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Home of the Dead, Religions of the Living: The Distinctions between the Jewish and Christian Communities in Ancient Rome as Observed in the Catacombs of the 2nd through 4th Centuries C.E.

Shoshana Foster
Bates College

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Home of the Dead, Religions of the Living:

The Distinctions between the Jewish and Christian Communities in Ancient Rome as Observed

in the Catacombs of the 2nd through 4th Centuries C.E.

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By

Shoshana Emma Foster

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For Sumner and Sophie

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Today we often view Judaism and Christianity as two distinctly separate religions with clear differences in practices and beliefs. Two core principles of the religions that display noticeable differences come to mind: (1) The followers have different beliefs about Jesus – Jews understand him as a false prophet whereas Christians view him as the son of God and the savior of the world; and (2) they use different sacred texts – Jews value the Tanakh (the Canon of the Hebrew Bible, which includes the Torah) while the Christians read the Bible (which includes the Old Testament – the Jewish Bible – but they focus on the New Testament). In reality, however, the religions are far more connected than we tend to recognize. In fact, before Christianity became a distinct religion in Rome, the first followers of the religion were Jews.

The goal of this thesis is to explore the question of how the Christian community emerged out of the Jewish community in ancient Rome, and show how the followers eventually became its own distinct religious group. To do so, this paper considers both the literary evidence – scanty, but nevertheless, informative – as well as the archaeological evidence – specifically the catacombs – of the Jewish and Christian communities in ancient Rome. Although the literary evidence aids us in generating an illustration about these two communities, the archaeological evidence is especially useful for revealing the relationships between the two religious groups and how they ultimately became independent of one another.

Chapter One, "A Study of Two Closely Tied Religions: 'A Parting of Ways'?," provides the traditional understanding about the separation between the two communities. It shares some scholars' newly proposed models for understanding the "parting of the ways" between the two religions. This chapter presents various understandings for the divergence of these two

communities, demonstrating that there is not one clear answer for when the Jews and Christians officially diverged.

Chapter Two, "The Presence of the Jewish Community in Ancient Rome (63 B.C.E.-200s C.E.)," is a survey of the information about the Jewish community in ancient Rome gathered primarily from the available literary evidence. It includes both a diachronic study[1] - detailing the history of the community of Jews in ancient Rome - and a synchronic study[2] – describing particular features of the community that are seen as essentially, the "hallmarks" or distinguishing features of the community. This chapter provides a portrait of the Jewish community, which will be used to understand how the early Christians in ancient Rome were similar or distinctly different from the Jews.

Chapter Three, "The Emergence of the Christian Community in Rome (~49 C.E.)," discusses the emerging Christian community. Like Chapter Two, it considers only the literary evidence available. The chapter outlines the origins of the community, traces the most significant treatments by the emperors, and discusses the community's organization. The chapter provides what we know about the early Christians, presenting the idea that the earliest Christians were Jews who were Christ-followers. This chapter illustrates the challenge of documenting the history of the emerging Christian community in Rome because the sources do not necessarily give us a clear description.

Chapter Four, "An Overview of Catacombs," is a general discussion on catacombs that includes a thorough description of the tombs, a brief archaeological history of them in Rome, the

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[1] A diachronic study considers the evolution and change over time of that which is studied, modeling roughly a historical discussion.

[2] A synchronic study limits its concern to a particular moment of time.

burial types, and how they functioned. This chapter proves exceptionally helpful for readers who are not familiar with the underground tombs by providing them with the necessary background information for continuing on to Chapters Five and Six. More importantly, this chapter explains why examining the Jewish and Christian catacombs will reveal information for understanding the emergence of the Christian community out of the Jewish community in ancient Rome.

Chapter Five, "Introducing Specific Jewish and Christian Catacombs," sketches the Jewish and Christian catacombs. It provides brief explanations about each of the two communities' catacombs, which are supplemented with tables that include fast information about the catacombs. The chapter also discusses the issues that archaeologists have faced regarding dating the catacombs. This chapter is necessary for giving readers a sense of the known Jewish and Christian catacombs in Rome, allowing them to become familiar with names, dates, locations, survival, and accessibility today before moving on to the final chapter that examines the catacombs in a more in-depth manner.

Chapter Six, "Examination of the Similarities and Differences between the Jewish and Christian Catacombs through Inscriptions and Artwork," delves into the central focus of this thesis: what the Jewish and Christian catacombs reveal about the two communities that the literary sources do not. The thorough examination of the language and content of the inscriptions and the wall paintings and sarcophagi from the Jewish and Christian Catacombs exposes similarities and differences between the two communities. It shows how they overlapped in many ways but then ultimately diverged.

CHAPTER I: A Study of Two Closely Tied Religions: "A Parting of Ways?"

The traditional model, the "Parting of the Ways," offers one way to view Judaism and Christianity, and to explain when the separation between the religions occurred.

Traditionally, Judaism and Christianity have been viewed as two separate religions based on differences in texts, practices, and beliefs. In fact, throughout history, Christianity has effectively been defined in direct opposition to Judaism.[3] Traditional scholarship assigns the point of separation to the first or second century C.E., when it is argued that Judaism and Christianity began to develop in isolation after emerging out of a "source in pre-70 Judaism," and then never overlapped again.[4] Scholars of ancient Christianity arrived at this conclusion through texts and dates of significant events concerning the development of Christianity from 28 to 200 C.E.[5] The distinct separation that occurred between the two religions is often referred to as the "Parting of the Ways."[6] This model places Judaism and Christianity on "two paths that branched off from a single road," never to cross or converge again.[7]

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[3] Philip Alexander, "The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135 : The Second Durham-TüBingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism (Durham, September, 1989)*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1992), 1.

[4] Martin Goodman, "Modeling the 'Parting of the Ways'," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 121.

[5] Paula Fredriksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways'? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City," ibid., 35.

[6] Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 1.

[7] ibid.

Scholars argue that the traditional model is problematic because it is far too simplistic, because Judaism and Christianity have a far more complex relationship to assign the parting to one single date or event.

Recently scholars have re-examined the model, the "parting of the ways," acknowledging the flaw in viewing the development of these two religions in this way.[8] Scholars generally agree that the major error in this model is that it has far too narrow a focus, and proceeds to answer simply one question: "When was the parting of the religions?"[9] This approach overlooks any other angles for investigating the developments of and interactions between Judaism and Christianity in ancient history.[10] Scholars view it as far too constricting and argue that it neglects much of the available literary and archaeological evidence.[11] They complain that the research already conducted by historians made too oversimplified assumptions. The model claims that the two religions, Judaism and Christianity, developed in isolation from each other, since it views the religions as developing on their own parallel paths that later dramatically diverge from each other.[12] It also assumes that the interactions between Jews and Christians after the second century C.E. were "limited [...] to polemical conflict and mutual misperception."[13] Many modern scholars agree that the parting of Judaism and Christianity is a much more complex issue that deserves more than simply tagging a date to the separation.

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[8] ibid., 1-2.

[9] Fredriksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways'? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City," 35.

[10] ibid.

[11] ibid.

[12] Becker and Reed, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, 1.

[13] Alexander, "The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," 2.

Modern scholars' approaches for understanding the separation between these two religions are much more nuanced, taking far more factors into consideration.

Although there is general agreement that the first or early second century C.E. was a pivotal point in the development of Judaism and Christianity – recognizing that hostile relations began to occur between Jews and Christians – many scholars have proposed additional ways for understanding the relationship between and separation of the two religious groups, or even presented new perspectives about this time period in late ancient history.[14] Philip Alexander astutely acknowledges that the question concerning the parting and separation of Judaism and Christianity is "one of those deceptively simple questions which should be approached with great care."[15] Thus, many scholars have researched this historical question.

The questions that scholars pose and attempt to answer go beyond the constricted question answered by the traditional model: *when*. They investigate why, how, and whether Judaism and Christianity actually parted in antiquity.[16] Scholars are aware that their suggestive answers are neither simple nor definite, but simply other ways for understanding this curious point in history of these two religions. Rather than providing a new and better model for the separation of Judaism and Christianity, my paper presents a few scholars' understandings about the history of relations between Jews and Christians. While each scholar takes a slightly different approach, ranging from reliance on dates and events to literary evidence to figures, they acknowledge the various factors – social, political, cultural, geographical, and theological – that contribute both to the complexity

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[14] ibid., 1.

[15] ibid.

[16] Goodman, "Modeling the 'Parting of the Ways'," 119.

of this question about whether there was a distinct "parting of the ways" and if so, *how*, *whether*, and *why* the separation happened.[17]

Like the evidence used for the traditional model, James Dunn uses dates of significant events to explain when the separation between Judaism and Christianity occurred.

Similar to historians who have proposed the evidence used for the traditional "parting of the ways" model, some scholars have simply used dates and significant events to determine when the separation occurred. James Dunn has explored the question of the separation of Judaism and Christianity, and has published a few different publications wherein he revises his conclusions from the older to the newer work.[18] In 1991, Dunn concluded that the final parting took place during the second Jewish revolt against Rome in the second century C.E.[19] After exposure to other scholarly debates and acknowledging evidence that he had previously overlooked – such as Christian leaders criticizing Christians for visiting synagogues, which suggests (1) that there were relations between Jews and Christians later than the second century; and (2) that people who identified themselves as followers of Jesus still felt religiously at home in synagogues, although the leaders of the Christian community no longer felt theologically and/or socially at home there – Dunn corrected his previous assertion in his 2006 work and made a broader conclusion: the "parting" not only occurred over a much longer period of time, but it also occurred at different paces in different parts of the world.[20] Furthermore, Dunn contends that a clear separation occurred

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[17] Alexander, "The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," 1-2.

[18] James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 1991).

[19] ibid.

[20] *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd edition ed. (London: SCM Press, 2006), preface.

"only after the Constantinian settlement."[21] Dunn generates his argument for the parting through dates and events, which is not inappropriate, but other scholars have considered other pieces of evidence that the traditional model overlooks, such as literary evidence.

Some scholars rely on primary literary evidence to observe the interactions between Jews and Christians in the first few centuries C.E.

Some scholars rely on primary literary evidence, specifically Jewish and Christian writings, to develop their arguments. Paula Fredriksen argues that there may not have actually been a parting of ways, and she challenges us to think about this historical problem in a contextual manner by considering the interactions between the Jews and Christians.[22] Fredriksen shows how the writings of Jews and Christians reveal their interactions in Late Antiquity. She concludes that ultimately we can attribute a separation between the two religious groups to the early- to mid-second century based on the writers, but this is not an absolute answer to this complex question because interactions were still occurring.[23] Fredriksen argues that even in the mid-second century, Jews and Christians continued to mingle.[24] Thus, she continues to rephrase the model's name throughout her discussion, questioning, "What 'Parting of the Ways?'"[25]

David Frankfurter and Daniel Boyarin also use primary literary sources to help show that the interactions between Judaism and Christianity are much more fluid than originally understood. Through primary texts, such as the Ascension of Isaiah, 5 and 6 Ezra, and the Testaments of the

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[21] ibid., xxiv.

[22] Fredriksen, "What 'Parting of the Ways'? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City," 61.

[23] ibid.

[24] ibid.

[25] ibid., 35-63.

Twelve Patriarchs, Frankfurter proves that there are instances in the second and third centuries when "Jewish culture continued to embrace Christ-worship" and instances where "Christ-worship continued to assume Jewish practice and identity."[26] Frankfurter emphasizes that there was actually much more overlapping between the two religions in terms of practices, which is neglected in the traditional model.[27] Boyarin goes a step beyond Fredriksen and Frankfurter by arguing that Judaism and Christianity were not separate entities, but rather very much intertwined. Boyarin goes so far as to combine the religions into one, which he calls Judaeo-Christianity, arguing "for at least the first three centuries […] Judaism in all of its forms and Christianity in all of its forms were part of one complex religious family, twins in a womb, contending with each other for identity and precedence."[28] However, Boyarin does not overlook the differences between the religions altogether. When he turns to examine the Jewish and Christian texts of the second and third centuries, such as rabbinic writings, the Mishnah, Josephus, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Boyarin concludes that the Jews and Christians highlight their own differences.[29]

Judith Lieu also builds her discussion with literary evidence. She challenges the traditional model, claiming that it works well when using a theological lens, but not when one considers the social context. Lieu argues that until about the fourth century, the boundaries between the two religions are much "fuzzier" than the traditional model asserts.[30] This is significant because Lieu

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[26] David Frankfurter, "Beyond 'Jewish Christianity': Continuing Religious Sub-Cultures of the Second and Third Centuries and Their Documents," ibid., 143.

[27] ibid.

[28] Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 15.

[29] ibid.

[30] Judith Lieu, "'The Parting of the Ways': Theological Construct or Historical Reality?," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 17, no. 56 (1995): 29.

extends the overlap between the two religions all the way up to the fourth century, while the traditional model marks the distinct separation to the first or early second century. Lieu's discussion allows us to see the question as Fredriksen does, "What Parting of the Ways?"

A more unconventional but nevertheless useful way for understanding the multiple perspectives of the separation is through the use of charts.

Martin Goodman takes perhaps the most unique approach to the discussion of the separation of the two religions by using several charts to display the complex relationships between Judaism and Christianity. Within his nine diagrams, Goodman represents various perspectives of the parting, or lack thereof, of the two religions. These graphs display the confusion that develops from various perspectives. His first diagram represents the "Standard Parting of the Ways," in which Jews and Christians begin as one people – Jewish Christians – and then diverge in 70 C.E. as Rabbis and Christians.[31] (See Appendix A.) Another diagram displays a timeline of various dates that have been used to identify the exact moment when Judaism and Christianity became separate religions. Goodman uses it to explain that the "decisive moment is sometimes presumed to be an event within Christian circles, sometimes a political event that affected Jews more widely."[32] (See Appendix B.) The five "events" that are included in the diagram that suggest the cause of the "Parting of the Ways" are the death of Jesus (~30 C.E.), the teachings of Paul (~30 C.E.), the Destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), Bar Kochba[33] (135 C.E.), and an event left

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[31] Goodman, "Modeling the 'Parting of the Ways'," 121.

[32] ibid.

[33] Bar Kochba was the rebellion of the Jews of Judea, lead by Simon bar Kochba, against the Roman Empire. It is sometimes referred to The Third Jewish-Roman War (or The Third Jewish Revolt) because it was the third of three major Jewish-Roman wars.

unidentified[34] in 312 C.E.[35] Goodman acknowledges that these models are only a guide for understanding this complex history, because they are "inexact representations of an elusive reality."[36] Although they may not be perfect representations, they certainly represent the complexity of the history through the multiple lines, arrows, circles, words, names, and dates found on the models.[37]

Concluding Thoughts: These scholars' discussions do not give a definite answer about the separation of Judaism and Christianity, but they encourage us to understand the phenomenon as complex and varying from place to place.

Though scholars provide some engaging discussions about ways for thinking about the relationships and developments of Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity, there is no obvious superior explanation for answering the many curious questions that arise concerning the "separation" of the two religions. It becomes clear from these scholars' research and proposed models, however, that it can be generally understood that Judaism and Christianity began as one religious group and eventually became two distinct groups over time, at different paces in different parts of the world. The process of the ultimate separation took several centuries after Christianity emerging out of Judaism began in the first century C.E.

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[34] I suggest that the event of 312 C.E. is the Battle of the Milvian Bridge (28 October 312). The battle was between the Roman Emperors Constantine I and Maxentius. Constantine won the battle, which eventually led to him ruling the empire. This is a significant event for identifying the separation between Jews and Christians because the battle marks the start of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Only months later, in February 313 C.E., the Edict of Milan was implemented, which was an agreement to establish religious toleration of Christianity in the Roman Empire.

[35] Goodman, "Modeling the 'Parting of the Ways'," 122.

[36] ibid., 120.

[37] ibid., 121-29.

The next two chapters will take a narrower focus on this subject, specifically discussing the developments of the Jewish and Christian communities in ancient Rome. It will attempt to answer the following questions: When were there defined Jewish and Christian communities in ancient Rome (defined meaning fully settled communities, not simply Jewish and Christian visitors to Rome)? What do the developments of the two communities look like, and how do they become more distinguished in Rome over time? Do the two communities interact with one another, and if so, how? What is the relationship between the two communities? Did one community, in essence, develop out of the other? This discussion will begin in the first century B.C.E. and continue through the third century C.E. in Rome.

CHAPTER II: The Presence of the Jewish Community in Ancient Rome (63 B.C.E.-200s C.E.)

