

The Intellectual History of Catacomb Archaeology (draft)¹

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Abstract

Since their discovery, the Roman catacombs have been studied by a variety of scholars of different nationalities, religions, and disciplines. I will provide a historical overview of the social, political, and religious contexts of the study of the Roman catacombs as a means of investigating the following questions: How have the Christian catacombs and the Jewish catacombs been treated differently by scholars? How have the catacombs been presented (both physically and in publications) to a religious, academic, and general public? How does this intellectual heritage inform the study of the catacombs today?

The study of the Roman catacombs has been an important part of a long-standing tradition of religious inquiry. The catacombs are perhaps unusual as a subject of archaeological study in their relation to a living religion. I use the term “catacomb archaeology” in the title of my paper in the broadest sense of the study of the past through its material culture. For sites such as that catacombs that have been continuously known instead of newly excavated or discovered, new information and insight comes from new approaches and from “excavating” the archives of

¹ Sections of this paper are based on “Exploration of the Catacombs” in *Vaults of Memory: The Roman Jewish Catacombs and Their Context in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, Estelle S. Brettman, Amy K. Hirschfeld, and

previous study. Context is essential in archaeological research—not only the context of the past and its material remains but also the context of each present in which research has been conducted.

The question traditionally asked by historians and archaeologists “How does the past influence the present and how has the present grown out of the past?” is increasingly being reversed to contextualize the work of the historians and archaeologists. The questions now being asked are “How does the present influence the past? and “How is our interpretation of the past colored by the present and restricted or prescribed by current social, political, and religious conditions?” Such questions can be productively examined from the perspective of the various “presents” in which the catacombs have been studied. How the catacombs have been studied *and* presented to academic audiences (in scholarly publications) and a general audience (in popular writing, tourist sites, and museum displays) forms an essential component of the evidence many scholars have historically relied upon in their interpretations of the catacombs, which have largely been viewed, even in “serious” scholarship of the past, as sites of connection to the past to legitimize the present. The same desire to be close to the “sacred” that led the ancient Christians to want to be buried in the catacombs near saints and martyrs motivated many later researchers.

Present religious sentiment, especially when concern with the past as a means of legitimizing the present, has a profound effect on the practice of archaeological excavation, interpretation, and presentation.² Throughout the history of their study, the catacombs have often

Florence Z. Wolsky. Forthcoming.

² This can sometimes become an obstruction to objective research when continued research depends on the good will of a host country or institution that may not want to risk the possible religious and political upheaval that could

been used as evidence to support preconceived notions rather than studied objectively in their own right. Many of the main figures in the history of catacomb exploration did not employ the “scientific” methods they are known for for the sake of objective science but rather for the sake of material documentation of already-known religious “facts.”

Sixth Century through the Middle Ages

The catacombs ceased to be actively used for burials in the fourth through sixth centuries C.E., having been gradually replaced by above-ground cemeteries. By the end of the third century, the site of the catacomb of S. Sebastian became the center for Christian veneration of Peter and Paul. Evidence for this use of the basilica can still be seen today in pilgrims’ Latin and Greek graffiti invoking the two apostles on the walls of the portico. Even after active burial in the catacombs ceased, the catacombs continued to be visited. Many of the catacombs were converted into martyrs’ shrines in the fourth and fifth centuries, and above-ground sanctuaries and cemeterial basilicas, sometimes linked to the catacombs by tunnels, were built for the veneration of the martyrs. Pope Damasus (366–384) enlarged and decorated sections of the catacombs that contained martyrs’ tombs and verified these tombs by affixing epigrams near them. The refurbishing of these sacred areas continued until at least the eighth century, and they attracted both Roman Christians and pilgrims who visited the catacombs for prayer and devotion. *Itinerari*, written as guides for pilgrims, especially during the seventh and eighth centuries, and

occur as a result of archaeological findings indicating that the past is not consistent with the present.

the *Liber Pontificalis*,³ begun in the late fifth-early sixth century, were valuable topographical resources for later scholars, aiding in the discovery and identification of the burial grounds.

After the last repairs to the cemeteries and martyrial shrines made by Popes Hadrian and Leo the Third at the end of the eighth century and beginning of the ninth century, there was an extensive removal of relics of the saints from their shrines and burial places in the catacombs, which were all outside the city walls, to churches within the city walls.⁴ Eventually, the cemeteries were totally abandoned, with the exception of a few galleries in certain catacombs that continued to be visited during the Middle Ages. By and large, only the sanctuaries of S. Laurence (and the adjoining catacomb of S. Cyriaca) on the Via Tiburtina, S. Pancratius on the Via Aurelia, S. Valentine on the Via Flaminia,⁵ and S. Sebastiano and Sant' Agnese which were located below martyrial churches were continuously visited.

There is no known documentation of pilgrimages to the Jewish catacombs in Rome. The apparent lack of documentation of Jewish catacombs would seem to indicate that knowledge of these catacombs had faded altogether once they ceased to be actively used for burial. However, the *Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela* seems to indicate that there was an awareness of the Monteverde catacomb in the twelfth century. Benjamin of Tudela was a rabbi from Spain who

³ The "Book of the Popes," is a biographical history of the popes from St. Peter through the fifteenth century and includes information on their burial places.

⁴ This large-scale removal may have been prompted by the presence of foreign invaders or could have resulted from gradual changes in ecclesiastical policy to allow the transportation of relics. See Irina Taïssa Oryshkevich, "The History of the Roman Catacombs from the Age of Constantine to the Renaissance" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 2003).

⁵ The galleries of S. Pancratius remained open in the Middle Ages, because the remains of S. Pancratius had not been moved to a church. They were eventually destroyed during the French Revolution when all of the martyrs' relics were removed. A fourth-century Constantinian basilica built over the tomb of St. Laurence in the catacomb of Cyriaca was expanded by both Sixtus III (in 432) and Honorius III (in 1218), keeping the memory and location of this catacomb alive, but it was ultimately damaged during an enlargement of the modern San Lorenzo cemetery. The body of S. Valentine was moved to the Church of Santa Prassede in the fourteenth century and the catacomb in

undertook extensive travels to southern Europe and Palestine in 1165–1173. He noted the existence of a “cave in a hill on the bank of the Tiber” in which the ten Jewish martyrs were buried. This observation could indicate that in 1166 Roman Jews knew of an ancient Jewish underground cemetery in this location.⁶

The common conception that the catacomb faded totally into an obscurity after the translation of relics to churches in the eighth and ninth centuries until their “rediscovery” in sixteenth century is not entirely true. The *Mirabilia urbis Romae*, a popular guidebook for Rome began in the twelfth century and enjoying popularity for several centuries, continued to include several catacombs in almost all of its editions, and numerous visitors in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, including Renaissance humanists such as Petrarch, wrote about their visits to the catacombs.⁷ However, there was not much interest in the exploration and study of the catacombs until the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. By that time, the locations and even the names of many of the catacombs had been forgotten. In the fifteenth century, reawakening humanistic interests and the visits of pilgrims renewed interest in the catacombs.

Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries

which it had previously been buried was neglected, eventually even being used as a wine cellar. *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913), s.v. “Early Roman Christian Cemeteries.”

⁶ Benjiman ben Jonah, *The Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela*. (translated with commentary by Marcus Nathan Adler), London (1907), pp. 5-9. Caution must be taken in viewing this itinerary as historical “fact” as it is replete with miracle stories, legends, and embellishments. However, it is descended from a long tradition of rabbinic writing, an important feature of which is the affirmation or validation of the present by association with significant events of antiquity. Rutgers, *Cultural Interaction*, pp. 3-5.

⁷ Oryshkevich, pp. 67–73, 102–107. See this entire dissertation for evidence that the catacombs were never “forgotten.” For a discussion of the later history of the Christian catacombs, see J. Osborne, “The Roman Catacombs in the Middle Ages,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 53 (1985):278–328.

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are characterized by the first systematic study and exploration of the catacombs, the use of the evidence from the catacombs for religious purposes of the present, and the creation of popular (nonscholarly) literature focused on the catacombs.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the renewed interest and knowledge of the catacombs made them an important destination for many travelers to Rome who followed guidebooks such as the *Mirabilia Urbis Romae* and who wrote about their impressions of the catacombs, although some of their descriptions seem to be copied from the guidebooks. The belief in purification and remission of sins in the presence of martyr's relics account for much of the appeal of the catacombs for visitors. Stories of getting lost in the catacombs and having a spiritual reawakening become a common literary theme in the following centuries.⁸

Pomponius Letus and the *Accademia Romana*

The *Accademia Romana degli antiquari*, led by their flamboyant "*pontifex maximus*" Pomponius Letus (1428–1498), wished to broaden their knowledge of classical antiquity by searching for pagan monuments. This unconventional group referred to themselves as *unanimes perscrutatores antiquitatis* (investigators of antiquity). They visited the catacombs of S. Callixtus, SS. Peter and Marcellinus, Praetextatus, and Priscilla.⁹ Pope Paul II considered their actions heretical,¹⁰ and members of the *Accademia* were prosecuted as pagans conspiring against the pope. Letus and other members of the *Accademia* were imprisoned in the Castel Sant'Angelo

⁸ Gaston, p. 147.

⁹ Testini, "Catacombe cristiani," pp. 15-16; see also Ludwig Hertling and Engelbert Kirschbaum, *The Roman Catacombs and their Martyrs* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1956). Hertling and Kirschbaum disparagingly refer to the *Accademia Romana* as "half-pagan humanists [with] no interest in Christian antiquities" (p. 3).

¹⁰ Giovanni Battista De Rossi, *La Roma sotterranea cristiana descritta ed illustrata*, vol. 1 (Rome: Cromo-

for almost a year, but evidence against them could not be procured. Interestingly, the graffiti they left in the catacomb of S. Callixtus, which would have provided the evidence the authorities needed but was not inscribed until after their imprisonment, was not known until the nineteenth century, when it was discovered by De Rossi.¹¹

Onofrius Panvinius

Religiously oriented investigation began with Onofrius Panvinius (1529–1568), who conducted a well-organized, methodical study of the Christian cemeteries of every known region of the ancient world. Panvinius is credited with beginning a trend of scientific Christian archaeology and was renowned as a great church historian and archaeologist. He focused on the cemeteries of Rome and researched the then-available historical, ecclesiastical, and epigraphic resources. His collection of ancient epigraphy and his only remaining written work, *De ritu sepeliendi mortuos apud veteres christianos et de eorundem coemeteriis*, printed in Cologne in the year of his death, was the earliest treatise to classify ancient Christian inscriptions¹² and indicate that he was aware of regions of 43 cemeteries. He did not explore them, however, and mentioned only three by name: S. Sebastian, S. Cyriaca, and S. Valentine. Thus, his “scientific” approach is primarily derived from a survey of literary rather than material evidence.

Other scholars such as Antonio Agostino and Aldo Manuzio (1450–1515),¹³ who transcribed inscriptions seen during their sole visit to the catacombs, also investigated non-

litografia pontificia, 1864), pp. 2-9. Testini, “Catacombe cristiani,” p. 15.

¹¹ The graffiti included the phrases *regnante pomponio pontifice maximo* (when Pomponio reigned as Pontifex Maximus) and *romanarum puparum delitiae* (delights of Roman girls). Oryshkevich, pp. 219–223.

¹² De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea cristiana*, vol. 1, pp. 9-11.

¹³ Manuzio established a Greek press in Venice, at which italic type, said to be adapted from the handwriting of

Christian material such as pagan inscriptions and imperial medals as well as Church records, thus broadening the scope of their research.

Filippo Neri and the *Cenacolo Filippino*

Filippo Neri (1515–1595), who was later sanctified, founded the *Cenacolo Filippino* in his quest to promote the Catholic Reformation, restore early Christian religious practices, and trace a history of Church events. He spent long hours in the catacombs meditating and frequently preached to his disciples on visits to the Catacomb of St. Sebastian. Neri's devotional focus on the martyrs of the catacombs and their message of suffering and redemption set the stage for the intense interest in the exploration of the catacombs by Antonio Bosio and others in the sixteenth century. Neri appointed his closest follower, Cesare Baronius, to continue his work.

Cardinal Cesare Baronius

Cardinal Cesare Baronius (1538–1607) inaugurated the scientific study of Church history, much as Panvinus was doing with Christian archaeology. He was the leader of the *Oratorio*, an important organization of the Counterreformation or Catholic Reform. By the second half of the sixteenth century, renewed interest in the archaeology of early Christianity was being supported by efforts on the part of both Catholics and Protestants to trace early Church history.¹⁴ Protestant interests led to the production of the *Madeburg Centuries* (1559–1574), a history that criticized the Roman Catholic Church. Baronius's monumental work *Annales ecclesiastici* (1598–1607) was written as a response to the *Madeburg Centuries* and

Plutarch, was first used.

made extensive use of previously ignored collections of Roman manuscripts. This publication earned Baronius the title “Father of Ecclesiastical History” and “[his] name came to be known over Europe as a synonym for unprecedented historical penetration, power of research, and zeal for verification.”¹⁵ Baronius's quest for accuracy, as well as the regard for the catacombs instilled in him by Neri, led him to the catacombs as a frequent subject of study. Baronius recorded the first discovery of any region of subterranean Christian cemeteries adorned with paintings.

