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Mimicry, Mirroring, Subversion, and Critique: Reading Heterotopia
in the Cubicula of the Sacraments

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology

Joint PhD Program

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By Eric C. Smith

June 2013

Advisor: Dr. Gregory A. Robbins

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the spaces commonly called the Cubicula of the Sacraments, five rooms in the Callistus Catacomb in Rome, in light of Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia. I argue that the Christian communities that created the Cubicula constructed their spaces and construed the symbolic worlds they conjured there as a way of mimicking, mirroring, subverting, and critiquing the "other" spaces and cultures that surrounded them.

This work takes place along four lines of inquiry. The first of these is space and place, and uses Foucault's and Henri Lefebvre's notions of heterotopia to describe the Callistus Catacomb's location in the Roman landscape—its relationship to other spaces, structures, and ideas. The second is art; the rich decorations in the Cubicula provide opportunity to think about the communities' creative use of new and traditional iconography to construct a uniquely Christian world-view in art. The third is texts. Much of the art in the Cubicula is drawn from or connected to textual sources, and examination of those texts reveals selections and interpretations that tend toward spatial readings and meanings. The fourth is practices; the Cubicula of the Sacraments contain references to practices such as baptism and meals, and served as locations for practices such as funerals and pilgrimage—all serving to underscore and enhance the heterotopian nature of the spaces.

Together, the evidence of space and place, art, texts, and practices, when viewed through Foucault's work, reveal that the Cubicula of the Sacraments were heterotopias, or "other spaces," within the Roman landscape. These were spaces of contestation, expression, and the formation of communal identity—venues for the construal of Christianity and its place in the world, and meticulously constructed microcosms of the world as they thought it ought to be.

This dissertation, then, provides a holistic, theoretically grounded view of catacomb spaces, and demonstrates the usefulness of approaches that combine various types of evidence available in the catacombs to "read" them as wholes. It also illuminates Christian construals of themselves and the Roman Empire in the period before Constantine, shedding light on the development of Christian traditions.

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It is with fondness and humility that I remember all the teachers who have guided and instructed me, at the University of Denver, the Iliff School of Theology, the Vanderbilt Divinity School, Mars Hill College, and elsewhere. There is something from each of you in this work, and I am indebted to you all.

My deepest gratitude is reserved for my family. I am grateful to my mother, who has been a strong presence and supporter of my studies. My wife Jessa has steadfastly and lovingly supported my work, and I will never be able to repay her what I owe. Our three children, Eli, Amos, and Hazel, were all born during my doctoral work, and they have supported me in ways they cannot yet understand.

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father, Vance McBane Smith.

IN PACE. 1950-2011.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“My aim is to correct the regnant exegesis. One does not have the proper distance on the text; one does not approach the text as though one were reading it for the first time; one tunes in anew to old questions. One...does not pay sufficient attention to the details in relation to the thread of the discourse; one is not surprised enough at the knots and tears in the text.”

--Julius Wellhausen on the Gospel of John¹

“Who but the wealthy get sleep in Rome?”

--Juvenal, Satire III.235

Rome and the Catacombs

Standing in the Forum, the beating heart of the Roman Empire, a resident of third-century Rome was surrounded with signs of imperial strength and Roman hegemony: temples of Saturn and Vesta, the Arch of Augustus and the Augustan Forum, and other monuments to Roman might. From that perch atop the pinnacle of Mediterranean power, he could turn his face south and walk, passing the Coliseum on his left and then the Circus Maximus a farther distance on his right behind the bend of the Palatine Hill, along the Via Appia, one of the great arteries of the Empire, which carried the lifebloods of trade, humanity, and military power that animated and supplied the Roman world. He passed the Septizodium, a decorative façade with no building behind it, which had been

¹ Wellhausen, Julius. *Das Evangelium Johannis*. Berlin: G. Reimer, 1908: 3. Translated and quoted in Ernst Haenchen, *John I*, trans. Robert W. Funk, Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 28.

constructed under the emperor Septimius Severus, and like the Trevi Fountain or the Spanish Steps today, it served as a social gathering place for the youth of Rome. Passing by the throngs of chatting Romans, this traveler—whose name was Callistus—walked under the soaring and imposing Aqua Claudia, which carried water 45 miles from the countryside into Rome, where it served all parts of the city. As he made his way south, he came after two Roman miles to the Servian wall, the city’s defensive wall and sacred boundary.² Passing through it, Callistus was leaving the imperial city and entering the suburbs and the Empire beyond.