"Now these Jews are already gotten into all cities;

and it is hard to find a place in the habitable

earth that hath not admitted this tribe of men,

and is not possessed by them."[38]

– Strabo[39] as quoted by Josephus, *AJ* 14.7.2

"There is not a community in the entire world

which does not have a portion of our people."[40]

– King Agrippa[41] as quoted by Josephus, *BJ* 2.16.4.398

The Immense Jewish Presence in Rome: By the time of Augustus' reign, there was a developed Jewish community in Rome.

These two quotations illustrate the great presence of Jews living throughout the world by the time of the reign of Augustus, and the continuing presence during the reign of Nero. Strabo and King Agrippa's assertions are not far from exaggerations. When the Diaspora began in the

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[38] Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. H. St J. Thackeray and Ralph Marcus, Loeb Classical Library 203 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

[39] Strabo, a geographer, philosopher, and historian, who lived during the era of Augustus, is the most important source for geography. For more on Strabo, see "Strabo," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World*, ed. John Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[40] *The Jewish War*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray and Ralph Marcus, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966).

[41] During the reign of Nero (54-68 B.C.E.), King Agrippa speaks to the Jews of Jerusalem as he warns them not to revolt Rome's power because it would harm Jews not only in Palestine, but Jews all over the world.

sixth century B.C.E. due to the Babylonian conquest, Jews dispersed and settled in many areas outside of Judaea.[42] Although not "all cities," as Strabo insists, had a Jewish community comparable in size and significance to those in Alexandria, Cyrene, or Antioch, both Strabo and King Agrippa emphasize the importance of the dispersion of the Jews throughout the ancient world. One city that can be included in Strabo's assertion of "all cities" is Rome.

The city of Rome became a unique settlement for Jews in the ancient world: the Jewish community in Rome, now more than 2,000 years old, is widely considered to be the oldest Jewish community in Europe as well as one of the oldest continuous Jewish settlements in the world.[43] Due to the ancient nature of the Jewish community of Rome, our knowledge about the community throughout the early centuries from the beginning of its development is somewhat limited and limiting. The literary evidence for the community is a selected number of recordings from Jewish and Roman writers, which as we know have bias. Despite the limited and undependable nature of the evidence, we can nevertheless create a general picture of the development of this community, beginning with its first appearance in the first century B.C.E. This chapter will first present a diachronic study, detailing the history of the community of Jews in ancient Rome, and then a synchronic study, describing particular features of the community that are seen as essentially, the "hallmarks" or distinguishing features of the community.

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[42] M. Avrum Ehrlich, *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 1.

[43] Leonard Victor Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora* (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 1; Harry Leon and Carolyn Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 259.

Diachronic Study: This discussion provides a description of the treatment of Jews by various rulers and emperors from the first century B.C.E. through the middle of the third century C.E., revealing that the Romans were not entirely tolerant or intolerant towards the Jewish community, but rather protective or repressive depending on the state of Rome.

First Presence: Literary sources suggest that the first Jewish community began developing in the first century B.C.E., which was made up of war prisoners.

Unfortunately, we do not have evidence that tells us exactly when Jews first came to Rome to settle.[44] Although a few Jews made visits to Rome in the early second century,[45] it was not until 63 B.C.E. after Pompey's invasion of Judea when there was a significant number of Jews beginning to settle in Rome.[46] According to Philo, the Jewish community in Rome began as a great number of war prisoners who were brought to Rome as slaves, delegates on diplomatic missions, and Jewish merchants seeking business opportunities (*Embassy to Gaius* 156).[47] The slaves quickly went on to become freed by their masters and to receive Roman citizenship, thereby becoming members integrated into the city (Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 23.155).[48] Thus, a distinctly

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[44] Leonard Victor Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 146.

[45] In 161 B.C.E., Jason ben Eleazar and Eupolemus ben Johanan arrived in Rome as envoys of Judah Maccabee. Hasmonean rulers sent other delegators to Rome in 150 and 139 B.C.E. A highly problematic passage of Valerius Maximus refers to the expulsion of both Jews and Chaldaeans from in 139 B.C.E. (*Memorable Deeds and Sayings* 1:3.3). For other discussions on the textual problems with this passage, see: Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 3-4.; Sylvia Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2006), 33.; E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 130.; Leonard Victor Rutgers, "Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome During the First Century C.E.," in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 97.

[46] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 4.

[47] Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.*, 47.; Rutgers, "Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome During the First Century C.E.," 97.

[48] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 4.

defined Jewish presence in ancient Rome can be dated to no earlier than first century B.C.E., and it perhaps cannot be dated to any earlier than 63 B.C.E. when there was a Jewish community permanently living in Rome.[49]

The Jewish Community Pre-Augustus (Before 27 B.C.E.): The Jews had a positive relationship with Julius Caesar, which set the expectation that future emperors treat Jews well.

During the late Republic period, Jews in Rome experienced positive treatment from Julius Caesar (49-44 B.C.E.). A speech that Cicero gave suggests that Jews observed Pompey's poor treatment of Jews during his triumphal procession, thus causing Jews to side with Caesar during the civil war between the two opposing figures.[50] The support Caesar received from the Jews likely caused him to grant the Jews with more relaxed rules so that they could observe their religious practices.[51] Caesar permitted the Jews free assembly for organizing as a community and to gather for meals; permitted them to raise money for communal reasons and send Temple tax to Jerusalem; and exempted them from military service so that they could observe the Sabbath and their dietary needs (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 14.185-216).[52] These special privileges not only demonstrate the kind treatment the Jews received from Caesar, but they also highlight the practices and customs that the Jews in ancient Rome most valued.

The special exceptions Caesar made for the Jews indicate the parts of Judaism that they wished to preserve in order to maintain their identity in Rome. From Suetonius, we learn how

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[49] Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.*, 46-47.

[50] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 9.

[51] ibid.

[52] ibid., 10.

thankful the Jews were for Caesar's understanding treatment; he shares that after Caesar's assassination, groups of Jews mourned and cried at Caesar's funeral pyre (Suetonius, *Julius Caesar 84.5*).[53] Many believe that the rulers following Caesar were positively influenced by Caesar's exceptionally benevolent treatment of Jews because many emperors treated them in a similar fashion.

The Jewish Community During the Julio-Claudian Dynasty (0-68 C.E.): Throughout the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, Jews experienced both tolerant and intolerant treatment from the emperors.

The population of the Jewish community of Rome was probably between 20,000 and 60,000 in the early first century C.E.[54] This estimated population is based on two sources, Josephus and Tacitus.[55] Thus the Jews would have made up about two to six percent of the population of Rome until 19 C.E.[56]

Literary evidence reveals that emperors were both tolerant and intolerant of Jewish practices and customs as well as of Jews in the first century C.E. The treatment of Jews by the Julio-Claudian dynasty - Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero - certainly varied in the degree by which Jews were able to practice their religion in Rome, or even more drastically, if they could remain in the city.

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[53] ibid.

[54] David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London: The Classical Press of Wales, 2000), 257.

[55] Josephus writes that more than 8,000 Jews gathered to revolt against Archelaus (*The Jewish War* 2.80; *Antiquities of the Jews* 17.300). Tacitus says that 4,000 Jews descended from freedmen (i.e. male citizens of military age) were conscripted and sent to Sardinia in 19 C.E. (*Annals* 2.85.4).

[56] Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers*, 257.

Initially, the Jews of Rome experienced a smooth transition from the Republic to the Empire. Augustus did not simply mimic his adoptive father's actions, but outshined them by establishing even more privileges for the Jews. Augustus renewed Caesar's edicts and granted Jews additional honors, such as reserving a portion of the grain distribution for Jews to claim the day after the Sabbath (Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 158). Augustus also did not impede the religious observances or collection and sending of money to the Temple of Jerusalem (Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 155-7).[57] The lifestyle of the Jews changed when Tiberius assumed the reign.

During Tiberius' reign, the Jews in Rome fared significantly less well.[58] According to a scandal reported by Josephus, Tiberius was misled into believing that four Jewish charlatans victimized a wife of a friend of the emperor, which led him to expel the Jews from Rome in 19 C.E.[59] Josephus is not the only ancient author to report on Tiberius' expulsion; Suetonius, Tacitus, and Cassius Dio all also report on it.[60] Though the reason behind Tiberius' expulsion in Josephus' account may not be accurate, the banishment of the Jews seems likely to have occurred.[61] Thus, Tiberius forbade Judaism in Rome by exiling the Jews. Under Tiberius' successor, Caligula, the Jews in Rome again received many of the rights back that they had under the reign of Augustus.[62]

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[57] The emperor also went so far as to demonstrate benevolence outside of Rome, gifting the Temple at Jerusalem and commanding that a burnt offering be made daily (Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 157). See Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 11.

[58] ibid., 17.

[59] ibid.; Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.*, 45.; (Known from Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Seneca, and Cassius Dio)

[60] See Tacitus, *Annals* II.85; Suetonius, *Tiberius* XXXVI; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LVII.18.5a

[61] We must keep in mind that Josephus is not always the most reliable and credible source because he wanted to please the Emperors and did not always defend the Jews.

[62] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 20.

The Jews encountered mixed treatment by Caligula's successor, Claudius (41-54 C.E.). While Claudius permitted the Jews to continue to worship and follow their observances, he threatened punishment if peace was broken again because he wished to "maintain law and order."[63] Meanwhile, the relationship between pagan Romans and Christians was worsening. Religious tensions were increasing in Rome in general because during Claudius' reign, the first Christian preachers surfaced.[64] The next chapter will go into more detail about these individuals, but it is an important factor to consider now because it explains the increasing tensions in the city. The literary evidence available about the expulsion during the reign of Claudius is a highly debated passage among scholars. It has been interpreted in many different ways, and the three sources that report on the expulsion – Acts, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio – conflict with each other:[65]

- "There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome" (Acts 18:2).

- "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome" (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4).[66]

- "As for the Jews, who had again increased so greatly that by reason of their multitude it would have been hard without raising a tumult to bar them from the city, he did not

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[63] Rutgers, "Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome During the First Century C.E.."

[64] Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.*, 69.

[65] ibid.

[66] There has been serious attention given to the line included in Suetonius' account. The Latin text has been interpreted to have several possible meanings. One interpretation understands the text as not referring simply to the Jews, but to the Jewish Christians. This line will be given more attention in the next chapter.

drive them out, but ordered them, while continuing their traditional mode of life, not to hold meetings" (Cassius Dio, *Roman History* LX.6.6).

While the accounts by Acts and Suetonius attest to an expulsion of the Jews from Rome, Cassius Dio's account claims that Claudius did not expel the Jews from Rome, because the Jews were too numerous, but he still took repressive measure on the community by forbidding them to gather.[67] Regardless of whether or not the Jews were expelled or banned, the ancient authors suggest to us that the emperor attempted to repress the community.

After the reign of Claudius, the Jews experienced a fairly tranquil period under Nero, despite the emperor's tyrannical tendencies during his reign. It is suggested that his fair treatment towards the Jews can be attributed to the emperor's wife, who was partial to Judaism.[68] Another possibility is that Nero was too distracted by the rise of the Christians, which will be addressed in the next chapter. The reign of Nero, however, prefaced the next dynasty when the scene shifted dramatically with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple.

The Jewish Community During the Flavian Dynasty (70-96 C.E.): Throughout the reigns of Vespasian and Domitian, Jews faced repression.[69]

The environment for Jews in Rome shifted with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E.[70] After this significant event, Vespasian imposed the Jewish tax (*fiscus Iudaicus*).[71] Like passages discussed in previous sections in this chapter, the ancient literary sources that point to this action, Josephus and Cassius Dio, agree on the main topics but disagree

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[67] Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.*, 81.

[68] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 29.

[69] I have skipped a few emperors (Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Titus) because their reigns were too short to have any significant impact on the Jewish community and we do not have any significant evidence from ancient authors.

[70] Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.*, 91.

[71] ibid., 100.

on more specific details.[72] They both report on a new tax imposed on the Jews to pay two drachmas

to the Temple of the Capitoline Jupiter.[73] Their reports differ, however, in whom they claim is

required to pay the tax. Josephus says that the tax was imposed on all Jews living in the Empire

(Josephus, *The Jewish War* 7.218) whereas Cassius Dio remarks that only the orthodox Jews

("Jews who continued to observe their ancestral customs") were subject to the tax (Cassius Dio,

Roman History 66.7.2). Regardless of how the tax played out, some portion of Jews, if not all of

them, was required to pay a tax. It is important to recognize that this tax was the Emperor's

response to the Jewish revolt. It was particularly insulting to the Jews because instead of paying to

rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem that had been destroyed, Jews had to pay money to maintain a

temple in Rome that was used for the Roman religion.

Domitian continued to repress the Jews by continuing the tax, and he even enlarged the

number of taxpayers by extending the tax to include not only those born as Jews, but also converts

to Judaism and anyone who "lived like Jews."[74] This raised issues because the earliest Christians,

as we will discuss in the next chapter, were indistinguishable from Jews. Nevertheless, the early

Christians protested the assessment of the tax on them.[75] Some attribute the Jewish tax as an event

that contributed to the separation of Judaism and Christianity.[76]

Before examining the situation of the Jews in the second century, it is important to

understand Rome's policy towards Jews in the first century. It seems as though a number of factors

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[72] ibid., 101.

[73] ibid., 105.

[74] ibid., 123-25.

[75] ibid.

[76] ibid.

contributed to the treatment of and interaction between Jews and Roman emperors. The policy toward Jews seems to have been determined both by religious concerns and a wish to maintain law and order within the state of Rome. It is hard to conclude that Romans were either entirely tolerant or intolerant of the Jews in the first century because the various emperors' treatments illustrate both.[77] Leonard Rutgers argues that there was "no constant factor in Roman policy," and he is right.[78] Rome took various measures to protect or repress the Jews depending on the state of Rome and who was in power. As we examine the community in the second century, we will see a similar pattern where some emperors treated the Jews better than others.

The Jewish Community from the Second to the Early-Third Century (100-235 C.E.): Throughout the reigns of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Septimius Severus, and Alexander Severus, the Jews faced fairly friendly treatment.

During this period of emperors, with the exception of one emperor, the Jews were faced fairly friendly treatment. While it is not clear that Hadrian (117-138 C.E.) had specific motivations to create policies against the Jews, it was ultimately the outcome. Hadrian created a law forbidding circumcision, a highly valued Jewish practice. Along with other actions that directly and negatively affected the Jews' practices, Hadrian is in the "Jewish tradition perhaps the most hated of the Roman emperors."[79] His son and successor, Antoninus Pius (138-161 C.E.), altered some of Hadrian's policies to give the Jews' some of their rights back. He changed the policy on circumcision by allowing Jews to carry out this custom, but only on their children (Justinian, *Digest* 48.8.11). This limitation seems to indicate a fear among the Romans of proselytizing and confusion between Jewish and emerging Christian communities.

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[77] Rutgers, "Roman Policy toward the Jews: Expulsions from the City of Rome During the First Century C.E.," 111.

[78] ibid., 114.

[79] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 37.

Under Septimius Severus (193-211 C.E.), the Jews continued to receive special privileges and friendly treatments; they had the right to hold public office and were exempt from any official duties that would conflict with their religious practices (Justinian, *Digest,* 27.1.15.6; 50.2.3.3). Alexander Severus (222-235 C.E.) treated the Jews so well that he was referred to as a title synonymous with "rabbi."[80] These emperors do not fit a natural pattern of positive or negative treatment because it simply changed from one emperor to the next.

I end my discussion of the treatment of and interactions between Jews and the Rome emperors here. This diachronic study has given us a sense of the Jewish community and how it was seen among the Romans, sometimes as simply another community in the city and other times as a threat that needed to receive repressive measures.

Synchronic Study: This discussion presents distinguishing features of the Jewish community in ancient Rome, such as the organization of the community, the titles of the community members, and the defining religious practices.

Organization: The Jewish community was divided into sub-communities known as synagogues.[81]

Inscriptions from the catacombs of Rome reveal the general organization of the community, which was divided into smaller communities called synagogues. From the inscriptions, we know that there existed 11 (or maybe even 13) synagogues[82] in Rome.[83] The dates

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[80] *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 43.

[81] This section relies not only on literary evidence, but also on archaeological evidence from the Jewish catacombs.

[82] It is important to note that, contrary to the modern understanding of the term, the term "synagogue" was used to define the congregation, whereas the place of worship was referred to as *proseucha*.

[83] Cappelletti says 11, while Donfried and Richardson say 13. See Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.*, 3; Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson, eds., *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 19.

for these synagogues are questionable and debated.[84] While many of them are usually dated to the second or third century C.E., five of the synagogues are dated to the first century B.C.E. or beginning of the first century C.E.[85] The fact that there may have been a total of five synagogues already in the first century B.C.E. or C.E. further contributes to our understanding that the community was established and large enough to need synagogues by this time. The names[86] of the synagogues reveal the relationship the Jewish community had with Rome. For example, two were named after influential figures in Rome – Augustus and his son-in-law Marcus Agrippa – suggesting that the community had a good relationship with the particular rulers in Rome.