Discovery of the Catacomb on the Via Salaria Nuova

May 31, 1578, was an important day in the history of catacomb exploration. While quarrying pozzolana, a volcanic stone, workers made the discovery of an intact Christian catacomb **containing** frescoes, sarcophagi, and inscriptions, in the vineyard of Bartolomeo Sanchez on the Via Salaria Nuova. The discovery captured the imagination of the public and scholars alike who visited the catacomb in great numbers. This catacomb, strikingly painted with Old and New Testament scenes, conjured up visions of a city buried beneath the suburbs of Rome and gave rise to the term *Roma sotterranea*.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Rutgers, *Jews*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁵ *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1913), s.v. “Venerable Cesare Baronius.”

¹⁶ The catacomb on the Via Salaria Nuova was incorrectly identified as the catacomb of Priscilla by Baronius and as the Ostiano cemetery by Alfonso Chacon and later by Bosio. Soon after its discovery, the catacomb was buried by a landslide, precipitated by the continued extraction of pozzolana. Antonio Bosio, who was only three years old at the time of the initial discovery, was later frustrated by his inability to visit this buried treasure and claimed that the diggers who were trapped in the collapse received just retribution. James Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Life and Death in Early Christianity* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1985), p. 51. The cemetery was rediscovered in 1921 by Enrico Josi and again mistakenly identified, this time as the catacomb of the Giordani. The catacomb was recently revealed to be a private cemetery and is now called the Anonymous Cemetery of the Via Anapo. Philippe Pergola, *Le Catacombe Romane: Storia e topografia* (Rome: Carocci editore, 1998), pp. 125-130; Fabrizio Mancinelli, *Catacombs and Basilicas: The Early Christians in Rome* (Florence: Scala, 1981), pp. 45-46. Mistaken identifications of this catacomb have persisted, even in recent works (e.g., W. H. C. Frend, *The Archeology of Early Christianity* [London, 1996]; James Stevenson, *The Catacombs: Life and Death in Early Christianity* [Nashville: T. Nelson, 1978]; and Robert W. Gaston, “British Travellers and Scholars in the Roman Catacombs.”

This “rediscovery of the catacombs” seemed almost providential for the Roman Church, who now had a tangible example in the catacomb frescoes of the early Christian use of images. The Council of Trent in 1563, just fifteen years earlier, had confirmed the value of the visual image, and the evidence from the catacombs took center stage in Reformation debates about sacred imagery.¹⁷

Alfonso Chacon, Philip de Winghe, and Ioanne L'Hereux

Among those who kept alive the newly awakened interest in catacombs were the Spanish Dominican Alfonso Chacon (1540–1599), known as Ciacconio, and the Flemish laymen Philip de Winghe (d. 1592) and his friend the learned Ioanne L'Heureux, known as Macarius. This “noble triumvirate”¹⁸ documented the catacomb on the Via Salaria Nuova as well as the catacombs of Priscilla, Ss. Peter and Marcellinus, S. Valentine, and S. Callixtus, which was recorded at this time as *Coemeterium Zephyrini*. As scholars with antiquarian interests, their work focused on early Christian burial practices in a comparative perspective.

Although Chacon's annotated interpretations were not very accurate and often amusing in their misinformation, much of his work was incorporated in Bosio's later work. His copyists frequently employed the artistic vernacular of the day, making entertaining images that were not particularly conducive to serious study. Chacon's colleague, Philip de Winghe, aware of the

Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 46: 144-165.

¹⁷ The idea of a providential “rediscovery” and its immediate impact may have been popularized by later scholars, especially De Rossi, who identifies May 31, 1578, as the birth date of Christian archaeology. The first mention of the archaeological evidence from the catacombs in treatises dealing with images is in Baronius's *Annales ecclesiastici* (1598–1607). Robert W. Gaston, “British Travellers and Scholars in the Roman Catacombs 1450–1900,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 46 (1983), p. 145, n. 4. See also Oryshkevich (2003).

¹⁸ De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea* I, p. 14.

deficiencies in his friend's work, reproduced and revised the material more accurately.

Unfortunately, de Winghe died prematurely in 1592 without having completed his work, which was not preserved in its entirety.

L'Heureux authored an important study of the monuments, *Hagioglypta, sive picturae et sculpturae sacrae antiquiores, praesertim quae Romae reperiuntur, explicatae a Ioanne L'Heureux*, but it was not published until 1859, by Father Raffaele Garrucci in Paris,¹⁹ and thus was not an important influence on contemporary study.

Before the first discovery of a Jewish catacomb (that of Monteverde in 1602), Jewish epigraphy was recorded in the sixteenth century by de Winghe, Claude Menestrier, and Ciacconio. This epigraphy was probably found above ground and is no longer extant. Almost a century later, in 1685, Jacob Spon of Lyons published the *Miscellanea eruditaе antiquitatis*, which included three Jewish epitaphs from ancient Rome, two of which were those originally recorded by de Winghe.

Antonio Bosio

Antonio Bosio (1575–1629) is regarded as the “Columbus of Roma Sotterranea,” the first person to extensively explore the catacombs physically as opposed to previous literary explorations. Bosio, a friend of Ciacconio, de Winghe, and *Cenacolo* members Baronius and Ugonius, was a student of letters and philosophy and an aspiring lawyer. In 1593 when he was eighteen years old, he visited the catacomb of Domitilla (which was then mistakenly identified

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

as S. Callixtus).²⁰ He enthusiastically devoted to the study of the catacombs and dedicated himself to investigating the catacombs tirelessly.

Between 1593 and 1596, Bosio explored catacombs on the Via Tiburtina, Via Appia, Via Labicana, Via Nomentana, the two Via Salariae, Via Flaminia, and lastly began investigating the Via Portuense in 1600. He went on to discover at least thirty other burial sites, mainly by searching for existing means of entry, at times through *lucernaria* or light-wells. He did not actually excavate or explore obstructed passages, supposedly because of a lack of funds.²¹ In 1602 Bosio explored the Jewish catacomb of Monteverde, which he recognized as Jewish on the basis of the Greek word CYNAGOG (synagogue) and the appearance of menorahs on almost every tomb.

Bosio's extensive explorations enabled him to amass a wealth of new information and earned him the tribute of G. B. De Rossi and numerous other future scholars. De Rossi was impressed by the four enormous volumes of Bosio's papers, which were kept in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana and indicated the immense scale of Bosio's endeavors. Despite Bosio's tireless investigation, he was able to identify only a very few Christian monuments by name and trace their history because of the lack of adequate topographical evidence.