Mostly coextensive with the wall was the city’s sacred pomerium, the boundary within which the already-ancient cults of Rome held sway with various rules and restrictions, and without which the tumult and contestation of a cultural melting pot were freer to inscribe themselves upon the populace and the land.³ One such restriction, again ancient already, was with regard to death; no burials or cremations or interment of cremated remains could occur within the pomerium, and so upon exiting through the wall and into the suburban countryside, Callistus would have been confronted with the twin

² The Servian Wall was constructed during the Republic, mostly during the fourth century BCE. During the time the Callistus Catacomb and other Christians catacombs were in their busiest period of use, the late third century, the Servian Wall was replaced by the massive Aurelian Wall. At the Appian Way, the exit point a traveler to the Callistus Catacomb likely would have used, the two walls were built relatively close to one another; at most other points, the Aurelian Wall greatly expanded the area of the city enclosed by walls. The Porta San Sebastiano is the gate in the current Aurelian Wall that most closely approximates the gate in the Servian Wall that Callistus would have taken. Of the Aurelian Wall, and other great walls of the period, Peter Brown has written that “walls replaced theaters, baths, and temples as the public building works par excellence...Carefully designed and massively built, they radiated the message of a calculated intention to survive, and to survive with Roman grandeur, even in a world that was felt to be less secure than it had been two centuries earlier.” Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 11.

³ A discussion of the pomerium, including its etymology and its role in Roman spatial differentiation, will come in Chapter 3.

enterprises of death and memorialization. Convenience dictated that these industries, pushed outward from the city by custom and statute, would concentrate just outside its edges, and so all along the roads leading out of Rome, mausoleums and tombs dotted the countryside, and smoke rose from cremation fires.⁴ At the height of its population, likely about a million inhabitants at the peak of the Empire, Rome produced about a hundred corpses per day, the inevitable by-product of so many people living in one place, with the concomitant disease, violence, and shortened lives.⁵

About a mile from the wall, the Via Appia rose over a green hill, and if Callistus had paused to turn around and look over his progress, he would have seen from his vantage point on the hill the outer edges of the city pressing against the city wall, the smoke of cremation and cooking fires rising into the frame, and the Forum just out of view in the distance. Behind him now stretched the Roman road, reaching down through Italy toward the Bay of Naples and the buried ruins of Misenum, Herculaneum, and

⁴ The catacombs arose and flourished at a time of great change in the funerary habits of Rome, and indeed of the Mediterranean generally. For reasons still debated by scholars, the fashion was shifting from cremation, which had prevailed in the late Republic and early Empire, to inhumation, which came to prevail in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. Whether the rise of Christianity was a cause of this shift is the subject of disagreement. For further discussion of the varieties of burial in Rome in the period, see Chapter 3. For a fuller discussion of Christian funerary activity in Rome during the period of the catacombs, see Chapter 6.

⁵ Estimates of the population of Imperial Rome vary widely, from a low end of about 200,000 – 400,000 to a high approaching 2,000,000. Here I follow the uneasy consensus view, which holds a population of about 1,000,000. Glenn R. Storey, "The Population of Ancient Rome," *Antiquity* 71, no. 274 (1997). Jérôme Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome: The People and the City at the Height of the Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 10-21. The figure of 100 corpses per day is based on the work of Valerie Hope and Eireann Marshall, who presuppose populations of 750,000 inhabitants and, from there, determine a daily death toll of 80. I have adjusted their numbers upward to account for my higher estimate of initial population. It is also worth noting that these figures likely do not account for much of the infant mortality in the city, which was significantly higher than in modern times. Valerie Hope notes that infant mortality was so high that funeral rites were rarely carried out for infants, and those who had not yet teethed were not even cremated. Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall, *Death and Disease in the Ancient City* (London: Routledge, 2000), 128-31. Valerie M. Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 180.

Pompeii. But he had no interest in continuing that far—his concern in following the Via Appia from the city went only as far this place, this green hill. Turning his eyes from the city below and to the north, he walked a short distance off the road and into a fenced-in area, and slipped through a small door in a modest brick building, and began walking down a stairway into the darkness.⁶

This was the entrance to what is now called the Callistus Catacomb, one of the earliest and grandest of the sixty-plus Christian catacombs that were dug under Rome's suburbs between the late second and fifth centuries.⁷ This particular catacomb, later named after Callistus, its first overseer and the man whose journey we followed south from the Forum, had probably known an existence earlier in the second century as a generic (non-Christian) burial site.⁸ But by the time of the third century, the catacomb

⁶ Green describes the surface above the catacomb entrance. Bernard Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome: The First Three Centuries* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 183.

⁷ The development of all catacombs in Rome halted in the fifth century, when invasions forced a move to burials inside the city. Richard P. McBrien, "Catacombs," in *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. John B. Shopp (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 235.