Religious Ideas and Practices: The literary sources share the most observed practices, which included observing the Sabbath, abstaining from eating pork, and practicing circumcision.

Many Roman writers[87] share the most widely known ideas and most commonly observed practices of the Jews in Rome. These include observing the Sabbath, abstaining from eating pork, and practicing circumcision.[88] Although the Jews evidently had other valued practices and customs, these are likely the most commonly observed since non-Jewish Roman writers observed Jews carrying them out in daily or weekly practice. Thus, it can be assumed that these were the practices the Jews in Rome were especially adamant about preserving.

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[84] Unfortunately no evidence for the actual buildings has been discovered, and the attempt to determine the location of the synagogues has been questionable. See Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 245.

[85] Peter Richardson, "Augustan-Era Synagogues in Rome," in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 29.

[86] The names of the synagogues are Synagogue of the 'Agger,' Synagogue of the Subura, Synagogue of the Field of Mars, Synagogue of Elaias, Synagogues of the Agrippaeans, Synagogue of the Augustiales, Synagogue of the Hebrews, Vernacular synagogue, Synagogue of Volumnius, Synagogue of the Tripolitans, and Synagogue of the Clacaresians. They are all located on the main roads where the catacombs are located (Via Nomentana, Via Appia Pignatelli, Via Appia, and Via Ostiensis).

[87] Some writers include Philo (*Embassy to Gaius* 23.158), Seneca (*Epistles* 95.47), and Suetonius (*Augustus* 76.2).

[88] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 244.

Overview: By the first century C.E., there was a fully established Jewish community in Rome, which became a significant part of the city.

The Jewish community in ancient Rome was fully established by the first century C.E., even though Jews arrived in the first century B.C.E. Due to Julius Caesar's positive attitude toward and treatment of the Jewish people, he set an expectation for future rulers of Rome for how to treat the Jews. As a result, the Jews received generally kind treatment from the emperors of the early Empire with the exception of a few - Tiberius, Claudius, Vespasian, Domitian, and Hadrian - who established repressive policies. Perhaps the most significant conclusion from this discussion is that the Jewish community became a large component of Rome's population in the early Empire, evidenced by the congregations, practices, and customs they brought to the city, forcing actions and decisions to be made by emperors in order to handle another religious group in the city.

More Illuminating Evidence: Although the literary sources have allowed for an understanding of the Jewish community, much of the evidence about the community comes from the archaeological materials.

While the majority of what has been discussed about the Jewish community in ancient Rome has thus far relied on literary sources, much of what we can gather about the community (especially from later periods, such as the late second, third, and fourth centuries) is from archaeological sources, specifically the catacombs. These underground tombs inform us about where the Jews lived in Rome (based on the locations of the catacombs), the language the Jews spoke, religious roles held in the community, and significant symbols (based on wall paintings and sarcophagi). Before we go into a discussion about the catacombs, we will consider the ancient literary sources for an understanding of the Christian community in ancient Rome.

CHAPTER III: The Emergence of the Christian Community in Rome (~49 C.E.)

"Through him [Jesus Christ our Lord] we received grace and apostleship

to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake.

And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

– Paul's letter to the Romans, Rom. 1:5-7

Origins: Literary sources, primarily sections from the New Testament, suggest that Jewish Christians first appeared in Rome during the reign of Nero (54-68 C.E.), or as early as during the reign of Claudius in 49 C.E.

The earliest evidence referring to the "Christ-faith"[89] in Rome is Paul's letter to the Romans, which dates to the late 50s C.E., or during emperor Nero's reign (*Romans* 1:5-7).[90] The excerpt of his letter provided above suggests that there were Christ-believers in Rome at this time when Paul asserts that some people "belong to Jesus Christ."[91] It is significant to note that when Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, he had not yet visited Rome.[92] A later portion of Paul's letter

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[89] Throughout this chapter, I will follow the trend of other scholarship by referring to the "Christian congregation" in Rome as the "Christ-faith" or "Jews who were Jesus followers." Previous scholars on the subject have used this term because the term "Christians" (Latin *Chrestiani* or *Christiani*) did not come into use until 70 C.E. when it appears in literary evidence (Acts 11:26; Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44; Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2).

[90] Rudolf Brändle and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 123.

[91] ibid.

informs us more about the presence of Christ followers. Romans 7:1 makes it clear that Paul is writing to people who know the law: "Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives?" This suggests that Paul is addressing either Jews or non-Jews who are knowledgeable about the Torah. The latter group would only have been knowledgeable about the Torah if they had become involved in the Jewish religion, thus becoming god-fearers.[93] God-fearers are defined as "A class of persons mentioned in the Acts (e.g. 10: 2) as religious, probably adherents of the synagogue but not yet proselytes who had been admitted to full membership by circumcision."[94] This passage is frequently interpreted as Paul addressing god-fearing non-Jews, or Gentiles. Scholars, however, still consider that Paul knew Jews in Rome who were believers in Christ due to the content of Romans 16. In this letter, Paul sends greetings to Priscilla (in Greek, *Prisca*) and Aquila, a married Jewish couple who were followers of Christ ("Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus").[95]

Determining exactly when the Christian community emerged in Rome or when those of the Christ-faith first arrived in Rome is a complicated question with no clear answer, because it is challenging to distinguish the early Christians from the Jews. The goal of the rest of this chapter is not to deliver definitive answers to this question, but rather to provide a discussion about the community from the literary sources, primarily referring to sections from the New Testament, that

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[92] ibid., 124.

[93] ibid.

[94] W. R. F. Browning, "God-Fearers," in *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[95] Brändle and Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," 124.; Other literary evidence that references Priscilla and Aquila includes Acts 18:26; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19.

reveal the complexity of documenting the development of the history of the community in Rome. The two main sources for considering the emergence of the early Christians out of the Jewish communities is the Claudian edict and Paul's letter to the Romans, thus, my discussion will return to these first.[96]

The expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius juxtaposes Paul's letters and suggests that (1) those of the Christ-faith were in Rome; and/or (2) Claudius did not only expel Jews; and/or (3) those that Claudius expelled were not simply Jews but also Jews who were followers of Christ. Suetonius' report on this event can be translated into English in several ways. The different possible translations suggest different historical meanings. Consider the three translations below that result from the Latin, *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit* (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4):

Trans. 1: "He [Claudius] expelled from Rome Jews who were constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus."[97]

Trans. 2: "Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus."[98]

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[96] James Walters, "Romans, Jews, and Christians: The Impacts of the Romans on Jewish/Christian Relations in First-Century Rome," ibid., 178-9.

[97] Bernard Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 26.

[98] ibid.

Trans. 3: "Claudius, at the instigation of Chrestus, expelled from Rome the Jews who were constantly making disturbances."[99]

All three translations trace the disturbances to Chrestus, and seem to make Chrestus the cause of the disturbances. The second translation, however, differs from the first and third translations because it proposes that Claudius determined that *all* of the Jews were making disturbances and expelled them all.[100] By contrast, the first and third translations suggest that only a portion of the Jews were making disturbances, and thus Claudius expelled only those who were causing trouble.[101]

How do these passages inform us about the Christian community in Rome? "Chrestus" often means "useful" or "good," but in this passage it is commonly interpreted as a misspelling for Christus, meaning Christians.[102] Thus, Suetonius reports on the expulsion of Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah, or all the Jews believing in Christ. This similar interpretation can be gathered from Luke in Acts 18:2: "There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome."[103] Some have interpreted the phrase, "all the Jews" in this line as all the Jews who

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[99] ibid.

[100] ibid.

[101] ibid.

[102] ibid.

[103] Cassius Dio and Orosius also report on this event. See Brändle and Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," 126.

were believers of Christ, including Aquila and Priscilla.[104] They had arrived in Corinth around 49 or 50 C.E. due to Claudius' edict.[105]

While some argue that Claudius' edict suggests that there were already those of the Christ-faith in Rome, the ambiguous nature of Suetonius' Latin has led other scholars to argue that the emperor's edict was the *cause* of the development of the "Christ-faith" in Rome. Rudolf Brändle and Ekkehard Stegemann outline a few theories about Claudius' edict to explain the formation of the first "Christian Congregation":[106]

1. Claudius' edict dates to 49 C.E. (both Orosius and Acts 18:2 suggest this date).

2. Not all the Jews in Rome were expelled, in contradiction to Acts 18:2.

3. The literary sources - Acts, Suetonius, Dio Cassius, and Orosius - report on the same event.

Still, questions persist regarding Claudius' edict and whom it affected. The sources do not give any firm conclusions. What can be concluded from the emperor's edict is that the expulsion had both social and religious implications for the emerging Christian community, and by the end of the 40s C.E., "there were conflicts amongst Jews about Christ, which made police measures necessary."[107] It must be clear that the edict was not the source of the tensions between Christians and non-Christian Jews; rather, it intensified them and seems to have initiated Christians to distinguish themselves from the Jews because they would wish to avoid facing the same repressive

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[104] Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries*, 26.; Brändle and Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," 125.

[105] William L. Lane, "Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity During the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, 1 *Clement*," ibid., 204.

[106] Rudolf Brändle and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," ibid., 125-6.

[107] ibid., 126.

realities the Jews faced.[108] Thus, the beginnings of the Christian community can be dated to Claudius' reign when there were Jews who were believers in Christ.

This chapter began with a quote from one of Paul's letters that mentioned those who "belong to Jesus Christ," but it is important to emphasize that the "Christ-faith" actually developed in Rome without the help of Paul at all. Although Paul had the vision to proselytize in Rome, he was delayed from carrying out his plans, and the "Christ-faith" began to develop without him.[109] Unfortunately, we can only make so many conclusions about who exactly brought the "Christ-faith" to Rome. Perhaps they were Jews who were believers in Christ who came from Palestine or the Diaspora and decided to settle in Rome, or they were Roman Jews who somehow came across the "Christ-faith" in an area outside of Rome and upon their return to the city, and began spreading it.[110] It is likely that Christianity made its way to Rome by Jews, proselytes, and sympathizers, who brought their faith in Jesus with them from the East.[111]

Although this discussion has not clarified the distinction between Jews and Jewish believers in Christ, the following sections will provide better, and hopefully more concrete descriptions and details about what came to be known as the Christian community in ancient Rome. The rest of this chapter will proceed with a synchronic study of the features of the community when Paul sent his letter to Rome – during Nero's reign - that distinguish it from the Jewish community.

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[108] James Walters, "Romans, Jews, and Christians: The Impacts of the Romans on Jewish/Christian Relations in First-Century Rome," ibid., 178.

[109] Rudolf Brändle and Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," ibid., 127.

[110] ibid.

[111] ibid.

Community from the Reign of Nero until the Edict of Milan (64-313 C.E.): The persecutions of the Christians by various emperors show how the Christian community introduced more tension due to their open refusal to worship the Pagan gods and their proselytizing practices.

In the previous chapter, we saw how the Jewish community in ancient Rome experienced periods of tolerance and intolerance depending on the emperor in reign as well as the state of Rome. Unlike the Jewish community, which experienced positive relations with the emperor upon their arrival to Rome, the Christians immediately encountered oppression as a new emerging religious community. At the beginning of their developing religion, they experienced exile due to the Edict of Claudius. This already attempted to repress their developing religious thoughts.

The situation only worsened for the Christians during the reign of Claudius' successor, Nero, as they faced persecution. It is believed that the emperor reflected the blame he received from the Roman people for setting the fire of 64 C.E. – which destroyed most of Rome – on the Christians and ultimately persecuted them.[112] Ancient literary texts give us different accounts for the reason behind Nero's maltreatment. Non-Christian historian Tacitus describes Nero torturing and executing the Christians, accusing them of the fire (*Annals* XV.44), while Suetonius reports on Nero punishing the Christians, but the reason for the punishment was that they had "given to a new and mischievous superstition" (*Nero* 16.2). Regardless, it is evident that Nero persecuted the Christians. In fact, he became known as the very first persecutor of the Christians, which is documented by Christian writer Tertullian, who writes, "Examine your records. There you will find that Nero was the first that persecuted this doctrine" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*

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[112] Michael J. G. Gray-Fow, "Why the Christians? Nero and the Great Fire," *Latomus* 57, no. 3 (1998): 595.

II.25.4).[113] The Roman people hated Nero so much that, as sources report, they celebrated his death (Suetonius, *Nero* 57; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 63).

Suetonius' account is significant to discuss because it encourages us to further examine the Romans' tolerance of religious groups in the city and the reason why Christians faced several persecutions before Christianity became the religion of the Rome Empire. Romans practiced a polytheistic religion. Therefore they generally accepted other religions, because welcoming new deities did not bother them. However, it was important to the Romans that the "peace of the gods" was maintained and that each god was respected.[114] Although both Jews and Christians did not meet these expectations, Judaism was not seen as much of a threat as was Christianity for a few reasons. Jews had long-established traditions. Though they did not adhere to publicly worshipping the pagan gods, they contained themselves within their own synagogues and did not proselytize or look for converts. Therefore, they were not seen as a threat to the pagan religion. The question of why the Christians were persecuted is one without certain answers, but several speculations. Like the Jews, the early Christians refused to participate in public worship of the pagan gods. Because they were a new religion, however, their beliefs and traditions were just developing, and thus they did not have the standing that the Jews had. In addition, because they were not contained to specific congregations and they sought people for conversion, they were seen as a threat to the Romans.

In the first three centuries, Christians encountered several periods of persecutions, both at the hands of Roman authorities as well as empire-wide executions. The recorded persecutions by the emperors after that of Nero were under Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius

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[113] Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical Histories*, trans. Samuel Parker (London: C. Rivington, 1729).

[114] Matilda Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome: A Comprehensive Guide* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), xi.

Severus, Maximus the Thracian, Decius, Valerian, and Diocletian.[115] The constant repression seems to have driven the need for Christians to announce their dedication to their faith, thus resulting in martyrs. The renowned martyrs in the early Christian faith, Peter and Paul, are credited for helping spread Christianity throughout the world, and ultimately sacrificing their lives for their faith.[116] Therefore, martyrdom became a core component of ancient Christian identity. It is argued that the martyrdoms, especially those that occurred during the mid-third century, were a huge contributing factor to the success of the new religion.[117]

Organization: During the formative years of the community (the reign of Nero, 54-68 C.E), the Christians met as "household" groups which came to be known as house-churches as evidenced by references to the place of worship in Acts and Epistles.[118]

There was no central meeting place or any organized Christian congregation in Rome for the emerging Christ-followers for worship.[119] In comparison to the clearly defined synagogues of the Jewish communities in Rome, no evidence exists to suggest that there was any type of organized structure of a church made up of Jews and/or non-Jews who followed Christ.[120] Instead, Romans 16:5 ("Greet also the church that meets at their [Aquila and Priscilla's] house") suggests

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[115] Joseph Plescia, "On the Persecution of the Christians in the Roman Empire," *Latomus* 30, no. 1 (1971): 120-32.

[116] Philippe Pergola, Francesca Severini, and Palmira Maria Barbini, *Christian Rome: Early Christian Rome: Catacombs and Basilicas* (Roma: Vision, 2000), 4-5.

[117] ibid., 4.

[118] Joan M. Petersen, "House-Churches in Rome," *Vigiliae Christianae* 23, no. 4 (1969): 264.

[119] Brändle and Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congregations," 124-25.

[120] ibid.

that there were house-churches in Rome where Christ-followers gathered.[121] Various passages from Acts suggest where in the house the Christians gathered and what took place there. They likely met in rooms upstairs for breaking the bread, worshipping, and learning from the apostles (Acts 2.42, 20.6-9). Still, the primary literary sources leave us with many unanswered questions about the house-churches. It is unclear precisely who met at these house-churches; we do not know if they were made up of a mixed group of people, that is, of Jews who were not Christ-followers, Jews who were Christ-followers, Jews who were Christ-curious, and Gentiles (non-Jewish Christ-followers who have no connection with Jews).[122] But Romans 14-15[123] suggests significant social interactions between Jews, who were likely followers of Christ, and Gentiles, thus it is likely both groups met at these house-churches.[124] Therefore, the house-churches suggest the mingling and still ever-present interaction between Christian Jews and non-Jews.

It is argued that the emergence of the house-churches can be attributed to the "absence of centralized Jewish leadership" as a result of Claudius' edict of expulsion as well as a prohibition of public assembly upon the return of those exiled.[125] The emerging Christ-followers recognized that the Greco-Roman tradition considered the household community as the basic unit of

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[121] ibid., 125.

[122] ibid.