Bosio, as well as many scholars who followed him and emulated his example, considered textual sources almost exclusively in the interpretation of archaeological material. He did not record all of the paintings or sculptural fragments he surely saw. For example, he neglected to describe or copy in detail the famed frescoes and stuccoes of the *orans* figures, the Virgin with child and prophet, and the Good Shepherd in the Priscilla catacomb, although he and his

²⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

illustrator "Toccafondo" (G. A. Santini) sprawled their autographs over the frescoes in the catacomb.

Although Bosio is considered by many to be the first to approach the study the catacombs “scientifically,” his main concern was for the spiritual value of the monuments he was investigating. He considered that catacombs to be tangible evidence of the early Church of the martyrs—evidence “over which, importantly, Catholic Rome has an effective monopoly. To be displayed as title deeds to its unique status as successor to the apostolic Church over and against Protestant counter-claims.”²²

Bosio had intended to publish his work, entitled *Roma sotterranea*, in three parts, but only the second part, which described the monuments of Roma sotterranea and included close to 200 drawings, was written and completed by 1620. In 1634, five years after his death, *Roma sotterranea* was published, having been edited, emended, and, in many cases, cut by Giovanni Severani.²³ A section that Bosio intended to include in Book One but that Severani cut clearly focused on Bosio’s “preoccupation with the devotional life of the early apostolic Church expressed liturgically and sacramentally as a way of justifying contemporary practice.”²⁴ It is thought that Severani’s edits also included the omission or simplification of sections that Bosio, in his zeal of completeness, had included but would likely have provided ammunition for Protestant polemicists.²⁵

Unfortunately, Bosio's deliberate methods were not employed by the explorers who

²¹ LeClercq, p. 21.

²² Ditchfield, p.352.

²³ The frontispiece is imprinted with the date 1632, the date that printing was initiated.

²⁴ Simon Ditchfield, “Text Before Trowel: Antonio Bosio’s *Roma Sotterranea* Revisited,” in *The Church Retrospective*, ed. R. N. Swanson, Studies in Church History 33 (Ecclesiastical History Society, 1997), p. 353.

followed him in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and many catacombs suffered the removal and resultant destruction of artifacts, inscriptions, and even frescoes. During this period, one of the few names worthy of mention is that of Raffaele Fabretti (1618–1700), "Custodian of the Holy Relics and of the Cemeteries," an office created by Pope Clement X in 1672 to prevent the removal of the remains of saints from cemeteries for distribution to churches or outside of Rome. Fabretti's work in epigraphy approached scientific methods in the estimation of G. B. De Rossi, and he was the first to conduct investigations of the catacombs after Bosio. Two other scholars who conducted excavations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as "custodians" were Marcantonio Boldetti and Giovanni Marangoni. However, it was the work of such early-nineteenth-century scholars as the cleric Giovanni Settele (1770–1840), who determined the provenance of the epigraphy that had been removed from the Christian catacombs of Rome, that provided models for the study of the finds from these seventeenth- and eighteenth-century excavations.

Jewish Catacombs

After Bosio's discovery of the Monteverde catacomb, few efforts were made to locate this first and only recorded Roman Jewish catacomb. It was not until the first half of the eighteenth century that interest in Monteverde was reawakened, when Giuseppe Bianchini claimed to have entered the necropolis with the archaeologist Cardinal Domenico Passionei. Subsequently, Gaetano Migliore, probably after the mid-eighteenth century, visited the catacomb but was forced to withdraw because of continuous rock slides. In an amusing, candid account, he

²⁵ Ditchfield, p. 356.

divulges that in spite of the imminent danger, he explored the catacomb in order to ingratiate himself with scholars.

For nearly the next one hundred years, interest in the Monteverde catacomb diminished to the point that even its location was unknown. In 1843, Father Giuseppe Marchi tried to locate the entrance to Monteverde, but his efforts proved fruitless. In 1879, the well-known Christian archaeologist, Mariano Armellini, declared that he had found the entrance to Monteverde but that it was blocked with soil, which had to be removed. Nikolaus Müller, who was later to become the principal investigator of Monteverde, failed to locate this burial ground in 1884 and again in 1888.²⁶ M. Seymour de Ricci, a French archaeologist, also tried and failed in his efforts to locate Monteverde in 1900 and 1904.²⁷

Renewed Interest of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

The nineteenth century is witness to a veritable explosion of interest in the catacombs, both for purposes of “scientific” study and for current religious debates being carried out in academic and popular literature.

²⁶ Leon, "The Jewish Catacombs and Inscriptions of Rome: An Account of their Discovery and Subsequent History," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 5 (1928):307.

²⁷ In his *New Tales of Old Rome* (Boston, 1901), Rodolfo Lanciani failed to distinguish this burial spot from a Christian cemetery because of the absence of ritual symbols on the fragments found in the earth and the presence of so many identified catacombs honeycombing the area.

Bosio noted the two catacomb entrances in the vineyards near the Via Portuense between 1600 and 1602, before his discovery of the Monteverde catacomb. In 1618 he also found the entrance of "a grotto *arenaria*" Christian catacomb, that of Pontianus, nearby on the same ridge in the Vigna del Collegio Inglese. (Bosio, p. 125, Testini,

Giovanni Battista De Rossi

Giovanni Battista De Rossi (1822–1894), contributor to more than two hundred publications, is renowned as the father of modern scientific Christian archaeology. De Rossi was the student and close friend of the Jesuit scholar Father Giuseppe Marchi (1795–1860) and continued Marchi's study of early Christian monuments. At the age of eleven, De Rossi was given a copy of Bosio's *Roma Sotterranea* as a gift from his father. Before he reached the age of twenty, De Rossi began to practice transcribing inscriptions. After the completion of his schooling, De Rossi was appointed *scriptor* at the Vatican Library, where he cataloged manuscripts and made good use of the vast resources at his disposal.

Father Marchi encouraged De Rossi to visit the catacombs and entrusted him with the tremendous undertaking of a corpus of Christian monuments. This entailed the systematic cataloging of Christian epigraphy, a project that De Rossi envisioned would, for the first time, partially reconcile it with topographical criteria. This conception would inspire De Rossi's desire to return inscriptions to the cemeteries they came from.

In collaboration with his brother Michele, a mathematician and geologist, De Rossi documented a detailed topographical study of the Roman catacombs published in three volumes entitled *La Roma sotterranea cristiana* (1864–1877), a name he likely selected in tribute to Bosio.