⁸ For a discussion of the possibility of the site as the family burial site of the Pomponians, see Graydon Snyder. Snyder points to a passage from Hippolytus which describes the act of Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome from 200 to 217, assigning responsibility for the care of the catacomb to Callistus, then a deacon and later himself a bishop of Rome. This creates a *terminus ad quem* for the development of the catacomb as a Christian space in the first two decades of the third century, and it likely had been begun sometime in the last two decades of the second century. Snyder makes much of this moment of Zephyrinus' appointment of Callistus, noting that 1) by this time Christianity must have been widely known enough and accepted enough that the church owning property would have been unremarkable, and 2) that this event roughly coincides with "the appearance of a distinguishable Christian culture." Peter Lampe disagrees with Snyder's assessment of the ability of the church to own property at this point, instead imagining that the land above the catacomb must have remained the property of an individual, who allowed Christians to dig beneath. Whose property the land was is not a concern of mine; for the purposes of this project, what is important is that the church had control over the site and that it is clearly and indisputably Christian. I share Snyder's conclusion, and that of others, that the earliest identifiable cultural markers of Christianity (summarized by Snyder as "symbols and language") emerged sometime around the year 180, and included an already-stable repertoire of symbols and central narratives. I also share the general bias of Snyder's book, which is that the period between the emergence of this culture in 180 and the rise of Constantine in the early fourth century is the most interesting for Christian material culture. Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine*, 2nd ed. (Mercer, 2003), 159. Peter Lampe,

was well established as the first and greatest church cemetery, already holding the bones of a great many of Rome's early Christians.⁹ At this time the catacomb was well short of the forty acres of space and twelve miles of tunnels that it would come to encompass in later centuries, but it was already an important part of the communal life of Christianity in Rome.

We have followed the journey of Callistus down the Appian Way to the catacomb, but our traveler might just as well have been someone else with an interest in the catacomb: a Christian with a relative buried there, a *fossore* (or digger) of the catacomb, an artisan hired to decorate the rooms below, or some other person with a personal or business interest in the subterranean spaces. Whatever the person's role, as he

From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries, trans. Michael Steinhauser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 25-28. It is worth noting that Snyder and Lampe represent a different lineage of scholarship than that of Daniel Boyarin, who nevertheless reaches broadly similar conclusions about the timing of the emergence of distinctively Christian culture. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, *Divinations: Reading Late Ancient Religion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004).

⁹ It is important to note that the Callistus Catacomb was the first burial site to be overseen directly by the church. Other early sites, such as the Priscilla Catacomb and the San Sebastiano Catacomb, were privately administered, either by families or associations. Vincenzo Ficocchi Nicolai, Fabrizio Bisconti, and Danilo Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome: History, Decoration, Inscriptions* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2002), 13-24. This ecclesiastical patronage has several ramifications. The first is that the Callistus Catacomb was in some ways egalitarian; while there are many richly decorated cubicula and sarcophagi, suggesting burials of wealthier individuals, there are also numerous loculi—the kinds of poor graves that the masses might afford. Perhaps it was the catacomb's status as belonging to the church that caused it to accept all comers, or at least to be somewhat more accepting to the graves of paupers than other spaces were. For a recent revisionist take on the administration (or lack thereof) of catacombs by the ecclesiastical structure and bishops, see the work of Éric Rebillard. Rebillard questions the former scholarly consensus that the church was intimately involved in administering cemeteries, seeing that work rather as falling to families. His work has prompted a re-examination among scholars of the catacombs. Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings and Jeanine Routier-Pucci (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). Nevertheless, I hold that the Callistus Catacomb must have had some early ecclesiastical control, given the edict of Zephyrinus (if Hippolytus is to be trusted as a source). Ann Marie Yasin, while finding Rebillard “convincing,” also maintains that “the evidence nevertheless does suggest that separate areas were designated by contemporaries as Christian, distinct from burial zones used by others, and in this sense ‘communal.’” Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult, and Community*, *Greek Culture in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 59.

descended the stairs into the darkness below, he entered a world markedly different from the green hill above and the imperial capital in view from its crest. This was the domain of the Christian dead, and very likely the only or one of the only spaces solely dedicated to Christianity in Rome at the time. The Callistus Catacomb and the other early Christian catacombs were, simply, the only spaces in Rome in the second and third centuries that truly belonged to Christian communities.¹⁰

The thesis of this dissertation is that reading the Cubicula of the Sacraments with attention to their spaces, works of art, texts behind that art, and practices undertaken and referenced in them, through the lenses of Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia," reveals the ways the community of the Cubicula expressed its construal of Christianity in relation to its context in the Roman Empire and the city of Rome. Such a spatial analysis