[123] Even just one line from *Romans* 14-15, *Romans* 15.27, indicates that there were interactions between the Jews and non-Jews: "For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings."

[124] Brändle and Stegemann, "The Formation of the First 'Christian Congregations' in Rome in the Context of the Jewish Congreations," 125.

[125] William L. Lane, "Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity During the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, 1 *Clement*," ibid., 207-13; Chrys C. Caragounis, "From Obscurity to Prominence: The Development of the Roman Church between Romans and 1 Clement," ibid., 260.

society.[126] They also acknowledged the obligation of gathering in private spaces, fearing the repercussions of public assembly.[127]

The concept of house-churches sheds light on the social tensions during the emergence of the Christian community in Rome.[128] Claudius' edict prohibited public assembly of Jews even after they returned to Rome in 54 C.E.[129] We have discussed that the emperor's edict likely also affected Christians who were related to Jews, thus, it is probable that the prohibition encouraged the use of house-churches.[130] It has been observed that the house-churches eventually led to the success of the community's growth, because they allowed for the development of leadership structures and encouraged the relationships between patronage and leadership in the early Roman Christian communities.[131] Thus, when those from exile returned, they returned to a church that had become predominantly Gentile.[132]

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[126] William L. Lane, "Social Perspectives on Roman Christianity During the Formative Years from Nero to Nerva: Romans, Hebrews, 1 *Clement*," ibid.

[127] ibid.

[128] ibid., 222.

[129] ibid., 207.

[130] ibid.

[131] ibid., 214.

[132] ibid.

Overview and Where we go from here: The development of the Christian community is messy with inconclusive explanations from the literary evidence, leaving us with little certainty except that the community was rooted in Judaism. The archaeological evidence can help better inform us about this occurrence.

The literary evidence about the first Christians in Rome is limiting and cannot give a full picture of the emerging community. We conclude from this discussion that the origins of Christianity in Rome derived from Judaism. It seems as though Gentiles began to join the Jewish Christ-followers. Therefore, the earliest Christians in Rome were Jews, but non-Jews joined them shortly after. While this discussion has provided a partial illustration of the Christ-followers in first-century Rome, archaeological evidence can help answer more questions about what the community was like and how it compared to the Jewish community. Thus, the Christian catacombs can inform us much more about the community in ancient Rome and expand our understanding about how the community emerged out of the Jewish community in ancient Rome.

CHAPTER IV: An Overview of Catacombs

Introduction

It is generally agreed that among all cultural phenomena

burial customs are among those least susceptible to sudden change.[133]

– Leonard Victor Rutgers

Rutgers begins his chapter on the archaeology of Jewish Rome with this assertion, but proceeds to disqualify this common assumption through an explanation of the history concerning burial customs in ancient Rome. In the second century C.E., there was a shift from practice of cremation to inhumation.[134] Cremation was the most common burial practice in the mid- to late-Republic to the second century C.E.[135] Romans likely opted for cremation for so long because the city was tight on space. It is believed that the shift to inhumation was influenced by the Jews who migrated from Judaea and brought their burial customs with them to Rome.[136] With this change in burial practices came the development of burial chambers.[137] These chambers varied in whether they were above or underground.[138] While they were established during the Imperial period, the

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[133] Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 50.

[134] ibid., 51.

[135] Laurie Brink and Deborah Green, eds., *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context. Studies of Roman, Jewish and Christian Burials* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 57.

[136] Jill M. Church, "Catacomb," in *Encyclopedia of Time: Science, Philosophy, Theology, & Culture*, ed. H. James Birx (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2009).

[137] Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 51.

[138] ibid.

burial places became mostly associated with Jewish and Christian communities. [139] These underground tombs came to be known as *catacombs*.

We do not know the original meaning of the word "catacomb" and it has been used in various ways.[140] The word generally refers to "a subterranean cemetery constructed during the Roman Empire or late antiquity (second to seventh century C.E.)," but more specifically it is used in archaeological terminology to mean "an underground Christian cemetery of large dimensions, characterised by an elaborate network of galleries and *cubicula* (square and rectangular chambers) used intensively for burial."[141] Although the word is most often thought about in the context of Rome, the catacombs in Rome were not the first in the world; they began in the Middle East about 6,000 years ago.[142] The term may have derived from Latin, *ad catacumbus*, meaning "near the hollows," or *cata tumbas* (from *cata-* "among" + *tumbas*, accusative plural of *tumba* "tomb"), meaning "at the graves."[143] During the fourth century C.E., the term likely indicated a region of underground tombs between the second and third "milestones" off of the Via Appia near Rome where it is said that the bodies of the apostles Paul and Peter were buried.[144] Catacombs have been discovered in other areas besides Rome (i.e. Naples, Malta, Alexandria, and Paris), but the greatest number have been found surrounding the city of Rome because initially Roman law did not allow

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[139] Brink and Green, *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context. Studies of Roman, Jewish and Christian Burials*.

[140] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 46.

[141] Nicola Denzey Lewis, "Catacombs," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Michael Gagarin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, "The Origin and Development of Roman Catacombs," in *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2009), 9.

[142] Church, "Catacomb."

[143] Lewis, "Catacombs."; Douglas Harper, "Catacomb," in *Online Etymology Dictionary* (2004).

[144] Fiocchi Nicolai, "The Origin and Development of Roman Catacombs," 9.

burial within the city's walls, meaning the Aurelian walls of 270 C.E.[145] Thus, over 60 catacombs are located along the limits of the city in the suburban terrain.[146]

Why Catacombs in Rome? The practical terrain and the inexpensive nature of using the unoccupied space under ground led to the development of the tombs.

Several conditions are attributed to the birth of catacombs in Rome. One primary reason is the constantly growing population.[147] Scholars have estimated a population between 500,000 and 2,000,000 in the height of the Empire.[148] This inevitably led to an increasing need for burial space, particularly due to the adoption of the practice of burial.[149] Large villas replaced the areas where public burial grounds had been.[150] Thus, the creation of catacombs makes sense because they efficiently used space that was underground and not being used for anything else.

Rome's terrain made it practical for building catacombs. The city is covered in tuff, which is volcanic rock.[151] Tuff is a prime material for construction since it is soft and easy to cut, but strong enough for construction as it hardens when exposed to air.[152] Ancient Jews and early Christians wished to bury their dead rather than cremate them. Because they were typically of low

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[145] Lewis, "Catacombs."; Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, Fabrizio Bisconti, and Danilo Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*, trans. Cristina Carlo Stella and Lori-Ann Touchette (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2009), 9; Church, "Catacomb."

[146] "Catacomb."

[147] Pergola, Severini, and Barbini, *Christian Rome: Early Christian Rome: Catacombs and Basilicas*, 8.

[148] ibid.

[149] ibid.

[150] ibid.

[151] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 43.

[152] ibid., 44-45.

economic status, and the land was expensive, they opted for underground tombs. They built these tombs by cutting into already existing hills.

Brief Archaeological History: For a long time, the catacombs of Rome were completely forgotten until the fortunate accidental discovery of one, which led to archaeologists devoting time to uncovering others.

We are fortunate to have knowledge about the catacombs in ancient Rome as they were completely neglected for a long time. Between the fourth and sixth centuries C.E., people stopped using the tombs for burial and opted for above ground cemeteries.[153] That being said, they were still regularly visited, as many were turned into shrines for martyrs.[154] The tombs were abandoned in the medieval period.[155] Some argue that this caused them to be entirely forgotten until the "rediscovery" of them in the sixteenth century.[156] Others argue that this was not simply true: there were guidebooks created in the twelfth century that include several catacombs.[157] Perhaps it is more about a lack of interest in "careful exploration, study, and recording of the catacombs until the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries."[158] Luckily, Augustinian Onofrio Panvinio began to study underground cemeteries in a scholarly fashion in the middle of the sixteenth century.[159]

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[153] Brink and Green, *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context. Studies of Roman, Jewish and Christian Burials*, 13.

[154] ibid.

[155] Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*, 9.

[156] ibid.

[157] Brink and Green, *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context. Studies of Roman, Jewish and Christian Burials*, 14.

[158] ibid.

[159] Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*, 10.

He studied early Christian funerary rites and successfully recorded the names and locations of 43 urban cemeteries.[160]

The accidental discovery of the first catacomb of 1578 initiated the succeeding searches for these underground tombs. On May 31 of that year, a Christian catacomb now known as the "Catacomba Anonima" of Via Anapo was found on the Via Salaria.[161] This breakthrough initiated future scholars to study and investigate the catacombs of Rome. Although the scholars of Christian antiquity received great attention for their discovery, it was only about 30 years later that another scholar stole the spotlight of fame.

A new figure emerged in the sixteenth century and became the most influential scholar, explorer, and archaeologist of Roman catacombs. Antonio Bosio, who has been coined as the "Christopher Columbus" of Roman catacombs, dedicated his life to the tombs and managed to uncover and document 30 new underground cemeteries during his 40-year research career.[162] His method was novel for his time and differed from that of Panvinio; Bosio used a systematic approach to collect the history and topography of the catacombs.[163] He first discovered a Jewish catacomb on December 14, 1602 in a vineyard near the Via Portuense.[164] This location is a quarter-mile west of present-day Trastevere railroad station.[165] We have access to some of Bosio's journal entries from when he visited the catacombs. Unfortunately, when Bosio died in 1629, he had not

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[160] ibid.

[161] ibid.

[162] ibid.

[163] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 46.

[164] ibid.

[165] ibid.

yet published the results of his catacomb excavations.[166] His great work, *Roma Sotterranea*, was published about five years after his death, which carefully chronicles the cemeteries he visited.[167] Unfortunately, for two centuries after Bosio's death, the catacombs were only studied out of "antiquarian interest for their iconographic material and the grave goods."[168]

In the mid-nineteenth century, catacomb archaeology resumed through the work of Giovanni Battista de Rossi, "the founder of the modern science of Christian archaeology," who continued Bosio's methodological approach.[169] He discovered many new sections of catacombs and accomplished a much more complete picture of the tombs. De Rossi's students – Mariano Amellini, Orazio Marucchi, and Enrico Stevenson – were heavily involved in the research and study of Roman catacombs as well.[170] There were many scholars who came after these influential figures, and contributed to our knowledge of the Roman catacombs, but Bosio and de Rossi are often the most cited due to their great accomplishments in their research of catacombs in Rome.

Burial Types: There are three primary tomb types that have been identified in both Jewish and Christian catacombs.

There are several tomb types that have been identified in both Jewish and Christian catacombs:[171]

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[166] Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*, 11.

[167] ibid.

[168] ibid.

[169] ibid., 12.

[170] ibid., 13.

[171] ibid., 12.; Timothy Darvill, "Catacomb," in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology, 2nd edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

1) *Loculus* (pl. *loculi*): This was known as a "slot" burial. It was used for a member of the lower class. *Loculi* were rectangular niches situated in vertical rows along walls. The *loculi* were sealed with slabs clay or marble. Because they were for the poor, many were left unidentified and did not have the name of the individual on the tomb. If they were identified, however, paint was used, or very rarely, an inscription with the individual's name was put on the tomb.

2) *Arcosolium* (pl. *arcosolia)*: These were large horizontal niches built into the walls lengthwise. The arch-shaped areas above them were used for decoration. These were typically used for families.

3) *Cubiculum* (pl. *cubicula*): This chamber had several burials of *arcosolium* type. *Cubicula* were typically small rooms off of a gallery. These served extended families, *collegia*, or groups of clergy.

4) Sarcophagus (sarcophagi): This was a box-like container for a corpse. They were often made out of stone or marble and elaborately carved and decorated. They were much less common because they were an expensive form of burial.

Most tombs held one body or two (*bisomus*) and rarely held three (*trisomus*) or four (*quadrisomus*).[172] Only some catacomb graves had labels with names through inscriptions.[173] Instead, they sometimes used other identity markers, such as coins, beads, dolls, or animal teeth that were placed into the grave's seals, which would indicate the body's identity.[174] The markers could indicate what the deceased person did or was passionate about throughout his life.[175]

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[172] Church, "Catacomb."

[173] Darvill, "Catacomb."

[174] ibid.

Function of Catacombs: Jews and Christians used the catacombs exclusively as cemeteries.

Contrary to the belief spread in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the catacombs were not used for habitation, refuge, or concealment during periods of persecution.[176] This was a common misconception because Bosio had mistakenly made this claim.[177] This has since been proven incorrect for two reasons: (1) The catacombs were known and maintained by Roman authorities, so they could have easily located those hiding; and (2) the catacombs had such narrow tunnels that they were not conducive to spending any significant amount of time in them with such little air circulation and little to no source of light.[178] Rather, Jews and Christians used the catacombs almost exclusively as cemeteries[179] until the fourth or fifth century C.E. when open-air type cemeteries replaced the underground cemeteries.[180]

Why Examine the Catacombs? Studying the "home of the dead" can expand our knowledge about the living.

Since our literary evidence is limited about the Jewish and Christian communities, studying the dead – or rather, the home of the dead – can expand our knowledge about the living. Beyond the fact that we will study the home of the dead, we will examine the underground tombs. Harry

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[175] ibid.

[176] ibid.; Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 46.

[177] Darvill, "Catacomb."; Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 46.

[178] Darvill, "Catacomb."

[179] Although Christians also used them for memorial services of the anniversaries of Christian martyrs.

[180] Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*, 13.

Leon astutely points out the advantage of the underground tombs in comparison to above ground cemeteries. He writes,

> The very fact that they were excavated entirely beneath the surface of the earth, so that their existence was ultimately forgotten, accounts for their preservation, whereas the cemeteries which succeeded them, exposed as they were to the abuses of invading armies, common vandalism and changes in the ownership of property, have so completely disappeared that even their locations are unknown.[181]

Leon emphasizes that the reality of the underground feature of these burials oddly works for our benefit because it means that they have been better preserved than if they had been above ground, thus leaving us with more evidence to expand our knowledge about the practices and identity markers of these two communities. Several aspects of the catacombs can inform us about these two communities including the catacombs' locations, inscriptions, and artwork. As we perform a thorough examination, distinguishing features may become apparent that will enlighten us more about when the two peoples emerged as overlapping communities but then diverged into two separate religious groups.

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[181] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 46-47.

CHAPTER V: Introducing Specific Jewish and Christian Catacombs

Jewish Catacombs: There are six known ancient Jewish catacombs.

Currently six[182] ancient Jewish catacombs have been discovered in the area of Rome, mainly along the Via Appia.[183] The names of the catacombs are often from the names of the streets under which they were built or the name of the discoverer. For the convenience of having a clear, quick description of the catacombs, on the following page is a table with fast facts.

Harry Leon, Leonard Rutgers, and Sylvia Cappelletti – three of the leading scholars in the study of the Jewish community in ancient Rome, who have given particular attention to and conducted thorough studies on the Jewish catacombs – show through their discussions that each of the catacombs offers evidence of varying degrees for our comprehensive understanding of the burial techniques and characteristics of the Jewish community in ancient Rome.

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[182] Leon considers that there were six, if we include a "doubtful" catacomb on Via Appia Pignatelli. It has been included in the table because a number of archaeologists and historians consider it a Jewish catacomb.

[183] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 53.

Table 1: Jewish Catacombs of Ancient Rome[184]

Name	Other Name	Dating (C.E.)	Location	Survival/Accessibility	Characterization
Monteverde	Via Portuense	II (earliest)	Via Portuense	Has collapsed entirely	Large/Catacomb
Via Cimarra	Vigna Limiti	II-III	Via Appia	No longer survives	Small/Hypogeum
Via Appia	Vigna Randanini	III/IV	Via Appia	Some survives for study and public visitation	Large/Catacomb
Via Nomentana	Villa Torlonia	III/IV	Via Nomentana	Available for study and public visitation today	Large/Catacomb
Via Labicana	Via Casilina	? (II?)	Via Labicana (Via Casilina)	Completely destroyed today	Small/Hypogeum
Vigna Appia Pignatelli	–	? (II-IV?)	Via Appia	No longer survives	Small/Hypogeum

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[184] This table was compiled by the following sources: ibid.; Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*; Cappelletti, *Jewish Community of Rome: From the Second Century B.C. To the Third Century C.E.*

Christian Catacombs: There are approximately 60 early Christian catacombs.

Far more Christian catacombs than Jewish catacombs have been discovered in Rome, partly because far more Christian catacombs existed. Approximately 60 early Christian catacombs[185] in Rome built along the consular roads out of Rome, such as the Via Appia, the Via Ardeatina, the Via Ostiensis, the Via Nomentana, the Via Labicana, and the Via Salaria, have survived.[186] Unlike the Jewish catacombs which typically were named based on their location (the street they were built under) or who discovered the tomb, Christian catacombs were named after a family member who owned the ground or named after the martyrs buried there.[187] Only a selection of second- through fourth-century catacombs will be provided in a table on the following page similar to that of the Jewish catacombs.[188] Three of the catacombs in the table – San Callisto, San Sebastiano, and Praetextatus – are among the three largest Roman catacombs.[189] The nine catacombs included in the table all survive today and all of them are available for public visitation.[190]

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[185] Sources are ambiguous about this number. Some say 40, some say 60 definitively, and others say some number of 60 catacombs.