In a remarkably brief time span, De Rossi, aided by ancient documents (those referring to classical antiquity as well as the Church), itineraries, Damasian inscriptions, graffiti, and his own insight, uncovered many martyrs' shrines. As a result, he was able to identify important regions

and the original names of cemeteries. In addition, he identified nine or ten entirely unknown cemeteries. Unlike Bosio, he was undaunted by the rubble that blocked his explorations and he believed that the obstructed regions he encountered must at one time have harbored the remains of martyrs before their removal to the churches of Rome. In 1852 he discovered the tomb of Pope Cornelius in the crypt of Lucina, an older cemetery that had been incorporated into the catacomb of S. Callixtus;²⁸ this "providential" gift vindicated his topographical methods.

Near the church of S. Sebastian, in 1866 he explored a small Jewish catacomb or *hypogeum* under the vineyard of Conte Cimarra,²⁹ from which he recovered five inscriptions and a marble fragment with figural representations but no epigraphy.

De Rossi inspired and provided the prototype for further topographical study with the publication of his *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana*, which documented the fruits of his many years of laborious research.

De Rossi figured largely in the establishment of the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archeology on January 6, 1852, by Pope Pius IX, who supported De Rossi and favored him with great affection. This commission instituted strong measures to control exploration of the Christian cemeteries and to end violations of the catacombs, and sponsored continued study and excavation by De Rossi and others.

De Rossi's extraordinary popularity in Rome and among international scholars, his extensive publications, and his labors in the service of Christian archaeology stimulated great

²⁸ Four years earlier, in the vineyard above, he had discovered one fragment of the marble inscription that, when combined with the epigraphy he found during laborious exploration in the crypt of Lucina, was found to be engraved with the name of this pope. De Rossi, *Roma sotterranea*, pp. 275-305.

²⁹ De Rossi, *BAC* 5;1, pp. 3 (Plan) and 16. See Frey, *CIJ*, inscriptions 277 through 281 a. (Leon does not mention the last; at the time of Leon's writing, [*Rome*, p. 51] this was included in the region of the parcels of the

interest in the subject. “De Rossi was . . . universally acknowledged, even in his lifetime, as the prince of Christian archaeologists.”³⁰ He befriended, mentored, and inspired the work of many, including J. Spencer Northcote and W. P. Brownlow, who first made De Rossi’s *Roma sotterranea* available in English.

De Rossi's protégé Orazio Marucchi popularized archaeology in the later nineteenth century with his prolific writing on the catacombs, and two other distinguished followers of De Rossi, Mariano Armellini (1852–1896) and Henry Stevenson (1854–1898), made notable contributions to the master's work. In 1903 Josef Wilpert (1857–1944), also a student and successor of De Rossi, published a comprehensive documentation of the paintings and sarcophagi of the catacombs. In spite of some limitations, his work served as a basic research tool for students.

Jewish Catacombs

In the last half of the nineteenth century, in addition to investigating Christian cemeteries, the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archeology also supported the exploration of Jewish catacombs. These efforts were probably influenced by Marchi, who encouraged the search to rediscover Monteverde, the only Jewish cemetery known up to that time. A second Jewish cemetery, the Vigna Randanini, was discovered in a vineyard in 1857.³¹ Excavations were made

Vigna Limiti, on the Vicolo di San Sebastiano.)

³⁰ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Giovanni Battista De Rossi.”

³¹ Marucchi, *Le catacombe romane*, 1903, (rev. ed. Enrico Josi, 1933) p. 676. Goodenough (*Jewish Symbols* 2, p. 15) also dates the discovery of the catacomb to this date, but Leon (*Rome*, p. 51) posits a date of 1859 as does Frey, (*CIJ*, p. 53). Since Garrucci only came on the scene in 1859 (Leon mentions a date of May 1, 1859 for the finding of the catacomb)--his date of May 18, 1859 for the excavation of new galleries of the Randanini catacomb, which had been explored quite extensively before that time, would also suggest an earlier date than 1859. Also pointing to the earlier date is Visconti's mention in his 1861 article (p. 16) on the excavations of the Vigna Randanini

by the owner, sig. Ignazio Randanini who assisted the eminent Christian archaeologist Father Raffaele Garrucci (1812–1885) in his investigations. Father Garrucci published a more detailed description of Vigna Randanini³² than his predecessor E. Herzog. Almost three-quarters of a century later, Father Frey explored this catacomb.

The next unexpected discovery of a Jewish catacomb, that of the Via Labicana, now called Via Casilina, was made in late 1882 by Orazio Marucchi, who was just commencing his notable career. Aware that he had come upon an ancient Jewish cemetery because of the presence of a menorah, Marucchi apprized his mentor, G. B. De Rossi, of his discovery. After viewing the site, De Rossi realized the importance of the discovery and urged Marucchi to publish a report on this catacomb.

The investigation of the Jewish cemetery of Via Labicana/Casilina was supported by the Pontifical Commission, as were the investigations of the small catacombs of the Vigna Cimarra and the Via Appia Pignatelli (which at that time was mistakenly considered to be Jewish), discovered by quarriers on the property of the Prince of Torlonia near the Cafarella³³ and explored by Nikolaus Müller. Müller went on to become the major explorer of Jewish catacombs in Italy, and at the behest of the Commission investigated the Monteverde catacomb, which had been exposed by a landslide in the early years of the twentieth century.

Because Müller considered the exploration of this catacomb to be of the utmost urgency, as did the Pontifical Commission, he conducted a series of excavations at Monteverde with the permission of the proprietors of the estate in 1904–1905 and in the spring and autumn of 1906.

of the fact that the Jewish *hypogeum* had been "discovered in these last years."

³² R. Garrucci, *Cimitero degli antichi Ebrei scoperto recentemente in Vigna Randanini* (Rome, 1862).

³³ Frey, *CIJ*, p. 50.

The 1906 excavations were funded by the Berlin Society for the Advancement of Knowledge of Judaism. Müller had to abandon excavations in 1909, and his death in 1912 prevented him from completing his publication of this necropolis and compiling a complete description of the artifacts retrieved during his explorations.

Müller had given Marucchi his incomplete Italian manuscript in 1912 before his death so that Marucchi could record it in the Acts of the Papal Academy. He had left his other records and German manuscript to his brothers, his legal heirs, who turned the material over to a scholarly committee at the New Testament Seminars, at the Royal University of Berlin. The Berlin Society for the Advancement of Knowledge of Judaism, at the committee's request commissioned Nikos Bees, Müller's assistant, to complete and publish Müller's German manuscript. Marucchi published Müller's Italian manuscript the following year, adhering exactly to the original.³⁴

Toward the end of 1913, a new section of Monteverde was revealed by chance. Baron Kanzler, Secretary of the Commission of Sacred Archeology, later wrote the official report³⁵ on the investigation of this region by inspectors Enrico Josi and Schneider Graziosi. Josi and Graziosi were requested by the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archeology, with the accord of the Rome Superintendency of Monuments, to remove all of the artifacts to the Sala Giudaica, a specially designed room in the Museo Cristiano Lateranense, because this new section of the catacomb was in such imminent danger of collapse. The Monteverde finds in the Sala Giudaica were also augmented with other Jewish finds, and Graziosi concluded his documentation of the exhibition with the observation that "all the scholars would be grateful to the Prefecture of the

³⁴ Marucchi added to the end of Müller's publication a note and an appendix of photos of inscriptions (which had been sent by Müller without instructions as to where they should be included) (Müller, *Il cimitero*, p. 315).