¹⁰ There is no evidence for dedicated church buildings before the Dura Europos site, the destruction of which dates to 256. In Rome, there is no evidence for dedicated church buildings prior to the time of Constantine. Christian groups, which appear not to have possessed church buildings in the period before Constantine, likely met in the residences of members. The long-dominant model of house churches has begun to give way to a model of insula churches, informed by the work of Peter Lampe, who through various means has demonstrated the unlikelihood of widespread Christian ownership of houses in Rome. More likely was the use of spaces in tenement houses, by far the dominant form of housing in Rome in the period. This model meant that Christian meetings were subject to more public scrutiny and attention that has been supposed, with neighbors being able to overhear easily the proceedings of any gathering. It also meant that there were almost no opportunities for the emergence of a Christian visual culture, since the meeting spaces were residential spaces that were converted as they were needed, and then converted back again. It was only with the establishment of the catacombs in the late second century that a distinctive Christian symbol set emerged. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 366-69. Ramsay MacMullen argues that even following the ambitious building projects of Constantine in the fourth century, "official" and dedicated communal space was still not nearly sufficient for housing all Christians for worship. MacMullen posits that cemeteries remained a vital sacred space for early Christian communities well into the fourth and early fifth centuries. Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009). Yasin dedicates a chapter of her book on church spaces to what she calls "Churches before architecture," and she traces an early Christian textual tradition of rejecting the sacredness of particular places. She does so in the context of Mircea Eliade's discussion of heirophanic space or "centers," which she sees as absent in early Christian literature. This changed, obviously, sometime between the second century and the fourth, when Constantine's building program obliterated this early Christian objection to the enplacement of the holy (as the remainder of Yasin's book demonstrates). I argue that the advent of the catacombs provided just such a space—of heirophany, to use Eliade's term, or of identity, to use a term used by both Yasin and me, later in this dissertation. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 15-26, 60.

reveals how the community of the catacombs saw themselves in relation to Roman power and cultural hegemony: as critics of, foreigners to, and even opponents of the Roman ideology that surrounded them.¹¹ The work of this dissertation is to understand this spatially-constructed, well-veiled inimical relationship between the Christian community that created the catacomb, and broader Roman culture and society, through the lens of heterotopian analysis of the catacomb itself (and especially the Cubicula of the Sacraments) and the spaces that surrounded it in and around the city of Rome in the second, third, and fourth centuries CE.¹²

First articulated as a spatial theory by Michel Foucault and later developed and refined by others, heterotopia describes the ways that certain spaces relate to other spaces

¹¹ These communities remained, of course, Roman. They were inextricably Roman, part of Roman cultural and social systems, and subject to the same forces, customs, contingencies, and physical environments as all other Romans. In this dissertation I do not posit a purely oppositional role for the communities of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, but something more subtle: that they critiqued from within, by mirroring and even exhibiting normative Roman symbols, ideas, and spaces. It was in this similarity that space was created for opposition and critique.

¹² A recent article and SBL presentation by Stanley Stowers have problematized the usage of the term “community.” “The use of the ‘community’ and ‘communities,’” Stowers writes, “is almost always unjustified.” The terms are used, he argues, uncritically and with Romantic notions of Christian origins in mind. The terms imply a greater level of social cohesion and ideological homogeneity than was likely to exist in early Christianity. Nevertheless, I use the terms here, with fear and trembling, lacking any other suitable terms by which to refer to the people who constructed the catacomb. I do assume that whatever a “community” was, more than one of them was at work in the Callistus Catacomb and in other catacombs, if only to capture the diachronic challenges of a multi-century span. The “community” of 180 was not the same “community” of 400. Nevertheless, here I assume a continuity both synchronically and diachronically—that the Christian communities of Rome had more in common with one another than with generic Roman culture. I also assume that while one particular community might have been primarily responsible for Catacomb A, and another for Catacomb B, that there was still a robust flow of ideas between those two communities and their two catacombs, and that both the groups and the spaces can be spoken of together, across the lines of competing communities. I also assume that from time to time feuding communities shared spaces in the catacombs, due to the paucity of burial space, institutional inertia, and the prerogative of families in orchestrating burials. Stanley Stowers, “The Concept of ‘Community’ and the History of Early Christianity,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011).

by mimicking, mirroring, subverting, and critiquing those spaces.¹³ Heterotopia can describe many different kinds of spaces, both real and imaginary, but here I will use the concept in what is perhaps its most common form: to describe the relationship of a marginal or marginalized physical space to more hegemonic spaces.¹⁴ This analysis will help to make sense of a contested set of relationships situated in just this kind of marginal/hegemonic environment; namely, early Roman Christianity's relationship with the city and the Empire. The second chapter of this dissertation will be devoted to heterotopia, its historical and contemporary articulations, and the meanings of the word and idea as they will be used in this dissertation.