[186] Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*, 9; Leonard V. Rutgers et al., "Jewish Inspiration of Christian Catacombs," *Nature* 436, no. 7049 (2005): 339.

[187] James Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 25.

[188] See Appendices C and D for a list of all of the known Christian catacombs and a map of where they are located. Archaeologists and scholars continue to publish new findings about the Christian catacombs of Rome.

[189] Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity*, 25.

[190] The catacomb of Sts. Peter and Marcellinus is open for public visitation, but only with private permission.

Table 2: Nine Christian Catacombs of Ancient Rome[191]

Name	Other Name	Origin of Name	Dating (C.E.)	Location
St. Callixtus	San Callisto	Deacon Callixtus; Pope Calixtus I	Mid II-IV	Via Appia
St. Domitilla	Domitilla	Landowner St. Domitilla	II	Via Ardeatina
Praetextatus	–	Aristocratic Roman family that found them	End of II	Via Appia
St. Sebastian	San Sebastiano	Martyr St. Sebastian	III	Via Appia
Commodilla	–	Landowner	III	Via Ostiensis
St. Agnese	Saint Agnes (a.k.a. Coemeterium Maius)	Virgin and martyr Saint Agnes	III	Via Nomentana
Sts. Marcellinus and Peter	Santi Marcellino e Pietro	Christian martyrs Marcellinus and Peter	Second half of III	Via Labicana
Priscilla	"regina catacumbarum" ("Queen of the catacombs")	Priscilla, who lived above catacomb	Estimated late II - IV	Via Salaria (Nova)
Via Latina	–	Road	IV	Via Latina

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[191] This table was compiled from Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*; Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*; Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity*; Pergola, Severini, and Barbini, *Christian Rome: Early Christian Rome: Catacombs and Basilicas*; Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome: A Comprehensive Guide*.

Some Notes About Dating: Dating the catacombs presents significant challenges for archaeologists.

Dating has been an unresolved issue for both the Jewish and Christian catacombs in Rome, and this unfortunately means that, like many ancient artifact findings, the dates provided in the tables on the previous page are purely speculative. The dating has not been based on stratigraphy. Rather, archaeologists have used the various forms of archaeological evidence available from the catacombs, but little of it is reliable proof for acquiring definitive dates.[192] They mainly rely on epigraphic, architectural evidence, and artistic (wall paintings and sarcophagi) data to date the tombs.[193] When archaeologists have considered these pieces of evidence for the same tomb, they sometimes find that these pieces of evidence suggest different dates.[194] Archaeologists struggle to settle on one time period for dating the tomb.[195] It is important to acknowledge the fact that these dates may not be completely accurate and as more investigation is carried out on the catacombs in the future, these dates may be adjusted. However, these are the dates with which we will work for this current study.

We can determine dates that are generally understood as the earliest to which the catacombs can be dated and the century when the catacombs were no longer used for burial, even if they remained attended for visitation. For the Jewish catacombs, some argue that the earliest the tombs can be dated is to the second century C.E.[196] when Romans shifted their practices from cremation

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[192] Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 457.

[193] ibid.

[194] ibid.

[195] ibid.

[196] For a long time, scholars thought that the catacombs (particularly the Jewish catacombs) began in the first century C.E. Some even thought first century B.C.E. because the literary evidence suggest that the Jewish community in Rome was established by the first century B.C.E. Archaeologists, however, were able to prove that no archaeological materials exist from the catacombs that date to earlier than the late second century C.E.

to inhumation.[197] The evidence suggests that the Jewish catacombs were no longer used toward the end of the third century or at the beginning of the fourth century, when Jews in Rome began using open-air cemeteries instead.

Christian catacombs also have a complicated date assignment. For the most part, however, many Christian catacombs have been dated to the second, third, or fourth century, and sometimes even assigned the time period from the second to fourth centuries. Notably, whether the catacombs - both the Jewish and Christian - are assigned to one century or several, this is a great span of time. The reality is that the catacombs were not built in one day or overnight, but rather over a span of a century or several centuries.[198] Thus, (1) it is inaccurate in many cases to assign a catacomb to one century; and (2) the catacombs undergoing multiple stages of building contributes to the challenges for archaeologists to date the tombs.

Archaeologists have constructed a four-phase timeline revealing what they understand to be the most accurate depiction of the history and development of the catacombs:[199]

1) Second and third centuries C.E.: Phase when customs of underground burial originated

2) Third century C.E.: Phase for the construction of the first real catacombs

3) Fourth century C.E.: Phase when catacombs developed into large underground communal cemeteries

4) Fifth through ninth centuries C.E.: Phase when burial ceased; period of restoration and visits by pilgrims

Phases one, two, and three will be our focus as we proceed with the examination of the catacombs.

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[197] Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora*, 457.

[198] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 53.

[199] ibid.

Many scholars and archaeologists have proposed ways for understanding the relationship between the Jewish and Christian catacombs with regard to the influence that one might have had on the other. Among the various suggestions include: Jewish catacombs served as an example for Christian catacombs, Christian catacombs served as an example for Jewish catacombs, and the catacombs are independent from one another and do not influence each other.[200] The most recent theory is from Rutgers, who argues that the catacombs are contemporary; he claims the use of catacombs is a phenomenon that is neither Jewish nor Christian, but Late Ancient.[201] This thesis will not argue that one of these opinions is most appropriate or accurate because the dating of the catacombs has been a huge challenge. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to argue when precisely the Jewish and Christian catacombs were built and developed. Instead, these perspectives are provided because they help contextualize how much uncertainty surrounds the study of the catacombs, and particularly in regard to identifying the relationship between the Jewish and Christian catacombs.

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[200] *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 40.

[201] ibid.

CHAPTER VI. Examination of the Similarities and Differences between the Jewish and Christian Catacombs through Inscriptions and Artwork

Introduction: Observing the similarities and differences of funerary inscriptions and artwork from the Jewish and Christian catacombs helps explain how the communities initially were closely tied until the Christian community diverged and became its own religious group. This discussion replays the historiographical traditions in the field, which tend to give more attention to the Jewish inscriptions and the Christian artwork, but nevertheless make significant connections with and interpretations about the material.

The material evidence that the catacombs yield divides naturally into two categories: funerary inscriptions and artwork. These parts suggest defining characteristics about the communities and have helped archaeologists identify catacombs as either Jewish or Christian. Though the inscriptions and artwork show differences between the Jewish and Christian catacombs, they also have many overlapping aspects. Therefore, conducting a thorough examination of the inscriptions and artwork of the catacombs reveals that the early Christians were Jews who were Jesus followers; they were later joined by pagan converts until the community significantly diverged and became its own religious group. This chapter will examine the similarities and differences in the language and content of the inscriptions as well as the wall paintings and sarcophagi to illustrate how the Christian community was initially closely tied to the Jewish community until it diverged and became its own religious group.

The trends in scholarship about the inscriptions and the artwork have influenced this discussion. Far more scholarship has examined the Jewish inscriptions than the Christian inscriptions; conversely, far more scholarship has discussed early Christian artwork than early Jewish artwork. This is partly a product of what the archaeological sources provide and the choices

made in the historiography. As a result, my discussion will follow this trend. It will be apparent through my discussion that more attention has traditionally been given to the Jewish inscriptions. Similarly, during the artwork discussion, more attention is given to the early Christian artwork and its development. That being said, I strive to execute a thorough examination with conclusions based on my observations about the inscriptions and artwork of both the Jews and Christians.

The Funerary Inscriptions: Various components of the funerary inscriptions reveal an unvarnished view of the communities because they were located in the unlit catacombs.

The funerary inscriptions in the catacombs provide significant information about the communities, particularly because they were not visible to a wider audience. Though it seems obvious, the inscriptions were hardly visible due to the dark atmosphere in the catacombs.[202] Thus, it seems unlikely that the individual ordering the epitaph had any motivation to impress any passersby through the inscription.[203] Rather, the individual likely crafted the inscription the way he wished the deceased person to be remembered. As a result, the funerary inscriptions are a reliable source for understanding how Jews and Christians viewed themselves, not how they wished others to view them.[204] Thus, we can acquire substantial insights about the Jewish and Christian communities through the inscriptions. They suggest the language that the community spoke and read, common names of community members, the names of congregations (from Jewish inscriptions), the titles of their officials, the organization of the communities, and iconographic

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[202] Rutgers et al., "Jewish Inspiration of Christian Catacombs," 263.

[203] ibid.

[204] ibid.

identity markers.[205] They also indicate, though not as definitively, the communities' religious ideas, how much they may have adopted from non-Jews or non-Christians, and vital statistics such as age at marriage or death and family size.[206]

Although there are several components of the inscriptions that are informative, this chapter considers the language and content because these best disclose the overlap as well as the divergence of the two communities. Before discussing the language of the inscriptions, it is helpful to have a sense of the number of known inscriptions from the Jewish and Christian catacombs with which we can work.

Jewish and Christian Inscriptions: The number of Christian inscriptions far outnumbers the number of Jewish inscriptions, but this number does not dictate the kinds of observation we can make.

The Jewish catacombs contain several hundred funerary inscriptions[207] that include "brief and frequently pathetic epitaphs which marked the individual graves."[208] The inscriptions from Jewish catacombs have been discovered over a span of several hundred years. Presently, the total number of Jewish inscriptions numbers 534.[209] The breakdown is as follows:

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[205] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 67.

[206] ibid.

[207] All of the Jewish inscriptions are compiled in Jean Frey's *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum (CII)*. It is the source that scholars on this topic use for their discussions on Jewish inscriptions.

[208] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 67.

[209] ibid., 73.

Table 3: Number of Inscriptions Per Jewish Congregation[210]

Location of Inscription	Number of Inscriptions
Monteverde	206
Via Appia (Vigna Randanini)	195
Via Nomentana (Villa Torlonia)	68
Vigna Cimarra	5
Via Labicana	3
Via Appia Pignatelli	2
Porto (probably from Monteverde)	13
Of uncertain or unknown provenience (most being probably from Monteverde)	3
Gold glasses	9
	Total: 534

As this table shows, the Monteverde catacomb has the most inscriptions, with the Via Appia catacomb as a close second and the Via Nomentana catacomb as the third most abundant in inscriptions. The location and dates of the catacombs can explain this curious distribution, though these are only mere speculations. Many scholars and archaeologists have dated the Monteverde catacomb to the second century C.E. This would make it the oldest of the Jewish catacombs and the one with the longest use. However, if it dates to as late as the fourth century, which is what some archaeologists have suggested, it would not explain this phenomenon. If we consider the catacomb's location, on the Via Portuense, we can understand that the catacomb was located at the mouth of the Tiber River on the right bank. We know that a large population of the Jews lived on the right bank, so the catacomb would have been in a convenient spot for the Jewish community, and therefore it makes sense that it displays a significant number of tombs and inscriptions.

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[210] ibid., 74.

The number of early Christian inscriptions far outnumbers the total of Jewish inscriptions. About 40,000 inscriptions[211] survive from the Christian catacombs, with about 25,500 of those dating to the early Christian period.[212] The first appearance of these inscriptions dates to the beginning of the third century C.E.[213] These inscriptions include the name of the deceased with a symbol at most.[214] They often include the date when the deceased was placed in the grave along with the date of death.[215] In addition to these characteristics, the Christian inscriptions and the Christian catacombs in general, can be distinguished from pagan inscriptions in two obvious ways: (1) Since Christians had limited financial means, it was not uncommon for their tombs to have a conglomeration of reused materials, such as plundered tiles or fragments of marble slabs sometimes without the edges even smoothed out; and (2) the characters of the inscriptions were often incised in a hasty fashion. This resulted in irregular writing, which included upper case, inclined letters. Therefore, the quality of the inscriptions themselves was low.[216]

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[211] The primary source for early Christian inscriptions is *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae* (*ICUR*, or also known as *ICVR*). It is one of the earliest and most extensive printed collections of exclusively Christian inscriptions.

[212] Danilo Mazzoleni, "Inscriptions of Roman Catacombs," in *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2009), 147; Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 172-73.

[213] Mazzoleni, "Inscriptions of Roman Catacombs," 149.

[214] ibid.

[215] ibid.

[216] ibid., 150.

The Language of the Inscriptions: The words show which language the communities predominantly spoke, reveal the communication between the two groups, and indicate how each community distinguished itself from the other.

The inscriptions not only demonstrate the languages that the communities spoke and in which they were literate, but they also indicate the complexities of the relationship between the two communities. Although the Jewish and Christian inscriptions appear both in Greek and Latin, the proportions of those in Greek and those in Latin within each community shed light on the origins of the communities and how the communities relate to each other.

The inscriptions from the Jewish catacombs are the only evidence available for indicating the language spoken by the Jews in ancient Rome. It is commonly understood that the Jews of the Diaspora were Greek-speakers, due to the spread of Hellenism throughout the Mediterranean world after the conquests of Alexander the Great.[217] The Jews in ancient Rome were no different from Jews in other parts of the Diaspora. We can conclude from the language of the inscriptions that Jews in ancient Rome were predominantly Greek-speakers. Rutgers argues that the use of Greek is an example of the Jews defining their Jewishness, since the Jews in the rest of the Diaspora spoke Greek.[218] Although many of the 534 inscriptions are merely fragments of phrases, one letter alone can reveal the language in which the inscription was written. This is the breakdown by language of the 534 inscriptions:

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[217] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 75.

[218] Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 181.

Table 4: Number of Inscriptions per Language[219]

Language	Number of Inscriptions
Greek	405 (76%)
Latin	123 (23%)
Hebrew	3 (1%, including Aramaic and bilingual)
Aramaic	1
Greek and Latin bilingual	1
Aramaic and Greek bilingual	1
	Total: 534

This table shows that the number of Greek inscriptions surpasses inscriptions in any other language by far. When the language of the inscriptions is provided for each of the Jewish catacombs, the same trend occurs: the vast majority of inscriptions within each catacomb are in Greek. (See Appendix E for a more detailed breakdown.) Leon notes through a close examination of the Greek text in the inscriptions that the language was remarkably similar to the Greek spoken in Rome during this time; it was not a Greek dialect adapted especially for or by the Jews.[220] Thus, "the Jews in ancient Rome spoke essentially the same Greek that was prevalent among the lower classes during these centuries."[221] This is one example of the Jews assimilating to the culture of Rome.

At first it is striking to note that only three of the 534 inscriptions are in Hebrew. The table, however, does not share that several inscriptions in Latin or Greek include the Hebrew word שלום (Shalom) or ישראל (Israel) or the phrase שלום על ישראל (Peace for Israel) at the end.[222] This suggests that Hebrew was not completely absent as a language, but it evidently was not the primary

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[219] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 76.

[220] Harry J. Leon, "The Language of the Greek Inscriptions from the Jewish Catacombs of Rome," *Transactions of the American Philological Society* 58 (1927): 233.

[221] ibid.

[222] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*.

language used by the Jews in ancient Rome. It is curious that Jews would include Hebrew in their inscriptions at all, but there are a few possibilities for the inclusion of the language. Although Hebrew was no longer the primary language used by Jews in the Diaspora, including in Rome, it was still seen as their language. Thus, one reason for inclusion may have been that it was used as an identity marker.

It seems as though the smattering of Hebrew words in the inscriptions is similar to the splattering of Yiddish words used by modern-day Jews. Yiddish, like Hebrew, used to be the international language of Ashkenazic Jews.[223] In the height of its use, Yiddish was spoken by millions of Jews from all over the world.[224] The decline of Yiddish came as a result of the Holocaust, since those six million Jews were the primary speakers of the language.[225] The Jews who escaped and made it to Israel or the United States brought Yiddish with them but it became their secondary language.[226] This is similar to the experience of the Jews of the Diaspora, who mostly abandoned Hebrew and adopted Greek as their primary language. Today, many Jews in the United States know almost no Yiddish, with the exception of a few words, such as *kvetch* (complain, whine) and *mensch* (honorable, decent person). While many non-Jews have also learned some basic Yiddish, the use of Yiddish words can still serve as a partial identity marker for Jews. Thus, the inclusion of basic Hebrew words or phrases in the Greek-dominated

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[223] There are several subgroups of Jews who have different cultures and traditions, which are defined by where their descendants come from. The two most known types of Jews are Ashkenazic and Sephardic. Ashkenazic (also Ashkenazi) Jews are descendants of Jews from France, Germany, and Eastern Europe. Sephardic Jews are descendants of Jews from Spain, Portugal, North Africa, and the Middle East.