³⁵ Kanzler, pp. 152-157.

Apostolic Palaces and to the administration of the museums for having added this very important epigraphic group to the notable Christian Lateran collection, an appropriate location because of the close relationships between the Jewish monuments and those of primitive Christianity."³⁶

One of the final important dates in the history of Monteverde was 1919, significant for the investigation of the last remaining tract by Paribeni. The 24 inscriptions retrieved from this exploration raised the total number actually discovered in the Monteverde catacomb over the years to over 200.³⁷ This figure apparently represents the largest number of definitely Jewish inscriptions retrieved from any Roman catacomb. On October 14, 1928, a devastating collapse occurred, destroying the catacomb completely for all practical purposes. The area is now covered with apartment buildings.

In 1918 a Jewish catacomb was accidentally disclosed by laborers strengthening the foundations of the stables on the grounds of the Villa Torlonia on the Via Nomentana. De Rossi had predicted in 1865 such a happening when he commented on the fact that if the agger with synagogue nearby mentioned in the Publius Corfidius Signinus inscription³⁸ was the well-known Esquiline agger (as generally agreed upon by scholars), a search should be made for Jewish cemeteries on the Via Tiburtina or Via Nomentana. True to De Rossi's prescience, more than fifty years later Jewish catacombs were discovered under the Villa Torlonia on the Via

³⁶ "La Nuova Sala Giudaica nel Museo Lateranense," *Nuovo Bullettino di Archeologia Christiana* 21 (1915):56.

³⁷ David Noy's compilation of Monteverde epigraphs includes 202 inscriptions and 56 fragments with letters or symbols (*Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe. Vol. 2, The City of Rome* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], pp. 1-172); Leon recorded a total of 206 inscriptions from Monteverde (*Rome*, p. 74).

³⁸ *CIJ* 531, p. 391; De Rossi, *BAC* 3;12, p. 95. This non-Jewish Latin epitaph is dedicated to one Publius Corfidius Signinus, who sold fruits in a stall near the *proseucha* (synagogue) next to the agger. This attests to the fact that a synagogue existed at that location, and could have been that of the Siburesians (residents of the Subura), at least four members of which were buried in the Torlonia catacombs, the closest burial grounds for this congregation.

Nomentana. In 1919 the Prince of Torlonia,³⁹ also a senator, financed excavations under the technical direction of engineer Agostino Valente, assisted by the Roman Soprintendenza of excavations, represented by Roberto Paribeni. Several years later, Hermann W. Beyer and Hans Lietzmann explored these burial grounds more fully and recorded in greater detail their findings.⁴⁰

* * * *

In addition to being the focus of intense scholarly attention in Italy and abroad during the nineteenth century, the catacombs are also the focus of popular interest and make appearances in much popular religious literature of the period, especially in England, and are replicated for museum exhibits and tourist attractions. The prolific discoveries and research of the nineteenth century “were . . . used by writers and lecturers to promote their various polemical and ecclesiastical concerns. Using this new wealth of archaeological information, Protestant and Catholic authors sought to create an image of the Early Church of the catacombs which would mirror their own doctrines and practices, providing them with apostolic authority and authenticity. The nineteenth century saw a steady stream of books and articles which sought to interpret the evidence of the Roman catacombs through the lens of of such polemical prejudice.”⁴¹

³⁹ The history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Roman archaeology appears to be closely interwoven with the Princes of Torlonia, particularly the excavations involving the burial finds of the Jews of ancient Rome.

⁴⁰Hermann W. Beyer and Hans Lietzmann, *Die jüdische Katacombe der Villa Torlonia in Rom*, Jüdische Denkmäler, vol. 1 (Berlin: W. de Gruyter and Co., 1930).

⁴¹ Meyer, pp. 76–77.

The Early Christian Novel

The catacombs easily captured the attention of a Victorian public fascinated with death and pleasurable terror, and several religious novels based on the early Christians of the catacombs and their martyrs became extremely popular. The authors of these novels, virtually all clergymen themselves, were intentional participants in current theological debates and appealed to readers with detailed descriptions of death and torture. These novels address religious and social issues of great current importance at a time when there existed a major rift in the English Catholic church between those who favors the Roman Catholic tradition and ritual (the Ultramontanes) and those who supported Liberal Catholicism. The novels are also examples of the “absurdities and nastiness of . . . religious polemic” and the “blatant rhetorical strategies by which paper opponents were demolished”⁴² that characterize most of the popular religious press of this period.

The three most important and popular novels in this category are *Hypatia, or New Foes With an Old Face* (1852–1853), by Charles Kingsley; *Fabiola, or The Church of the Catacombs* (1854), by Nicholas Wiseman; and *Callista: A Tale of the Third Century*, by John Henry Newman (1855). The authors “displayed certain parallel aims in their respective works: use of the stage of history to tell a contemporary tale, with the novel’s assuming a propagandist, moral role, in what amounted to polemical warfare.”⁴³

Charles Kingsley uses a different approach than most of the authors of Early Christian novels. He uses the example of history in his novel not to recall a venerable past that provides

⁴² David J. DeLaura, Review of *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England*, Robert Lee Wolfe, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 33: 2 (Sept. 1978), 251–255.

justification and validation for the present but rather as a negative example of the corruption of the past to compel his readers to find their own justifications for their faith in the present instead of to look to the past. His heroine Hypatia (who is not actually converted in the novel) is murdered after her acceptance of Christ in fifth century Alexandria (when Christianity was already the state religion). Kingsley uses the death of Hypatia to question the value the Roman Catholic Church placed on the patristic past, which Kingsley believed to be corrupt.⁴⁴

Nicholas Wiseman claimed that the nineteenth-century Roman Church was consistent with the Church of the catacombs.⁴⁵ *Fabiola* was published in the series the Catholic Popular Library, which may have been originated for the purpose of refuting Kingsley's version of the early Church.⁴⁶ Wiseman wrote the novel to respond to Kingsley's negative portrayal of the early church in *Hypatia* and also to promote the English Roman Catholicism. Wiseman had been made the Archbishop of Westminster in 1850 when the Roman Catholic hierarchy was restored in England. *Fabiola*, a pagan in Rome, converts to Christianity after witnessing many martyrdoms, which Wiseman describes in gruesome detail. Wiseman's novel enjoyed immense popularity, probably due in large part to the graphic, sensationalized descriptions of the martyrdoms, and went through numerous editions, translations into other languages, and even an adaptation for the stage, *The Youthful Martyrs of Rome* by Frederick Oakeley.⁴⁷

John Henry Newman believed that the sufferings of the martyrs were emblematic of the

⁴³ Leon B. Litvack, "Callista, Martyrdom, and the Early Christian Novel in the Victorian Age," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 17:2 (1993), p. 164

⁴⁴ Litvack, pp. 164–165.