¹³ The image of the mirror is one of Foucault's main metaphors for heterotopia. The title of this dissertation, "Mimicry, Mirroring, Subversion, and Critique," is a citation of this central metaphor of the mirror, and an addition of three of the main functions of heterotopia as I understand its instantiation in the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The spaces, like many heterotopias, serve to mimic other more hegemonic spaces, and then subvert and critique them in ways both subtle and obvious. This dissertation will seek to illuminate the ways the Cubicula of the Sacraments perform these functions. These are not the only functions of heterotopia, and these four terms are not to be taken as specific or technical descriptors, but should rather be understood in the sense Foucault uses them, as general suggestions of how the spaces function. Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 25. By "mimicry," I mean that those who made the Cubicula of the Sacraments often reproduced more normative Roman images and ideas, sometimes repurposing them for Christian stories, and sometimes lifting iconography from one image to employ somewhere else. This was mimicry born of necessity, since the people decorating the Cubicula were inextricably in and of Rome in the second and third centuries. But it was also a creative mimicry, repurposing images for the bearing of new meaning. By "mirroring," I mean to evoke Foucault's own example, in which he describes how the mirror works like heterotopia works: to reflect back a space that is not real, though it is the image of real space. The mirror, Foucault writes, "does exist in reality," and is not an imaginary space, but its function is to open up an "unreal, virtual space" which is opposed to the real. *Ibid.*, 24. Subversion refers to the effect of this mimicry and mirroring: the makers of the Cubicula and other catacomb spaces, by appropriating and re-appropriating the images and ideas of more normative Roman culture, thereby claimed it for their own, and subverted the truth-claims of those more normative images and ideas to their own truth-claims. Critique functions in the same way: it refers both to the attitude of the communities in the re-appropriation of images and ideas, but it also refers to the spirit in which the space itself was constructed: as counter-spaces, set against and over hegemonic space, critiquing other spaces and asserting itself as a totalizing and "perfect, meticulous...well-arranged" heterotopia. *Ibid.*, 27. "Mimicry, Mirroring, Subversion, and Critique," then, refers to the way the spaces were constructed—in opposition to but participating in Roman cultures, replicating while also critiquing Roman images, ideas, and spaces. The Cubicula of the Sacraments are inescapably Roman, but they also seek to redefine Roman-ness—to reclaim it and rehabilitate it for a new construal of the world.

¹⁴ Some scholars dispute the usage of heterotopia to describe marginality and alterity. This debate will be summarized in Chapter 2.

The heart of this dissertation, discussed in Chapters 2 through 6, lies at the foot of those stairs Callistus descended atop the green hill south of the Servian wall: in the so-called Cubicula of the Sacraments, five rooms situated in one of the oldest parts of the Callistus Catacomb. The rooms are so named because of the rich decorations adorning their walls, featuring what the catacombs' Counter-Reformation re-discoverers and interpreters understood as sacraments: Baptism and Eucharist. Additionally, the Cubicula contains images of Jonah's journeys and trials with the *ketos*, communal meals, fishermen, *fossores*, Abraham and Isaac, Moses, and other images from both Jewish and Christian scriptures and Christian tradition.¹⁵ The third chapter of this dissertation will be concerned with the catacomb's and Cubicula's places within the Roman urban landscape, and how that situatedness contributed to their heterotopian nature. The fourth chapter will examine the art of the Cubicula, reading the images for signs of heterotopia. The fifth chapter will consider the texts to which that art refers, noting what kinds of texts the communities were reading and painting, and asking what signs of heterotopia can be read there. And the sixth chapter will examine the practices that occurred in the catacomb or were depicted in the catacomb, and ask how those practices contributed to and reinforced the heterotopian nature of the catacombs.

The purchase these arguments will make is a vision of the early Christian communities of Rome as embedded in Roman space, inextricably linked to Roman life, customs, religion, commerce, language, and symbols, but nevertheless ineluctably opposed to it at the same time. It is a vision of conflict-in-space, embodied in the

¹⁵ In this dissertation I will use "*ketos*," the Greek word for the sea creature in the tale of Jonah, rather than "whale" or "fish," two common, but troublesome translations.

Christians' construal-in-space of their understanding of their religion and their place in the world. It is a vision that takes seriously the existence-in-space of early Christianity in Rome, and the consequences of that emplacement.