[224] "Yiddish," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. Adele Berlin and Maxine Grossman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[225] ibid.

[226] ibid.

inscriptions from ancient times and the use of minimal Yiddish by Jews today serve an expression of ancestral ties rather than as an expression of language fluency; neither the ancient Roman Jews nor the modern-day Jews are fluent in these languages.

Unlike the Jewish inscriptions that were predominantly in Greek, the Christian inscriptions were largely in Latin, with a small fraction of them in Greek. Of the 25,500 early Christian inscriptions, about 23,100 (91%) were in Latin and 2,298 (9%) were in Greek.[227] These statistics similarly reflect the inscriptions in individual catacombs. For example, 15.5 percent of the inscriptions in the Domitilla catacomb and 19 percent of the inscriptions in the Priscilla catacomb are in Greek.[228] These percentages are only slightly higher than the percentage for the total number of Christian inscriptions in Greek. The Domitilla and Priscilla catacombs, however, are not the norm and the majority of epigraphical materials from Christian catacombs are between zero and 15% Greek, with the rest of the epigraphic materials in Latin.[229]

The small number of Christian inscriptions in Greek is a revealing factor about the Christian community. It has been observed that Greek was present in the materials that date to the third century, but it completely disappeared in materials dating to the fourth century.[230] This could be because a significant number of pagans began joining the Christian community in the fourth century causing Greek to quickly go out of use in the early Church in Rome.[231] It is possible that the few Greek inscriptions were for the early Christians who were Jews following Christ, since

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[227] Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 183.

[228] ibid.

[229] ibid., 181.

[230] ibid.

[231] ibid., 184.

these Christians were in such close contact with the Greek-speaking Jews. It makes sense that there would be far fewer inscriptions in Greek than in Latin, because as the Christian community grew, the vast majority of its members were pagans converting to the religion, who spoke Latin. Thus, the rough dating of the Greek inscriptions to the third century and the Latin inscriptions predominantly to the fourth century shows that the Christian community began as a subset of the Jewish community; it then diverged on its own as it left Greek behind and adopted Latin. The content of the inscriptions that we will examine in the next section further shows how the communities overlapped, but also had distinctive funerary inscription practices.

The Content of the Inscriptions: The theme of peace and the role of the deceased in the community expose how the two communities were initially connected and then diverged from each other.

The theme of peace is the most notable similarity in the content of the Jewish and Christian inscriptions, and it also sets them apart from pagan inscriptions.[232] Jewish inscriptions use the Greek phrase, EN EIRENE (I)HEKOIMESISSOU – "in peace thy sleep," whereas Christian inscriptions use the Latin phrase, IN PACE – "in peace" or DORMIT IN PACE - "(s)he sleeps in peace."[233] The source of inspiration for this phrase   is not apparent. However, there are several lines in the Bible that resemble the idea of sleeping in peace. For example, "sleep in peace," appears in the Hebrew Bible in the Book of Isaiah: "...will come in peace, and they will rest in their beds, he who goes straightforward" (Isaiah, 57:2). Another phrase with sleeping in peace appears in Psalm 4.8, which reads, "In peace I will both lie down and sleep." Yet another reference

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[232] Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity*, 61 & 154.

[233] ibid., 61.

to peace comes from a line in the third chapter of the Book of Wisdom, which reads ILLI AUTEM SUNT IN PACE ("however they [the souls of the righteous] are in [peace]").

It is not clear whether the Jews or Christians came up with this phrase, and the problematic dating of the catacombs and the inscriptions does not enable a direct answer. However, it seems plausible that the Jews were the first to use the phrase in their epitaphs, and then the first Christians who were Jews following Jesus decided to incorporate it into their own. The fact that later Christians changed the phrase to "REQUIESCAT IN PACE," meaning "rest in peace," supports this proposition because they would have wished for their deceased member's soul to find peace in the afterlife.[234] Regardless of the source of the phrase, the experiences of the Jews and Christians in Rome made it logical for the theme of peace to appear in their funerary inscriptions. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, both communities experienced periods of repression, expulsion, and persecutions in Rome. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that they would have wished for their deceased members to rest in eternal peace, wishing them safety from any more suppression or discrimination.

While the wish for peace shows a clear similarity in the two communities' funerary practices, a distinguishing feature in the content of the inscriptions is the inclusion, or lack thereof, of references to community-related functions and occupational status. The Jewish inscriptions suggest that the status of a Jew depended on his involvement in the Jewish community, because the epithets included the form of participation in religious practices.[235] The inclusion of the deceased member's role in the community suggests that "the Jewish communal activities held a

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[234] This is where the modern acronym R.I.P. comes from.

[235] Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 199.

place of central importance in the lives of many Roman Jews."[236] The epitaphs incorporate the office positions the members held in the Jewish community in about 20.5 percent of the 595 Jewish epitaphs from Rome. One of the most significant positions is the archonship, which appears in no fewer than 47 inscriptions (14 from the Via Appia catacomb, 18 from Monteverde, four from the Nomentana, one from Vigna Cimarra, and 10 from unrecorded places) of the Roman Jews.[237] Unfortunately, the inscriptions do not suggest what the role of the archon entailed, but it appears to have been a fairly significant position in the community since it was included in so many inscriptions.

In comparison, the Christian inscriptions typically do not mention any religious positions held by the deceased; instead, they use images to depict daily activities carried out by the deceased.[238] A sample of about 5,500 early Christian inscriptions from the Catacombs of Callixtus, Sebastiano, Praetextatus, Agnese, the coemeterium Majus, and various catacombs along the Via Portuense establish the lack of references to ecclesiastical functions.[239] Of these thousands of inscriptions, less than one percent mentions any religious title.[240] Instead, they represent mainly through images, the faithful who are busy at work.[241] For example, the Catacomb of Praetextatus has a gravestone with no written inscription but representations of many surgical instruments, including scalpels, pliers (to extract teeth), spoons, a cupping glass (for blood-letting), and

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[236] ibid., 198.

[237] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 173.

[238] Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 199.

[239] ibid.

[240] ibid.

[241] Mazzoleni, "Inscriptions of Roman Catacombs."

probes.[242] These images suggest that the deceased member was a dentist.[243] A number of other written words or representations have suggested a lengthy list of occupations that the members of the Christian community held, ranging from food producers and sellers, educators, political positions, military positions, to performers of various kinds.[244]

A number of possibilities could explain why the Christians included the professions and not religious roles of the community members. First, it seems reasonable to assume that the community did not yet have defined roles within the religious community. Since the members of the community were meeting at house-churches that were only loosely defined congregations, they were constantly welcoming new members. It is quite possible that official religious roles had not yet been assigned or determined within the community. Even if the community did have official titles, the religion was developing and it did not have the bureaucratic organization that Judaism had. Therefore, the solution was to focus on what the members of the community were contributing to the city of Rome through their profession in an effort to blend in with the rest of the Roman community. Another suggestion is that the first Christians, those who were Jews following Jesus, no longer fit into the Jewish community. In an attempt to find a place in Rome, they may have decided to focus on what they provided for society through their profession. Thus, they developed the practice of including what their members of the community were contributing to the city. The

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[242] ibid.

[243] ibid.

[244] Occupations interpreted from the inscriptions through words or representations include bakers, pastry makers, butchers, salami vendors, fruit and vegetable grocers, craftsmen, bricklayers, cleaners, dyers, seamstresses, shoemakers, and cobblers, doctors, veterinarians lawyers, notaries, stenographers, couriers, teachers, and clerks of grain administration, imperial clerks, senators, consuls, municipal judges and provincial officials, military (praetorians, cavalry, and equites singulares), jobs connected with performances (pantomime, mime, impersonator, imitator). See ibid.

inclusion of these occupations on the funerary inscriptions suggests that the community also acknowledged the importance of the roles during their lifetimes as well.

The Artwork: The images in the inscriptions, wall paintings, and sarcophagi illustrate the development of the Christian community. Although the Jewish and Christian catacombs do not use the same symbols in the artwork, a closer examination of the actual scenes in the wall paintings and sarcophagi demonstrates how the first Christians were initially part of the Jewish community.

While the inscriptions of the Jewish and Christian catacombs yield a great deal of information about Christians emerging out of the Jewish community, the artistic representations in the catacombs illustrate how the development of early Christian art aligns with the development of the Christian community itself. Erwin Goodenough confirms the value of examining catacomb paintings, stating that they "perpetuate, celebrate, and confirm the anonymous faith of those ages and people."[245] Indeed, the symbols and scenes that we find in the inscriptions, wall paintings, and sarcophagi suggest the beliefs and values of the Jewish and Christian communities. Like the inscriptions, the art proves to be a reliable source for learning about the two communities because it appears on the walls and sarcophagi in the dark underground tombs. Therefore, it was not commissioned for the purpose of sharing with passersby.

The imagery found in the catacombs can be divided into two main categories: iconographic symbols and scenes. While we do not have conclusive meanings for all of the symbols or definite reasons for their appearance in the Jewish or Christian catacombs, a number of ideas have been proposed. (See Appendices F and H for detailed descriptions and explanations about each of these

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[245] Erwin R. Goodenough, "Catacomb Art," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, no. 2 (1962): 137. Goodenough, Catacomb Art page 137 – refer to Stevenson page 55

symbols.) The symbols commonly found in Jewish catacombs are the menorah, the lulav and etrog

pair, the flask, the shofar, the Ark of the Law, and miscellaneous animals (i.e. birds, ram, bull, calf,

bovine animal).[246] (See Appendix G for a breakdown by catacomb.) The symbols commonly found

in Christian catacombs were predominantly "pagan" and then "infused with a meaning."[247] These

are the Good Shepherd, the fish, the Monogram of Christ, a dove with the olive branch, the anchor,

the praying figure, miscellaneous symbols (i.e. peacock, ship of the church, palm branches, vine,

branches, and grape clusters), and images representing the faithful who are busy at work or tools

of their trade (i.e. wine barrels, balances, chisels, axes, spindles, compasses).[248] These symbols are

most frequently found accompanying inscriptions or serve as the inscription itself.[249]

These two lists of the common symbols make it appear as though there is no iconographic

system that unites the Jewish and Christian catacombs, since there are no overlapping images. This

makes it seem as though the images are of limited use in understanding how the Christian

community relates to the Jewish community. More artwork, however, exists beyond these

symbols, which can be used to trace the development of the Christian community, as it originated

from the Jewish community.

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[246] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 196-97.

[247] Graydon F. Snyder, "The Interaction of Jews with Non-Jews in Rome," in *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome*, ed. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 85.

[248] ibid., 81-5.

[249] ibid.

The wall paintings include some of the common symbols as well as pagan and floral scenes (found in both Jewish and Christian catacombs) and biblical scenes (appearing in only Christian catacombs). These scenes suggest what the communities chose to portray through their artwork, the process of assimilation, and the sharing of religious ideas.

Wall paintings in the catacombs date to about 200 C.E. and came to an end in the fifth century when the underground burials ceased.[250] Although most of our evidence of artwork within the Jewish catacombs comes from the inscriptions because only a few wall paintings have been preserved, those that have been preserved allow us to observe that Jewish artwork tended to depict non-religious scenes in addition to common Jewish symbols.[251] The most notable frescoes from the Jewish catacombs are those in a painted room and arcosolia of the Nomentana catacomb, two painted rooms of the Via Appia catacomb, and paintings in the upper Villa Torlonia catacomb.[252] The wall paintings in the latter two catacombs are the only ones that have been preserved and can be studied today.[253] Although they include some Jewish motifs, such as the menorah, Torah shrines, the Ark, and the lulav and etrog, these are not included frequently, and some of the wall paintings do not include them at all.[254] The wall paintings also include figures of animals and human beings, which Leon argues, "would hardly have been the work of Jewish artists or used by Jews to adorn a tomb chamber."[255]

Because the wall paintings that have been found in Jewish catacombs are populated with images typically not associated with Jewish art, the wall paintings were initially frequently

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[250] Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity*, 59.

[251] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 150.

[252] Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 202; Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 73.

[253] *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 73.

[254] ibid.

[255] ibid., 73-74; Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 206-08.

identified as pagan in character. For example, Fortuna, the goddess of fortune and luck in Roman religion, appears in one of the rooms in the Via Appia catacomb.[256] This suggests three different theories: (1) The use of pagan mythological figures as decoration was not considered as inappropriate to the Jews; (2) The artists that Jews hired to do the artwork chose to depict what they wished, even if it was not what the person had requested; or (3) Jews were assimilating to the culture around them and that they were not isolated from the rest of Rome.[257] Any one of these suggestions is possible, and it is hard to determine exactly why pagan images appear in the Jewish artwork. But what is significant is that the artwork does not include religious images aside from the common symbols.

In addition to deity representations in the Jewish catacomb wall paintings, floral images, a common Classical theme, have been found in both the Jewish and Christian wall paintings. The garden and floral scenes in both communities' catacombs suggests that the floral motif was a shared image in the Classical world.[258] In one of the Jewish catacombs, the Via Appia, there are floral wreaths and birds.[259] Likewise, the garden theme is "depicted a thousand […] ways" in Christian catacombs, such as flowerbeds, petals, flower buds, and floral motifs.[260] Some of the catacombs that exhibit this imagery are Callixtus, Domitilla, and Priscilla.[261] This sharing of

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[256] *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 205.

[257] ibid., 228.

[258] Fabrizio Bisconti, "The Decoration of Roman Catacombs," in *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2009), 97-99.

[259] ibid., 99; Rutgers, *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 75.

[260] Bisconti, "The Decoration of Roman Catacombs," 100.

[261] ibid.

Classical imagery served as an indication of the two communities' "participation in Greco-Roman culture," and thus, their assimilation to Roman culture.[262]

It may come as a surprise that the wall paintings of the Jewish catacombs in Rome do not actually include any Old Testament (OT) scenes because the Torah is such a central part of the practice of Judaism. In fact, until fairly recently, it was understood that generally Jews did not depict OT scenes in their artwork in any part of the world. However, in 1933, the oldest OT scenes were discovered in a Jewish synagogue in Dura that dates to 244 C.E.[263] The paintings depict Moses and the 10 Commandments, Pharaoh pursuing the slaves at the Red Sea, and other Biblical scenes.[264] This discovery was instrumental to the understanding of the relationship between Jewish and Christian art. Scholars argued that this discovery revealed that "Christian art borrowed from Jewish pictorial art in style, composition, and subject matter."[265] Although the artwork in the Jewish catacombs in Rome did not seem to have a direct influence on the Christian catacombs, it appears as though the Jewish texts, namely the Hebrew Bible, influenced the Christians as they developed their own identity and religion.

Unlike the Jewish catacombs in Rome, the Christian catacombs incorporate scenes that the Jewish catacombs in Rome did not include at all, but the subject of these scenes reveals the identity and origins of the Christian community. The development of early Christian artwork has been of particular interest to scholars. Archaeologists, through an iconographic approach, have constructed

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[262] Snyder, "The Interaction of Jews with Non-Jews in Rome," 81.

[263] "Oldest Old Testmanet Scenes Unearthed on Euphrates," *The Science News-Letter* 23, no. 625 (1933): 196.

[264] ibid.

[265] ibid.

a phase timeline for understanding the development of early Christian art preserved in the catacombs of Rome.[266] It includes three phases:[267]

1. Earliest phase: second and third centuries C.E.; beginning of early Christian art

2. The Old Testament (OT) phase: third century C.E.

3. The New Testament (NT) phase: fourth and fifth centuries C.E.

This phase timeline assigns the beginning of early Christian artwork to the second and third centuries. It suggests that we generally begin seeing OT scenes in artwork dating to the third century and then NT scenes in artwork in the fourth and fifth centuries. (See Appendices I and J.) This is not a flawless timeline; as we consider the artwork in the Christian wall paintings, we will note that some OT and NT scenes appear in paintings that have been dated to earlier than the third century. However, this is still a helpful timeline in order to understand the development of early Christian art, and it is relevant for the rest of this discussion for tracing the development of the Christian community in Rome.

Clark Lamberton constructed a table with the subjects that appear on the wall paintings of Christian catacombs from the first century to beyond the fourth century, which enables us to understand how the images frequently fit into one of the three phases of the timeline of early Christian catacomb artwork and to observe the flaws the timeline.[268] The table includes 132 subjects (pagan, OT, and NT images) documenting when they appear in the catacombs throughout the centuries (20 from I, 34 from II, 22 from III, 49 from IV, and 7 from V or later).[269] (See

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[266] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 84.

[267] ibid.