⁴⁵ At this time, it was commonly believed that the catacombs were monuments of the first century, an idea that has since been disproven.

⁴⁶ Charlotte E. Crawford, "Newman's *Callista* and the Catholic Popular Library," *Modern Language Review* 45 (1950): 219, cited in Susann Dorman, "*Hypatia* and *Callista*: The Initial Skirmish between Kingsley and Newman," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 34:2 (Sept. 1979), 173–193.

trials that all Christians must undergo to gain salvation, and some of the themes in *Callista* probably represented his own painful struggle in converting from Anglicanism.⁴⁸ Newman wrote *Callista* (which he wrote at Wiseman's request and published anonymously in the Catholic Popular Library) in what seems to be almost direct response to Kingsley's *Hypatia*.⁴⁹ Newman details *Callista*'s spiritual struggle leading to her conversion and her eventual martyrdom. *Callista* also enjoyed great popularity and also was adapted for the stage in *The Convert Martyr* by Frederick Husenbeth.⁵⁰

The Phial of Blood Controversy

In addition to writing extraordinarily successful Early Christian novels, Wiseman and Newman played important roles in the popular religious press of the period. The Roman catacombs were the subject of many popular series of articles in *The Rambler*, a publication of the Liberal Catholic Movement (of which Newman was once the editor), and the *Dublin Review*, founded by Wiseman.⁵¹ The debate between the Ultramontanes, who advocated traditional Roman devotions and centralized ecclesiastical authority and veneration of saintly relics, and the Liberal Catholics, who advocated intellectual freedom and saw scholarly and scientific inquiry as independent of religious oversight, reached a height in the "Phial of Blood controversy,"

⁴⁷ Litvack, pp. 165–167.

⁴⁸ Litvack, pp. 162–163.

⁴⁹ See Dorman (1979) for a comprehensive comparison of *Hypatia* and *Callista*.

⁵⁰ Litvack, pp. 167–170.

⁵¹ See Joseph Altholz, *The Liberal Catholic Movement in England: The Rambler and Its Contributors, 1848–1864* (Montreal, 1962); id., *The Religious Press in Britain, 1760–1900* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989), pp. 99–102. Mary Heimann, *Catholic Devotion in Victorian England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) suggest that the most vocal proponents on each side of the debate between the Ultramontanes and Liberal Catholics likely viewed the debate in a larger context than that of England alone and were either foreign or outsiders in some other way.

which was largely carried out in the pages of *The Rambler* and in which “the emerging concepts and theories of scientific inquiry [were placed] in direct conflict with the authority of the Church.”⁵²

Graves of the martyrs in the catacombs were officially identified by phials affixed to the plaster outside of the grave per a decree of 1668 issued by a commission appointed by Clement IX. A question emerged in the mid-nineteenth century about whether the phials contained the blood of the martyr, collected at the time of the martyrdom, or contained eucharistic wine, as was commonly found in phials in ordinary graves. The suggestion that the phials supposed to identify the graves of the martyrs contained only eucharistic wine called into question the authenticity of the relics of the martyrs and sparked a vicious debate.

Richards Simpson, then editor of *The Rambler*, suggested that the controversy could be solved by a microscopic investigation of the contents of the phials. “Such a recommendation may not seem unreasonable to twentieth-century minds; at the time, however, it seemed like an attempt to test the Church’s authority by chemical analysis, to pit the authority of the Church of Rome against that of scientific inquiry.”⁵³ A chemical analysis of the contents of sixty phials from the catacombs was eventually published. All of the contents were found to be neither blood nor wine but instead iron rust deposits that had effloresced from the glass.⁵⁴ In the continued debate that followed, many of the parties, which now included even De Rossi in Rome, were

⁵² Wendel W. Meyer, “The Phial of Blood Controversy and the Decline of the Liberal Catholic Movement,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46:1 (January 1995), 75–94.

⁵³ Meyer, p. 86.

⁵⁴ Today, scholars commonly agree that the phials held perfume. Meyer, p. 93.

hesitant to overtly question the Church's authority in the name of scientific inquiry.⁵⁵ In 1863, the 1668 decree was reaffirmed by the Roman Catholic Church and signaled in many ways the downfall of Liberal Catholicism in nineteenth-century England and the inability of scientific evidence to stand up to the Church.

Replicas of the Catacombs

Two interesting replicas of the Roman catacombs are produced at the turn of the twentieth century with the cooperation of the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology. The first, the creation of an exact replica of sections of the Roman catacombs in old quarries in Valkenburg, The Netherlands, and can be seen as an example of the combination of religious motivation and financial motivation, which is often seen in the modern presentation of the catacombs in Rome. The second example is the extensive copying of Roman catacomb frescoes by Russian artist Fyodor Reiman for the founding collection of the Pushkin Museum.⁵⁶

The fame of the Roman catacombs in the nineteenth century led to the creation of an exact replica of sections of the Priscilla, Domitilla, and San Sebastiano catacombs in abandoned limestone quarries in Valkenburg, The Netherlands. The creators of these replicas had both religious and scientific purposes, as well as financial purposes in creating a tourist attraction and providing work for the unemployed. They went to much effort, in cooperation with Roman

⁵⁵ J. S. Northcote, an former Anglican priest and convert to the Church of Rome who is well known for compiling and publishing the English version of De Rossi's *Roma Sotterranea*, wrote a popular series of articles on the Roman catacombs for *The Rambler* and was initially a strong supporter of the publication. He later joined the opponents of *The Rambler* when the editors could not "appreciate the dilemma that Northcote felt so keenly, the need to balance the search for truth with concern for the beliefs of the faithful." Meyer, pp. 87–88.

⁵⁶ These instances of replication of the Roman catacombs in Valkenburg and in Reiman's murals are the subject of a larger research project I am currently undertaking.

researchers, to make their replica as exact as possible. Marucchi, De Rossi's protégé, was present at the opening of the Valkenburg catacombs in July 1910. The Valkenburg catacombs remain a popular tourist attraction to this day.