The balance of this current chapter, then, will be devoted to setting the stage for the above: introducing and defining terms, recounting briefly the history of the catacombs and their rediscovery, and reviewing the scholarship of the catacombs from their rediscovery to the present.

The Beginnings of the Catacombs

The word "catacomb" derives from the Greek words *κατα'κὺμβας*, used from at least the fourth century CE to refer to a locale along the Via Appia where the ground was hollowed out, forming cavities.¹⁶ The designation came to apply particularly to the few Jewish and many Christian underground funerary complexes that sprang up around Rome between the first and fifth centuries CE.¹⁷ By the end of the catacombs' production in the fifth century, more than sixty complexes had been created by the Christian communities of Rome. These ranged in size from the small and familial to the grand and communal.¹⁸

I share a bias in my scholarly interest in the catacombs (and Christian material culture generally) with Graydon Snyder, who divides early Christian material culture into

¹⁶ This area is now the San Sebastiano complex, adjacent to the Callistus Catacomb. Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 9.

¹⁷ Leonard Rutgers et al. have demonstrated that Jewish catacombs predated Christian ones in Rome. Analysis of the Villa Torlonia catacomb, a Jewish catacomb, demonstrates that it was in use before construction began on the earliest Christian catacombs, including Callistus. Leonard V. Rutgers et al., "Jewish Inspiration of Christian Catacombs," *Nature* 436, no. 7049 (2005).

¹⁸ For a review of many of the catacombs of Rome, including those of various sizes and uses, see Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 25-69. For a good account of the distinctions between catacombs and other burial spaces, such as columbaria, see Bodel's chapter in Laurie Brink, and Deborah Green, ed. *Commemorating the Dead: Texts and Artifacts in Context. Studies of Roman, Jewish, and Christian Burials* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008).

two periods: an early period and a late period, falling on either side of the reforms of Constantine in the early fourth century CE. The earlier period is the subject of Snyder's interest, and he elegantly calls it "*ante pacem*," or the time "before the peace" of Constantine.¹⁹ I share Snyder's interest in the earlier period, and therefore it is the pre-Constantinian catacombs that interest me most. These include, by Snyder's estimation, portions of the Priscilla Catacomb along the Via Salaria in northeast Rome, portions of the Callistus Catacomb, and portions of the Domitilla Catacomb, located near the Callistus Catacomb.²⁰ Others identify portions of the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus and the San Sebastiano Catacomb as catacombs belonging to this early period, although Snyder considers them "covered cemeteries" and not catacombs.²¹ The Callistus Catacomb, then, belongs to a small collection of Christian burial sites in Rome that predate the reign of Constantine and the beginning of the ascendancy of Christianity in the Empire.²² As such, along with its fellow early sites it is immensely important for

¹⁹ Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 1-4.

²⁰ Snyder's criterion here is catacombs "with nuclei that are certainly late second to early third century." Ibid., 157-63.

²¹ Again, Snyder identifies portions of these complexes as pre-Constantinian, although he classifies them as "covered cemeteries" rather than catacombs. Semantics aside, they are of the same general category as the catacombs proper, and may be included in any discussion of early Christian burial sites in Rome. Snyder also includes Sta. Agnese, S. Lorenzo fuori le mura, and St. Peter's in this list, although they are more properly cemeteries and not catacombs. Ibid., 171-205.

²² The only other certainly identifiable material remains attributable to Christians in this period are Christian manuscripts (as Larry Hurtado argued in *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*), and the house church at Dura Europos. Larry Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

understanding the nature and development of Christianity in the period before Constantine, and in particular for Christianity in Rome.²³

The Callistus Catacomb probably had its origins as a Christian burial site in the late second century or very early third century.²⁴ This date is arrived at by taking the earliest references to and burials in the catacomb and extrapolating backward a period long enough to ensure the catacomb's existence by that time.²⁵ A date of about 180 is the most common assignation, and is accepted here.²⁶ This earliest date of Christian usage, combined with the date of Christianity's imperial patronage beginning in the early fourth century, means that for Snyder, myself, and others interested in the church before Constantine, there is an effective period of about 130 years, from 180 to about 310, during which material culture might shed light on early Christianity.²⁷

²³ Catacombs are by no means limited to Rome, although the geology of the area lends itself to catacombs' development. North Africa, Naples, and most famously Paris have all seen the development of catacombs, among other places. Roman Christianity certainly set much of the pattern for later underground burial spaces, lending still more importance to them and their development.