[268] Clark D. Lamberton, "The Development of Christian Symbolism as Illustrated in Roman Catacomb Painting," *American Journal of Archaeology* 15, no. 4 (1911): 519-22.

[269] ibid., 510.

Appendix K.) Some of the images include birds, peacocks, and dolphins (pagan); Daniel in the Lions' Den, Noah, Moses striking rock, and the sacrifice of Isaac (OT); and St. John the Baptist, Peter's denial, Crucifixion and group at the cross (NT).[270] The table does not perfectly align with the three constructed phases of early Christian art in the catacombs because there are quite a few instances where some scenes from the OT or NT appear in catacombs that date to earlier than the third and fourth centuries, respectively. For example, three Biblical themes appear in catacombs, namely the catacomb of Domitilla and the catacomb of Priscilla, which date to the first or second century.[271] These Biblical scenes are Daniel in the Lions' Den, Noah, and the Good Shepherd.[272] It is striking that the early Christians began using OT scenes in their artwork, especially because Jewish catacombs in Rome include no OT scenes at all.

A further discussion of the nature of the Christian artwork in the catacombs will help make sense of the inclusion of OT scenes, but even more so will explain the emergence and divergence of the Christian community. When artwork emerged in the catacombs, the Christian community had not yet defined its own distinct art vocabulary.[273] As we saw in Chapter Two, the Romans generally respected and tolerated the Jews because they practiced an ancient religion with long-established traditions. By contrast, Christianity was a new religion in its developing stages and thus lacked the credentials to be taken seriously by ancient Roman society at large.[274] Rutgers points out that early Christians had two options for developing their own art; they could use objects

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[270] ibid.

[271] ibid., 511.

[272] ibid.

[273] Goodenough, "Catacomb Art," 133.

[274] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 107.

and symbols already available, or they could develop iconography that was appropriate within the context of their religion.[275] He argues that it was the execution of the first that allowed them to do the second. [276] The early Christians relied on an old, respected tradition, which they could claim as their own, and eventually tweak to fit their developing religious beliefs.[277] In doing so, "early Christians began their art by inventing a symbolism or symbolic vocabulary in Jewish terms only that they might laboriously at once translate it into Christian typology."[278] Early Christians easily morphed the Jewish scenes to fit their own ideas about salvation. While the image of Moses represents salvation in Judaism, Christ became that figure for Christians. The Christians' use of OT scenes that they then morphed to fit their core beliefs was a tactic for developing and defining their own art, while simultaneously gaining credibility as a new religion. This observation of the development of early Christian artwork in the catacombs traces the development of Christians beginning as Jews with knowledge about the OT stories.

If we return to the Lamberton's table, we can see that while the OT scenes generally first appear in the second and third centuries, they do not disappear by the fourth century. In fact, if we examine the breakdown even more closely, we see that there are just as many, if not more, OT scenes that date to the fourth century than those that date to the second and third centuries. Rutgers argues that the reason for OT scenes in the fourth-century wall paintings in the catacombs is due to "a typological relationship between both Testaments," meaning that the OT scenes served to prefigure the NT scenes that mainly concerned the life of Christ.[279] For example, the story of Job

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[275] ibid., 85.

[276] ibid.

[277] ibid., 107.

[278] Erwin R. Goodenough, "Early Christian and Jewish Art," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 33, no. 4 (1943): 409.

prefigured the sufferings of Christ; similarly, the sacrifice of Isaac was used as an example of the Crucifixion of Christ.[280] Rutgers' argument relates back to my earlier discussion of Christians using the established ideas of Judaism to gain credentials as a new religion. It seems as though Christians paired OT scenes with NT scenes that shared similar content in order to have images that were already tolerated by the rest of the population of Rome. Though the artwork was not necessarily used to impress passersby or outsiders, it is possible that non-Christians saw the artwork.

The continuance of the OT scenes in the fourth century seems to also suggest a larger issue: the early Christians' faced an identity crisis. They wished to both hold onto their beliefs that they established from the Jews as well as to develop their own beliefs. It is quite telling that Christians began incorporating depictions of the Crucifixion into their artwork in this period because it indicates some confidence about their beliefs and values. One event that likely contributed to the rise of Crucifixion imagery in the fourth century is the Battle at the Milvian Bridge in 312 C.E.[281] In this battle, Constantine defeated his pagan opponents after he saw a sign of the cross in the sky and hears, "In this sign you will conquer."[282] This battle marked the beginning of the cross becoming a Christian symbol and Constantine's devotion to the religion.[283] Thus, although the OT scenes continue in catacomb wall paintings in the fourth century, the fact that the NT imagery becomes the central focus – and we will observe this more in the sarcophagi – suggests that

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[279] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 110.

[280] ibid.

[281] ibid., 113.

[282] ibid.

[283] ibid.

Christians were beginning to realize that they would not be a subset of Judaism, but their own religion. Through observing the incorporation of particular scenes on the burial containers, the few sarcophagi that come from the catacombs further illustrate the relationship between the Jews and early Christians.

Sarcophagi: The sarcophagi found in the catacombs are another helpful artistic form for observing the distinctions between the Jewish and Christian communities, the development of early Christian art, and the development of Christianity out of Judaism.

In addition to wall paintings, sarcophagi also show differences between the Jewish and Christian communities. Sarcophagi are containers used for burial that were made out of stone or marble.[284] They include inscriptions as well as engravings of many pictorial scenes.[285] Before discussing the sarcophagi from the Jewish and Christian catacombs, it is important to know the challenges archaeologists and scholars have faced and the limitations that we will face.

Unlike the wall paintings, which are situated and cannot be moved, the sarcophagi and other archaeological materials could be, and frequently were, relocated.[286] Many sarcophagi were found inside as well as outside the catacombs, but it is difficult to determine whether the catacombs were the original home for the sarcophagi.[287] As a result, archaeologists have had a hard time identifying sarcophagi as Jewish, Christian, or pagan.[288] They rely on three forms of identification: (1) If the sarcophagus was found *in situ*; (2) if the inscription indicates that pagans, Christians, or

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[284] ibid., 160.

[285] ibid.

[286] *The Jews in Late Ancient Rome: Evidence of Cultural Interaction in the Roman Diaspora*, 77.

[287] ibid.

[288] ibid.

Jews used it; and (3) if the iconography of the piece suggests a pagan, Christian, or Jewish commission.[289] Still, a vast number of sarcophagi fragments have yet to be identified.[290]

There are specific limitations of sarcophagi within the context of this topic. Only very wealthy members of the communities purchased sarcophagi because they were an expensive form of burial.[291] As we know, the Jewish and Christian communities were of low economic status, therefore, neither of these communities had a particularly large number of sarcophagi within their catacombs. Only a small number of the sarcophagi found are identified as having been used by the Jews in the Jewish catacombs.[292] That being said, the sarcophagi from the Jewish catacombs are the "largest group of sarcophagi found anywhere in the ancient diaspora."[293] There are 22 sarcophagi that have been almost certainly identified as Jewish from a Jewish catacomb in Rome.[294] It is unclear how many sarcophagi survive from the Christian catacombs because no scholar has produced a full list. Many of the Christian sarcophagi[295] come from not only the catacombs, but also from basilicas, mausolea, necropoli, or unknown locations.[296]

The Jewish sarcophagi demonstrate key aspects of the Jewish community, including the language, content of the inscriptions, and preferred forms of iconography. The 22 identified

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[289] ibid., 78.

[290] Adia Konikoff, *Sarcophagi from the Jewish Catacombs of Ancient Rome: A Catalogue Raisonne* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990), 11.

[291] ibid.

[292] ibid., 11.

[293] ibid.

[294] ibid., 57.

[295] Many of these sarcophagi are on display in the Museo Pio Cristiano, which is part of the Vatican museums.

[296] Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome: A Comprehensive Guide*, 26-28.

sarcophagi are broken down into three main categories: three are only known from archaeologists'

records (but the actual sarcophagi are now lost), nine were found *in situ*, and ten were removed

from their site.[297] Most of the sarcophagi from the Jewish catacombs of Rome date to the second

half of the third century C.E.[298]

The inscriptions on the sarcophagi are similar to the funerary inscriptions on the regular

tombs, which include the name of the deceased as well as the position he held within the religious

community. Many report that the member was an archon, a position of high importance within the

Jewish congregation.[299] For example, a sarcophagus found in the Vigna Cimarra catacomb shares

in the inscription that the deceased member was Jonathan who was an archon.[300] The fact that the

archon would be the only position appearing on the sarcophagi supports the theory that only

particularly wealthy members of the congregation would have invested in this form of burial. Like

the inscriptions on the regular tombs, the majority of the inscriptions on these sarcophagi are in

Greek; only one is in Latin, and one of those in Greek includes some Hebrew.[301]

The artwork includes similar images found in the wall paintings, including religious and

non-religious images. At least four of the sarcophagi include the most common Jewish symbol,

the menorah.[302] One sarcophagus found in the Via Appia catacomb includes the menorah, a shofar,

and the lulav and etrog pair.[303] In contrast, there are a few sarcophagi fragments from the Villa

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[297] For a full description and image of each of the 22 sarcophagi, see Konikoff, *Sarcophagi from the Jewish Catacombs of Ancient Rome: A Catalogue Raisonne*.

[298] ibid., 36.

[299] ibid.

[300] ibid., 25.

[301] ibid.

[302] ibid.

Torlonia that have non-religious images, such as a lion mask and a rural scene.[304] The variety of words and images on the sarcophagi identified as Jewish support what we found in the inscriptions and wall paintings: Jews spoke predominantly Greek, they prioritized the member's role in the religious community, and their art included only religious symbols and non-religious scenes, but were absent of any Old Testament scenes.

Christian sarcophagi portray the development of early Christian art, especially the increasing importance of Christ in Christian iconography, and the gradual replacement of OT scenes with NT scenes.[305] The majority of Christian sarcophagi date to the fourth century, which was the NT phase.[306] As we learned from the discussion of wall paintings, the Christians began to include NT scenes in the fourth century, but OT scenes did not disappear. Due to the ambiguity concerning the original location of the sarcophagi, we do not know where many of the Christian sarcophagi came from. Therefore, we will be considering a fourth-century Christian sarcophagus that may or may not have originally come from a Christian catacomb that best shows the development of early Christian art.[307]

The fourth-century sarcophagus of Junius Bassus[308] includes both OT and NT scenes, but the exact placement of the scenes on the sarcophagus portrays the development of early Christian

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[303] ibid., 19-20.

[304] ibid., 30-33.

[305] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 110.

[306] Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome: A Comprehensive Guide*, 28-29.

[307] Some sarcophagi in the Pio Christian Museum gallery have been identified as coming from Christian catacombs or were found near them. An early fourth-century sarcophagus is believed to have come from the Catacomb of San Callisto and includes Miracle scenes, scenes of the Manger and scenes from the *Book of Jonah*. A sarcophagus dating to the second half of the fourth century was found near the Catacomb of Praetextatus on the Via Appia Antica and includes three shepherds standing on ornate pedestals, carrying sheep on their shoulders. For more on these sarcophagi and others within the Museum's collection, see ibid., 26-28.

art, the growing importance of Christ as the central figure of the religion, and the diminishing tie

of the Christians and the Jews.[309] It is not clear exactly where the sarcophagus was originally

located – it may or may not have been a Christian catacomb – but it was found near the *confessio*

of St. Peter's in the sixteenth century.[310] The sarcophagus is very "richly decorated" with several

niches of sculpted figures arranged in two horizontal rows.[311] (See Appendix L.) The main focus

of the sarcophagus is Christ, who is depicted in the center niche with the apostles Peter and Paul.[312]

Below Christ is a man who is considered the personification of the skies.[313] On the left and right

of the central niche are scenes that depict parts of Jesus' life as well as scenes from the OT and

NT. The scenes on the top row, from left to right, are Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the arrest of

Peter, the arrest of Christ, and Christ before Pilate.[314] The scenes on the bottom row, from left to

right, are Job sitting on a hill, the Temptation of Adam of Eve, Christ entering Jerusalem, Daniel

in the Lions' Den, and a relief which has been interpreted as either Paul's arrest or him specifically

being led to his martyrdom.[315]

It is significant that though the sarcophagus includes OT scenes, all of them point to the

trajectory of Christ's life and place the focus on Christ, suggesting his growing significance in

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[308] Junius Bassus was a high Roman official (a prefect of Rome) who died in 359 C.E. immediately after he had been baptized and converted to Christianity. From ibid., 13.

[309] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 111.

[310] Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome: A Comprehensive Guide*, 13.

[311] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 112.

[312] ibid.

[313] ibid.

[314] Webb, *The Churches and Catacombs of Early Christian Rome: A Comprehensive Guide*, 13; Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 112.

[315] ibid.

Christianity. Rutgers points out, "Even though Christ is still represented as a young man on some […] sarcophagi, his presence became much more important and central than had been the case hitherto."[316] Therefore, the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus is a helpful sarcophagus for tracing the significant development of Christianity during the fourth century, as Christ became a core figure in the religion, and the religion's followers became more distinguished from the Jews.

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[316] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 112.

CONCLUSION

Together Jews and Christians brought to the Roman world their most significant social contribution, a deep sense of community satisfaction through an identifying word: PAX - shalom. Finally, the Jews of Rome built an identity vis-à-vis Roman culture. Christians, on the other hand, infused the symbols of Rome with new meaning and created new ones. That inculturation[317] created a new culture.[318]

While Graydon Snyder comments on the similarities and differences between the two communities, he highlights one particularly notable shared practice between the Jews and Christians: the inclusion of peace in their funerary inscriptions. Snyder also emphasizes the Jews and Christians' differing approaches to assimilation and acculturation in Rome; the Jews created an identity within Roman culture whereas the Christians altered Roman symbols (as well as Jewish concepts, like those from the OT) so that they fit their newly developed religious beliefs, and from there, they developed their own original iconography. These similarities and differences begin to touch upon the various components of the catacombs examined in this thesis, and more broadly the two communities in question.

This thesis surveyed the several overlapping qualities of the two communities as well as many distinguishing features in order to trace the development of the Christian community out of the Jewish community in ancient Rome. Chapter One exposed the difficult nature of explaining

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[317] Snyder defines inculturation as "a new term [used] to describe a style of cultural interaction which allows for an aggressive promotion of an *outside* myth without seeking to dominate or destroy an invaded culture" (72). For more on this, see Snyder, "The Interaction of Jews with Non-Jews in Rome," 69-90.

[318] ibid., 90.

the development of Judaism and Christianity. Some scholars advocate for a clear "parting of the ways," whereas others argue that there was no "parting of the ways" because the two religions are so closely connected.

The following two chapters illustrated through ancient literary sources the developments and characteristics of the two communities in Rome. The Jewish community of smaller synagogues practiced a number of religious traditions and did not encounter complete tolerance or intolerance, but rather periods of acceptance or repression under various emperors. The emerging Christian community was linked to the Jews in Rome, as the first Christians were Jews. At the start of its development, the community faced intolerance in the forms of expulsion and persecution. Due to these tensions between Romans and Christians, house-churches became the selected place for Christians to worship and pray in a private space where they could welcome new members as well as be safe from the Roman authorities.

The next three chapters turned to the archaeological evidence for the two communities. Chapter Four shared how the shortage of land space due to the ever-growing population in Rome called for an alternative form of burial. The underground nature of the catacombs works to our advantage because it enabled far more to be preserved in comparison to above ground cemeteries. The discussion in Chapter Five shared information about the six Jewish catacombs and some of the 60 Christian catacombs as well as spent time discussing the challenge of dating the tombs. Despite this unfortunate reality, the inscriptions and artwork inform more about these two communities, particularly significant information that we do not gather from the literary sources.

The inscriptions reveal the language spoken and the epithet content. The Jewish community had predominantly Greek-speakers while the Christian community had predominantly Latin-speakers. The few inscriptions in Greek suggest the connection between the Jewish followers of

Christ and the Jews. As Snyder states in the quote provided at the beginning of this conclusion, the communities introduced the sense of community through peace, which set their epitaphs apart from pagan inscriptions. The role of the community member, which was included in their inscriptions, however, is a component that distinguished the two communities: Jews included religious roles while Christians included non-religious professions. In the artwork, we again saw points of similarity and difference. The core symbols found in the inscriptions, wall paintings, and sarcophagi were different between the two communities. However, some Jewish and Christian artwork included floral imagery, demonstrating that both communities were assimilating. Unlike the Jewish artwork, the Christian artwork included OT and NT scenes, which reveals the Christians' close relationship with the Jews.