Ivan V. Tsvetaev (1847–1913) was the son of a priest and himself studied in the seminary at Vladimir. He was a professor of antiquities and the Latin language in Moscow University and is considered the first Russian specialist in Latin epigraphy. Tsvetaev founded the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts (which opened in 1912 as the Moscow Museum of Fine Arts and originally part of Moscow University) on the model of the Cabinet of Fine Arts and Antiquities of the Moscow University, which contained scientifically exacting casts and copies of ancient arts and sculpture for educational purposes.⁵⁷

Tsvetaev commissioned artist Fyodor Reiman in the last decade of the nineteenth century to make detailed copies of paintings in the Christian catacombs for the founding collections of the museum and for a never-published(?) atlas of early Christian frescoes.⁵⁸ Reiman spent 12 years in the catacombs making his watercolor copies of the paintings and nearly lost his eyesight in the process. Reiman's watercolors were not exhibited until 2000, when the exhibit "Under the Vaults of the Catacombs" was shown at the Pushkin Museum in honor of the Papal Jubilee.⁵⁹

Recent Investigations of the Catacombs

⁵⁷ "Museum History," The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, 1998, <<http://www.museum.ru/gmii/defengl.htm>>, viewed 20 March 2005.

⁵⁸ Reiman's watercolors were not published, and I found mention of the fact that they were commissioned for an atlas of Christian frescoes only in the "Bollettino di Informazione" of the Italian Embassy in Russia. 28 February 2000, <<http://www.ambrusital.mid.ru/AnbRusItal/it/bull8.htm#14>>, viewed 18 July 2001.

⁵⁹ "Roman Catacombs Unveiled," The Russia Journal, 21 February 2000, <<http://www.russiajournal.com/1s/article.shtml?ad=317>>, viewed 24 February 2001. The museum did not publish a

In 1929, the excavation and preservation of the catacombs of Rome and Italy were officially entrusted to the Vatican in accordance with Article 33 of the Concordat, which was one of the three sections of the Lateran Pacts of 1929 signed by Mussolini for the Italian government and Cardinal Pietro Gasparri for the papacy and dealing with the Roman Catholic Church's ecclesiastical relations with the Italian State. According to the Concordat, all of the catacombs of Rome and Italy were directly administered by the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archeology until the administration of the extant Jewish catacombs was handed over to the *Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali* (now *Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali*, instituted in October, which includes theater and sports as well as archaeological sites) of the Italian government on April 14, 1988, according to the Revision of the Concordat signed on February 18, 1984.

In addition to extensive work on the Christian catacombs, the Pontifical Commission, in 1971, restored and systematized the Jewish catacomb of Randanini, thus making it more accessible and preventing any further deterioration due to seepage from the farmlands above. In 1973–1974, Father Umberto M. Fasola, then Secretary of the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archeology, cleared, thoroughly explored, and identified the origins and development of what proved to be two distinct catacombs under the Villa Torlonia. It was due to Father Fasola's concern for the preservation of these catacombs, which had been strengthened by the Commission in 1946, that they were closed to safeguard them from the same destructive fate that befell the villa above the catacomb and its grounds when they became public domain.

The Christian catacomb continue to be studied and maintained by the Pontifical Commission and are an important destination for tourists and pilgrims visiting Rome. In a speech to the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology on 7 June 1996, Pope John Paul II indicated the significance of the Christian catacombs as destinations for modern pilgrims, in particular those visiting Rome for the Papal Jubilee in 2000: “By visiting these monuments, one comes into contact with the evocative traces of early Christianity and one can, so to speak, tangibly sense the faith that motivated those ancient Christian communities. . . . Visitors will be able to feel the atmosphere of the first conversions to the Gospel. . . . the catacombs should be a necessary destination for Holy Year pilgrims. . . . Thank you for your efforts and for the professional contribution you are making to evangelization with your activities.”⁶⁰ In another speech at a plenary assembly of PCAS on 16 January 1998, the pope stated: “your attention is appropriately focused on the pastoral benefits of these famous monuments of Christian antiquity [the catacombs]. . . . In the silence of the cataombc, the pilgrim of the Year 2000 can rediscover or revive his religious identity on a sort of spiritual journey that, by starting from the first testimonies of the faith, brings him to the reasons for the new evangelization and to its demands.”⁶¹

The Jewish catacombs remain under the administration of the Italian state, which has recently undertaken a highly controversial program of privatization of Italian cultural heritage, in

2001.

⁶⁰ *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly edition in English, 19 June 1996, p. 7 quoted at <<http://www.catacombe.roma.it/en/discorso.html>>.

⁶¹ From *L'Osservatore Romano*, quoted at <<http://www.catacombe.roma.it/en/discorso.html>>. This explicit mandate of the Pontifical Commission, the organization that grants permission for access to direct study of the Christian catacombs, seems a potential obstruction to certain types of research that might be perceived as contrary to the aims of the Church.

which culturally significant sites have been sold to international investment firms and private investors to generate funds to reduce Italy's budget deficit or finance public works.⁶² What effect might privatization have on the Jewish catacombs, which have received limited attention since they have been in the hands of the Italian state since the revision of the Concordat in 1984?⁶³

The International Council on Museums and Sites recently reported on the risk to cultural heritage when some "sites are not given the same priority as other examples of archaeological heritage, because they are manifestations of particular historical periods or cultures. . . . This arises as a potential threat when one cultural group does not recognise a segment of the archaeological heritage as relating to their current society's cultural tradition. As a result, alternative periods are given greater priority for research and conservation as they are deemed to be important to the dominant society's cultural identity."⁶⁴ Italy is cited in this report as one of the countries that has this risk.

⁶² Privatization has sparked heated political and social debate among politicians, scholars, and the general public. See Salvatore Settis, *Italia S.P.A.* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002) and Roland Benedikter, "Privatisation of Italian Cultural Heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 10:2 (2004):369–389.

⁶³ The Randanini catacomb and its limited accessibility to visitors is maintained through the generosity of its proprietor, the Marchesa Del Gallo, who owns the land in which the catacomb is situated. A recent restoration project for the Villa Torlonia, which included the construction of an underground parking lot near the villa, did not include any consideration of the Jewish catacombs located under the villa. Only after the Jewish Community in Rome publicly denounced the government in a newspaper article and negotiated "on behalf of the catacombs" was money allocated to the study of the catacombs and the plans for the underground parking lot abandoned. Jessica Dello Russo, "500 Million Italian Lire to Finance Jewish Catacomb Study," 3 February 2001, <http://www.catacombsociety.org/nfr_2-3-2000.html>.

⁶⁴ *Heritage at Risk, ICOMOS World Report 2001/2002 on Monuments and Sites in Danger* (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag, 2001) <<http://www.international.icomos.org/risk/2001/icahm2001.htm>> viewed 4 May 2005.