²⁴ The site of the Callistus Catacomb, like most places beyond the city walls, likely had a pre-Christian history as a burial site. Some speculation connects the site to the Pomponians. Snyder traces this connection to the so-called "Roman School" of catacomb interpretation (see below), and rejects it. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 159-61.

²⁵ Zephyrinus' assignment of Callistus to the cemetery during his episcopacy (200-217) and the burial of Zephyrinus and several other early third-century bishops of Rome in the catacomb suggest to Snyder, *inter alia*, that the catacomb was well into its life as a community cemetery by that time. Ibid.

²⁶ Snyder puts the earliest date at "prior to 200." Ibid., 159. Baruffa gives a similarly vague date, "after the middle of the 2nd century." Antonio Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus: History, Archaeology, Faith* (Vatican City: L.E.V., 2000), 21. Nicolai et al. restrict the date "more or less to the last years of the second century." Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 14. Amanda Claridge dates certain of the areas of the catacomb to the second century, but declines to give a more specific range. Amanda Claridge, *Rome: An Oxford Archaeological Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 449-51.

²⁷ Only at the very end of this dissertation, in Chapter 6, will I move beyond these time frames, for a discussion of pilgrimage practices of late antiquity.

Within the Callistus Catacomb, there are two “nuclei” that date to this period: the spaces called the “Cubicula of the Sacraments,” and the so-called “Crypt of Lucina,” located near one another in the “First Area” of the catacomb.²⁸ Figure 1 illustrates these early areas in their context within the catacomb: the development of the catacomb began there, and then spread out to the west, northwest, and northeast, and deeper into the earth, respecting property lines above ground.²⁹ While other areas within the Callistus Catacomb might contain some pre-Constantinian material, the only areas certainly belonging wholly to the era in question are the Cubicula of the Sacraments and the Crypt of Lucina. While the Crypt of Lucina would provide excellent material for a project like this, I have chosen to examine the Cubicula of the Sacraments because of their plentiful and varied art.

“Cubicula” is the plural form of “cubiculum,” the word used to refer to rooms within catacombs. There are two basic kinds of burial sites in the catacombs generally and the Callistus Catacomb specifically: loculi and cubicula. Loculi are shelf-like recesses cut into the walls of hallways, meant to receive one or two bodies, and to be sealed off with a stone or terra cotta slab, mortar, or brick, onto which an image and

²⁸ The naming of spaces within the catacombs is laden with ideological agendas. Below, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation contexts of the catacombs’ rediscovery and initial scholarship will be discussed. A name like “Cubicula of the Sacraments” implies a sacramental understanding of the acts depicted (not to mention a particular interpretation of images) that is not shared by all interpreters. One important area of the Crypt of Lucina, the site known as the “Crypt of the Popes,” contains the burial sites of eight more bishops of Rome, and on a tour of the site the Salesian monks who serve as tour guides will point out the resting places of Catholicism’s early popes. However, many scholars, including myself, consider the designation “pope” anachronistic for the period. The study of the catacombs is rife with theological and ecclesiological agendas like these, and some of the implications of these will be discussed below. For the sake of consistency with other scholarly publications, many of which were undertaken by Catholic scholars and clergymen, I use the traditional designations, although I may not agree with the theological and ecclesiological reasoning that produced them.

²⁹ This seems to have been broadly true, although it was of course imprecise, and it is difficult to imagine how this might have been accomplished in antiquity. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 34-35.

simple epitaph was sometimes scratched—often the Latin words “IN PACE,” “in peace.” These were typically the choice of the poor or destitute, a sizable portion of both the general Roman population and the Roman Christian population.³⁰ Loculi were therefore usually undecorated or poorly decorated. Although many were looted either by invaders beginning in the fifth century or for the medieval removal of relics to churches in the Middle Ages, some remain intact.³¹

Cubicula, on the other hand, were often the province of wealthier families and individuals, and were decorated accordingly.³² They were rooms dug into the tufa, stretching out to the sides of the hallways, and were typically of small dimensions. Inside they held the same kinds of ledges dug into the walls, and also sometimes sarcophagi, ranging from basic and roughly executed to finely wrought. These sarcophagi are occasionally still visible, some even containing bone fragments, although many have been removed.

The Cubicula of the Sacraments, then, probably represent the final resting place of people of means. These spaces cannot offer a cross-section of Roman Christianity generally, because people of lesser means likely were not able to afford to memorialize their dead in ways that crystallized their beliefs and worldview into space and art. This is

³⁰ For a valuable analysis of the socio-economic status of early Christians, see Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

³¹ Although the names and identities of most of those buried in the catacombs have long since passed out of memory, the visitor can still be overtaken by a deep sense of pathos. A few contain tokens of the person’s life: a bit of glass embedded into the mortar, or the symbols of one’s trade etched into the stone covering the entrance. Loculi of children are appallingly common, their tiny dimensions a reminder of the high rate of child mortality that plagued antiquity. It appears that infants were sometimes buried in the catacombs, although some Christian communities might have shared non-Christian Rome’s propensity to reserve burial or cremation for older children.

