.⁴⁷ It is also noticeable that none of the seven catacombs was reserved for a particular synagogue. Epitaphs mentioning the name of the congregation to which a deceased had belonged are relatively few, with the majority coming from Monteverde (18 out of 25),⁴⁸ while there is an abundance of epitaphs mentioning offices related to the synagogue without indicating which one.⁴⁹ It should therefore not surprise us if the first Jewish cemeteries in Rome dated back as far as the earlier 3rd century, following a more general trend towards ethnic clustering in the organization of burials, although in all likelihood these clusters were relatively limited in size.

Similarly, it has been shown how Christian writers, striving to carve out an identity for Christians as a distinct group, often conceived of themselves in terms of *ethnos/natio* or *genos/genus*. While these terms, in their narrower sense where territory and genealogy are key defining elements, may seem ill-suited, in fact they had long been rather fluid in their meaning and application.⁵⁰ It has also been demonstrated that Christian writers took their first steps in developing a notion of an autonomous, disembedded *religious* identity in the later 2nd century, yet such a notion only took hold more fully in the 4th century.⁵¹ Outside specialist theological discourse in particular, familiar ethnic terms must certainly have managed to communicate the general claim of a coherent identity that lived up to, and even superseded, Jewish and other ethnically framed identities. The establishment of communal hypogea by Christians who *did* feel a desire to be buried among their fellow believers would therefore equally have fitted into the new pattern.

The extent to which both groups visually and explicitly self-identified as Jewish or Christian in epitaphs and through the display of religious symbols and

47 Ditto Noy 1998, 83–84, who thinks that it was these office holders who introduced epigraphy into Jewish burials, but does not provide a plausible explanation for the chronological coincidence; Williams 2013, 193–194.

48 Based on Noy 1995. Cf. also Williams 1994, who argues for the organization of burial by the family, not just in Rome but across the Diaspora and Palestine.

49 Epitaphs from the Monteverde catacomb record 45 titles, while 49 are recorded for the Vigna Randanini catacomb (where only once is the synagogue specified) and 18 for the Torlonia catacomb.

50 Esp. with further bibliography: Buell 2002; 2005; Johnson 2014; for examples of a more un-specific use of *ethnos* and *genos*, for the rich and poor classes, or for bakers and potters, for instance, see Aaron P. Johnson's review of Buell 2005 at <http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2006/2006-02-31.html> (last accessed 1.1.2017).

51 For influential suggestions for how and when the notion of a disembedded religion and religious identity came into existence, see Schwartz 2001; Boyarin 2004; Buell 2005; Boyarin 2008; 2009.

images is a different matter again. There was very little tradition in Rome of making any kind of religious statement in the funerary realm, and religion was not normally part of an individual's explicit identity claims. Altars were sometimes set up to traditional deities in tombs and funerary precincts as to a family's tutelary deity, but there was no need to evoke any divinity on the occasion of death, except for the *Dii Manes*. In the rare cases where this was still done, it normally had nothing to do with eschatological beliefs, and it was also never meant as an ostentatious statement of religious belief, affiliation, or identity. It typically resulted from pride in a priestly office. At present, it is impossible to tell to what degree Jews already displayed markers of their identity such as liturgical symbols or offices related to the synagogue in the 3rd century. A review of the evidence suggests that such display may have been very limited at the time, and only increased significantly during the 4th century. Similarly, as indicated above, there is no recognizable Christian epigraphic habit before the 4th century, and biblical images are also very rare, often occurring in the more marginal parts of gallery systems, and almost invariably within individual *cubicula*: that is, in spaces separated from the rest of the hypogea. Unfortunately, we do not know who their patrons were, but it is noticeable that there is no indication of a special involvement of clerics. While the Crypt of the Popes in Area I Callixtus may have been remodeled so significantly in later times that few if any features of the original decoration were preserved, it is still important to note that it does not contain any biblical imagery. Subsequent Popes were buried in different places in the Roman *suburbium*. Only two *cubicula* have been preserved with their original decoration, but both were lacking religious imagery as well.⁵² The bones of Cornelius († 253), which were not buried in the Crypt because he died in exile, were later translated to the so-called "Crypt of Lucina", a different part of the Callixtus catacomb, where the paintings of four saints and martyrs were not added before the 6th century, and most likely only in the first half of the 8th.⁵³ Still, the number of biblical scenes in the catacombs increased markedly in the 4th century, when gold glass with images of the saints and of Christ also first emerges, often set into the sealing mortar of *loculi*,⁵⁴ and from the

⁵² Gaius (283–296 CE) was buried in a huge double *cubiculum* immediately to the west of the entrance stairs (O2), and Pope Miltiades translated the remains of Eusebius (309) from his location of exile to *cubiculum* O1 facing it: Reekmans 1988, esp. 207–223; Reekmans 1992; Guyon 2005, 238.