Thus, these parallels and variations in the inscriptions and artwork trace the path of the Christians in Rome beginning as Jews following Jesus who then became their own distinct community with their own religion. This relationship, so clearly shown through the ancient literary sources and archaeological evidence, is often forgotten today. Remembering this connection may allow for a mutual understanding, and with that, a hope that the two communities can interact with each other with less tension and animosity and instead with more ease and amity.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS[319]

arcosolium (pl. *arcosolia)*:   type of burial that was a large horizontal niche built into the

wall lengthwise with an arch-shaped area above used for decoration

catacomb: underground tomb (subterranean cemetery) made up of

passageways, niches, and chambers cut into the tuff

cremation: incineration of corpses

cubiculum (pl. *cubicula*):   chamber that had several burials of *arcosolium* type; typically small

rooms off of a gallery that served extended families, *collegia*, or

groups of clergy

hypogeum (pl. *hypogea)*:   underground tomb chamber; subterranean family grave

inhumation: interment of corpses

Late Antiquity: period from third to sixth century C.E.

loculus (pl. *loculi*):   rectangular grave cut into the walls of the catacombs; most common

type of burial; also known as a "slot" burial used for a member of

the lower class

martyr: person killed because of their religious beliefs

mausoleum (pl. mausolea):   tomb located above ground

sarcophagus (pl. sarcophagi): stone or marble container used for burial

tuff: volcanic soil into which the catacombs were built

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[319] This list was inspired by Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 159-60.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: "Standard view of the 'Parting of the Ways'"[320]

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[320] Goodman, "Modeling the 'Parting of the Ways'," 121.

APPENDIX B: "Different datings of the 'Parting of the Ways'"[321]

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[321] ibid., 122.

APPENDIX C: Jewish and Christian Catacombs in Rome by Location[323]

Location/Road	Jewish Catacombs	Christian Catacombs[322]
Via Flaminia		1. S. Valentinus
Via Salaria Vetus		2. Pamphilus 3. Via Paisiello 4. Bassilla-S. Hermes 5. Ad Clivum Cucumeris
Via Salaria (Nova)		6. Maximus-S. Felicitas 7. Thrason 8. Jordani-S. Alexander 9. via Anapo 10. Priscilla
Via Nomentana	12. Villa Torlonia (a.k.a. Via Nomentana)	11. Nicomedes 13. S. Agnes 14. Majus 15. Vigna Rosselli
Via Tiburtina		16. Cipriaca-S. Laurentinus 17. Novatianus 18. S. Hippolytus
Via Praenestina		19. Gordiani
Via Labicana	22. Vigna Apolloni (a.k.a. Via Labicana or Via Casilina)	20. Aurelii-Manzoni 21. S. Castulus 23. Ad duas lauros-Ss. Petrus et Marcellinus 24. Centocelle 25. del Grande-Villa Cellere
Via Latina (Modern-day Via Casilina)		26. Ss. Gordianus et Epimachius 27. Villa Del Vecchio (Via Latina) 28. Trebius Justus 29. Tertullinus-S. Eugenia 30. via Dino Compagni 31. Apronianus 32. Cava della Rossa 33. S. Stephanus

[322] The Christian catacombs listed above add up to 63. One that does not appear in this list is the Catacomb of San Panfilo, located on Via Salaria Vecchia (underneath modern-day Via Paisiello). It is unclear whether this is the same catacomb as number 3 in this table. San Panfilo is mentioned several times in Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*.

[323] This table was compiled by the following source: Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Location/Road	Jewish Catacombs	Christian Catacombs
Via Appia	40. Vigna Randanini (a.k.a. Via Appia) *Not numbered on map*: Vigna Cimarra (a.k.a. Vigna Limiti) AND Vigna Appia Pignatelli	34. Campana, ad Scipiones 35. Cacciatori 36. Vibia 37. Santa Croce 38. Casale dei Pupazzi 39. Praetextatus 41. Circus Maxenti 42. S. Soteris 43. Lucinakrypten 44. S. Callixtus 45. Casale della Torretta 46. Vigna Chiaravoglio 47. S. Sebastianus 48. Polimanti
Via Ardeatina		49. Balbina-S. Marcus 50. Martiri non identificati 51. Basileus-Ss. Marcus et Marcellianus 52. Domitilla 53. Nunziatella
Via Ostiensis		54. Commodilla 55. S. Paulus 56. Timotheus
Via Laurentina		57. S. Thecla
Via Portuensis	58. Monteverde	59. Pontianus-Ss. Abdon et Sennen 60. Ad Insali(s)atos-S. Felix 61. Basilica Julii 62. Generosa
Via Aurelia		63. S. Pancratius 64. Doria Pamphilj 65. Ss. Processus et Martinianus 66. Duo Felices 67. Calepodius

APPENDIX D: Plan of Rome with an indication of the consular roads and of the location of the Jewish and Christian catacombs.[324]

Image removed to comply with copyright.

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[324] ibid., 148-49.

APPENDIX E: Language of Inscriptions by Catacombs by Number and Percentage[325]

Catacomb	Greek	Latin	Semitic	Bilingual	Totals
Monteverde	161 (78.2%)	41 (19.9%)	3 (1.4%)	1 (0.5%)	206
Appia	124 (63.6%)	71 (36.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	195
Nomentana	63 (92.6%)	4 (6.0%)	1 (1.4%)	0 (0%)	68
Others	57 (87.7%)	7 (10.8%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.5%)	65
Totals	405	123	4	2	534

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[325] Inspired by a table from Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 77.

APPENDIX F: Symbols Found in Jewish Catacombs[326]

1) *Seven-branched candelabrum or menorah*: It has been found it no fewer than 144 of the 534 inscriptions. It had also been discovered on closures of tombs, in decorations of *arcosolia* and tomb chambers, on sarcophagi, gold glasses, lamps, and on the seals of rings. The most common form is with six curved arms with a middle straight arm (to create seven branches) but it has also been found with more rectangular elbows or with diagonal branches that make it look tree-like. The menorah became a symbol of Judaism, appearing in a number of inscriptions.

2) *Lulav (also known as lulab) and Etrog*: The lulab (branch) has been found in 34 inscriptions and etrog (yellow citron) in 27 inscriptions. These are ritual objects used for the Jewish holiday, Sukkot. The lulab appears in various forms, sometimes as a simple branch and other times in more elaborate from with many branches. The lulab is usually seen as a circular object with a stem attached. Sometimes artists got more creative included realistic details such as "protuberances of the fruit" and leaves. In some cases, the image has been interpreted as a turnip or other root vegetable, and been understood as the bitter herb, which appears at the Passover dinner.

3) *Flask*: The flask is found in 27 inscriptions. Since it normally appears with the menorah, it has often been interpreted as an oil vessel. However, there are at least three examples of when it appears without the menorah so it has often been understood as wine flask, for the sacramental use of wine. The common image is a two-handled vessel, but other more unique forms are a large amphora, spherical vase, and a two-handled chalice.

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[326] This list was compiled by the following sources: ibid., 196-202; Snyder, "The Interaction of Jews with Non-Jews in Rome," 79-80; Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 151.

4) *Shofar (ritual horn)*: The shofar has been seen in 14 inscriptions. It is general found in its most standard form, but occasionally has been depicted with more of an emphasis on the horn aspect. It is almost always found with other symbols, commonly the menorah, lulav, and etrog.

5) *Aron hakodesh/Ark of the Law*: The Ark of the Law in has been found in six inscriptions, all from the Monteverde catacomb. The ark is always depicted with a triangular pediment on top and two doors open, showing the scrolls of the Torah from the endwise portrayed as circles. The depiction of the scrolls or the extent of the scrolls has varied from one representation to the next. Goodenough has described the shrine with its doors open as symbolizing "the cosmic and heavenly place of the Law as a divine symbol."[327] The inclusion of the Ark has been interpreted to mean that the person buried had lived according to the Torah.

6) *Miscellaneous Objects*: Birds (unidentifiable by species) appear on nine inscriptions). Figures of animals – maybe ram, bull, calf, bovine animal – have appeared on five of these inscriptions. There are other objects found in inscriptions, but of doubtful identification.

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[327] Goodenough, "Catacomb Art," 136.

APPENDIX G: Distribution of Symbols Accompanying Inscriptions by Catacomb[328]

Symbol (Total)	Monteverde	Via Appia	Via Nomentana	Via Cimarra	Others
Menorah (144)	75	46	10	-	13
Lulab (34)	20	10	2	-	2
Etrog (27)	17	9	-	1	-
Flask (27)	17	9	-	1	-
Shofar (14)	11	3	-	-	-
Ark (6)	6	-	-	-	-
Total	146	77	12	2	15

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[328] This table was inspired by Leon and Osiek, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, 196.

APPENDIX H: Symbols Found in Christian Catacombs[329]

1) *The Good Shepherd*[330]: The most frequent of all images found in the Christian catacombs is the good shepherd. It is often set in a "country" setting with trees and plants. The shepherd takes one of three roles when it appears in the Christian artwork: The shepherd carries the lost sheep on his shoulders, as mentioned in Matthew[331] and Luke[332]; the shepherd pastures or guards his flock as in Psalm 23 and in John 10:3; or the shepherd milks his sheep.

2) *The Fish*: The fish was a symbolic image in Christian art because it depicted a number of images at the core of Christianity. First and foremost, the fish depicts Christ himself. The Greek word for fish is ichthys (ΙΧΘΥΣ), is an acrostic for **I**esous **C**hristos **T**heou **Y**ios **S**oter, meaning "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." Sometimes in other occurrences the fish appears at the sacred meal, representing Christ. In other instances, the fish represents the disciples as "fishers of men" which comes Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1.17 ("Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men").

3) *Monogram of Christ*: This symbol is also referred to as Chi-Rho or the Constantinian Monogram. Chi and Rho are the first two letters (XP) of Christ's name in Greek ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ. The letters are mainly found after the beginning of the Constantinian era (312-337 CE).

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[329] This list was compiled by Snyder, "The Interaction of Jews with Non-Jews in Rome," 81-5.

[330] *The Shepherd* is the name of the prophetical work of Hermas, produced at Rome in the first half of the second century C.E.

[331] Matthew 18:12-13 states, "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off."

[332] Luke 15.5 states, "And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders."

Persecuted Christians used it in the catacombs and Constantine held the symbol at victorious armies when he was struggling to become emperor.

4) *Dove with the olive branch*: The dove is depicted with the olive branch in its beak or at its feet. This symbol represents divine peace and happiness of the soul/deceased. The olive branch comes from the story of Noah, as the piece of vegetation that the dove returns to Noah with is a sign that the flood is over and that the land is now habitable (Genesis 8:11). The dove also, though very infrequently in catacomb art, represents the Holy Spirit.

5) *The Anchor*: The boat anchor usually represents the expectation of eternal life. It likely comes from Hebrews 6:19: "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." It can, however, also represent the cross when Christians feared to depict the cross at the risk of persecution. The crosspiece at the top of the anchor was reminiscent of the cross where Jesus died.

6) *The Praying Figure*: This symbol is of a Christian (perhaps depicting the deceased) with arms raised or outstretched in prayer or praise. Usually the orante (*Orans* is translated as one who is praying or pleading) stands and with the elbows at the sides of the body and with the hands outstretched sideways, palms up. It symbolizes the soul's assurance of living in peace with God.

7) *Other Symbols*:

   a. *The peacock*: representing eternal life

   b. *The ship of the church*: emulating Noah's ark, carrying Christians safely to their eternal destination in heaven

   c. *Palm branches*: a symbol of victory in heaven

d. *Vine, branches, and grape clusters*: Derived from John 15:1-6, "I am the vine, you are the branches."

8) *Images representing the faithful who are busy at work or tools of their trade:* Instead of inscribing the name of the deceased's occupation, they sometimes portrayed their profession through symbols; i.e. wine barrels, balances, chisels, axes, spindles, compasses, modii (unit of measurement for grain), hammers, scissors, and musical instruments.

APPENDIX I: Common Old and New Testament Scenes in Christian Catacombs[333]

Old Testament Scenes

1. The Creation of Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:20-25): Believed to symbolize God's love for humanity in the Creation.

2. Noah and the Great Flood (Gen. 8:6-11): Believed to symbolize peace on Earth and faith in God.

3. Abraham and his Son, Isaac (Gen. 22:1-18): Believed to symbolize faith in God and hope for a renewed life.

4. Moses and the Flight from Egypt (Ex. 14; 17:1-7): Believed to symbolize heroic faith.

5. Daniel in the Lions' Den (Dan. 6:1-23): Believed to symbolize suggest that faith is liberating.

6. The Young Men in the Fiery Furnace (Dan. 3): Believed to share that faith in God liberates people from death.

7. The Story of the Prophet Jonah (Jonah): Believed to symbolize a promise of resurrection and suggests that a prophet's faith liberated him from death.

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[333] These lists were compiled by the following sources: Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*; Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity*; Goodenough, "Early Christian and Jewish Art."

New Testament Scenes

1. Birth of Jesus in Bethlehem through His Resurrection and its Aftermath

2. The Birth of Jesus

3. The Magi Kings

4. The Madonna and Child

5. The Baptism of Christ by John the Baptist

6. The Wedding at Cana

7. The Samaritan Woman

8. The Healing of the Paralytic Man

9. The Healing of the Blind Man

10. The Resurrection of Lazarus

11. The Last Supper

12. The Entrance into Jerusalem

13. The Denial of Peter

14. Jesus before Pilate

15. The Crucifixion

16. The Resurrection

APPENDIX J: Old and New Testament Images in Selected Christian Catacombs[334]

Name	Old Testament Decoration	New Testament Decoration
St. Callixtus[335]	Sacrifice of Abraham; Jonah (various scenes); Moses striking the rock	Baptism of Jesus with fisherman to left and paralytic carrying his bed to right; The Eucharist with loaves and fish (maybe a basket containing wine); cubiculum of the Seasons
Domitilla	Moses striking rock; David and his sling; Daniel in Lion's Den	The sheep and the serpent; The martyr Petronella introduces Veneranda to paradise with open book and box for books to the right; Christ seated with Peter and Paul; Resurrection of Lazarus; Apostolic College and Good Shepherd on apse
Praetextatus	Susanna as a lamb who is being persecuted by elders depicted as wolves with figures of saints on right and left	The Shepherd defending his flock from a wild ass and a wild boar; The crown of thorns (Mk 15:19 "They struck his head with a reed.")
San Sebastiano	Balaam pointing to the star (supposedly representing Moses receiving the law)	Graffiti invoking Apostles Peter and Paul; Flock of sheep with "Good Shepherd"
Commodilla	Moses striking rock (Roman soldiers receive the water); Job	The denial of Peter; fresco of Madonna with martyrs Felix, Adauctus, and widow Turtura
St. Agnese	Moses and Aaron attacked by their countrymen	Virgin and Child; Christ as judge with box of books; fresco with Madonna and Child

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[334] This table was compiled by the following sources: Fiocchi Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions*; Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Rediscovered Monuments of Early Christianity*; Pergola, Severini, and Barbini, *Christian Rome: Early Christian Rome: Catacombs and Basilicas*.

[335] Biblical images in this catacomb were painted between 320 and 350 C.E.

Name	Old Testament Decoration	New Testament Decoration
Sts. Marcellinus and Peter	Moses striking the rock, Noah in ark with dove and raven; Balaam pointing to the star (supposedly representing Moses receiving the law); Daniel, Noah, and Jonah	Christ enthroned between Sts. Peter and Paul; Wedding at Cana with Jesus touching jars with his staff – baptism to left and *orans* to right; the multiplication of the loaves; the heavenly banquet; man with the book; *cubiculum* of the Seasons; *arcosolium* with banquet scene
Priscilla	Three young men in the furnace with dove flying over them; story of Susanna with elders laying hands on her head and Daniel aiding her	Prophet Balaam before Virgin and Child pointing to the star; The Annunciation with Virgin seated; Virgin with Divine Child; The Eucharist; The Good Shepherd
Via Latina	Adam and Eve; Moses discovered by Pharaoh's daughter; Crossing of Red Sea (includes Moses with rod, Egyptians overwhelmed, and Hebrews unarmed); Balaam pointing to the star (representing Moses receiving the law); Samson and the lion; the ascension of Elijah; Jacob at Bethel with vision of heavenly ladder; Jacob blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, sons of Joseph	Raising of Lazarus with large crowd and above, the cloud and pillar with Moses about to receive the law; Jesus and the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well; The sermon on the mount; Soldiers casting lots for the tunic of Jesus

APPENDIX K: Table of Paintings in the Catacombs[336]

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[336] Lamberton, "The Development of Christian Symbolism as Illustrated in Roman Catacomb Painting," 518-22.

APPENDIX K *Continued***:**

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APPENDIX K *Continued***:**

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APPENDIX K *Continued***:**

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APPENDIX L: Image of Junius Bassus' Sarcophagus[337]

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[337] Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City*, 111.