⁵³ Reekmans 1964, esp. 118–120; Osborne 1985, 305–310.

⁵⁴ Morey 1959; see now Walker 2018, with a new approach to dating.

Constantinian period onwards we find explicit references to Christ and Christian ideas in epitaphs too.⁵⁵

This evidence would be consistent with the observation that the efforts to forge a distinct Christian identity in opposition to a Jewish and pagan one started to shape discourses more widely in the 4th century, and also affected Jewish identity claims.⁵⁶ Moreover, it suggests that such ideas had by then also filtered down to the wider Christian lay community, and that they had moved on from being part of a theoretical and intellectual discourse to shaping the “lived religion” of growing numbers of people in increasing numbers of contexts. Many Christians now felt the desire to activate and even display their religious identity in new ways, and in contexts that were not, until then, much affected by their Christian-ness, such as the funerary realm.⁵⁷ At the same time, whether in response to Christian pressure, as part of a general trend, or a general trend that accelerated after Christianity received a great boost from the emperors’ support, Jewish identity equally became more visible, with their synagogues now architecturally more distinct and decorated with religious symbols, and with the display of liturgical objects and the frequent mentioning of Jewish offices in the funerary realm.⁵⁸ For the first time in Roman history, religious affiliation as such (rather than a priestly office) became an aspect of an individual’s identity that was worth commemorating in permanent forms such as epigraphy and imagery. With the details of chronology of the Roman evidence being as elusive as they are, it would be hazardous to speculate on cause and effect on these grounds alone. Yet it is remarkable how the development – from the formation of the first Christian collective hypogea of very

55 For the content of these references, see esp. Dresken-Weiland, Angerstorfer and Merkt 2012.

56 See authors n. 51.

57 For the activation of a Christian identity in specific contexts, see esp. Rebillard 2012.

58 Schwartz 2001, 179–289, for Palestine; Levine 2006, for the general development; Noga-Banai 2008, on the choice of specific motifs. Collar 2013, esp. ch. 4, argues that the marked increase of explicitly Jewish epigraphy is a reaction to the destruction of the temple, which in turn triggered rabbinic Judaism spreading throughout the Mediterranean and inspiring a stronger sense of Jewish identity. Quite apart from the fact that the influence of the rabbis in the 2nd and 3rd centuries is debated, and considered by many to have been very limited even in Palestine (for a radical view, see e.g. Schwartz 2001, part 2), her hypothesis rests on her dating of this increase to the 2nd century, a chronology that is impossible to sustain for the western Empire including Rome (Noy 1998, 79), and on the unproven assumption that Jewish identity as expressed in offices and images of the menorah and other liturgical elements must reflect a rabbinic form of Jewish identity (did the rabbis not condemn the memorialization of honors?).

limited size and with even more limited display of identity markers, to more extended clustered cemeteries with more extensive and overt display of such identity markers – occurs largely parallel to the development of Jewish underground cemeteries and their decoration.⁵⁹

There is a host of questions that my paper does not address. Some have never been posed, such as what may have triggered this emerging ethnic clustering and pride (the *Constitutio Antoniniana* is too late for this role). Megan Williams (among some others) stated a few years ago: “[. . .] we cannot write a history of the relations between Christianity and Judaism in the Roman Empire without at the same time taking into account the relation of each of these concepts to other categories of identity current at the time.”⁶⁰ It is to this contextualization that I hope to have contributed with this paper.

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⁵⁹ For the menorah, Levine 2000 has suggested that it was deployed as an equivalent to the Christian cross. Given the latter’s rarity in the earlier 4th century, I wonder whether the prevalent Chi/Rho sign may have been its opposite number.

⁶⁰ Williams 2009, 51.

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