³² See Rhee, especially Chapter 4. Helen Rhee, *Loving the Poor, Saving the Rich: Wealth, Poverty, and Early Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012).

mitigated somewhat by the ecclesiastical oversight of the catacomb, which might have ensured that it was more egalitarian than a privately owned cemetery would have been, but it is likely that this dissertation deals with subject matter that reveals something about only the wealthier members of Roman Christendom.³³

History of the Catacombs and the Callistus Catacomb: Creation and Early Use (Second through Fifth Centuries)

While underground tombs were common across ancient cultures, the catacombs in Rome were likely an innovation of the Jewish community, which was adopted by the Christians there beginning in the late second century.³⁴ They probably had their origins when people began making use of natural hollows in the earth and spaces left over from mining activity, and burying their dead there.³⁵ The catacombs were possible in part because of a fortuitous feature of the geography of Rome, the deposition of a volcanic rock, called tufa, around the city. Tufa was (and is) a valuable material for building, due to its light weight, easy working qualities, and high strength.³⁶ The combination of these qualities meant that the mining of tufa for building material left behind underground

³³ Peter Lampe makes an argument that the assignment of Callistus as overseer of the Callistus Catacomb was not as simple as it seemed, owing to the difficulties of establishing that the church owned property that early. His discussion of the matter also includes several comments on the purposes of church oversight, including as a burial place for Christians of lesser means. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 25-28.

³⁴ Rutgers has established the precedence of Jewish catacombs over Christian ones. Rutgers et al., "Jewish Inspiration."

³⁵ Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 9.

³⁶ Tufa is also referred to as "tuff." L.V. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome: In Search of the Roots of Christianity in the Catacombs of the Eternal City* (Lueven: Peeters, 2000), 43-46.

cavities of remarkable structural soundness that rarely needed buttressing. The native tufa of Rome was the ideal material from which to hew the underground spaces.³⁷

Those who undertook the excavating were called *fossores*, from the Latin *fodere*, meaning “to dig.”³⁸ By the third or fourth century, they were known as a minor class of the clergy, underscoring the church’s involvement in the catacombs, and giving them great influence over the development of the catacombs.³⁹ Into the third and fourth centuries, the *fossores* imposed order onto the catacombs, which had begun with a rather inchoate pattern. A characteristic fishbone pattern began to flourish in many of the catacombs of Rome, probably representing the standardizing work of the *fossores*, making the planning and development of the catacombs more systematic and efficient.⁴⁰

A person or family wishing to bury someone in the catacomb, then, would work with the *fossores* to secure a space. In catacombs that were administered by the church, like the Callistus Catacomb, spaces were produced and managed by the *fossores* (and therefore by the church).⁴¹ The subsequent use of the spaces, however, including any rituals and decorations occurring there, is less certain. It is likely that there was ecclesiastical presence in the catacombs, at least in the form of burial and

³⁷ More work had to be done, of course, in order for the walls to receive images. Before our fictional Dionysios could apply his images, the walls would have been shaped and plastered. That work was largely carried out by *fossores*, who were also charged with maintenance.

³⁸ Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, 68-69.

³⁹ G.B. de Rossi, *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana Tom. II* (Rome: Litografia Pontificia, 1867), 120.

⁴⁰ Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, 68-73.

⁴¹ There were, of course, catacombs that operated differently. The Via Latina catacomb is likely an example of a private or familial burial space, not sanctioned by the church. Antonio Ferrua, *Le Pitture Della Nuova Catacomba Di Via Latina* (Citta Del Vaticano: Potoficio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 1960). William Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb: Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth Century Roman Painting* (University Park and London 1986).

memorialization rites, although Ramsay MacMullen, among others, has noted that the catacombs and other cemetery sites were likely the epicenter of early popular Christianity.⁴² The most intense period of the catacombs' use lasted roughly from the beginning described above, in the late second century, until the end of the fifth century.⁴³ During this period, catacombs, including the Callistus Catacomb, were being created and used for burials.

History of the Catacombs and the Callistus Catacomb: Pilgrimage (Fifth through Sixth Centuries)

A second phase of the catacombs' use began in the fifth century and lasted into the sixth, and consisted of the catacombs being a site of devotional attention and pilgrimage.⁴⁴ Only rarely were new burials undertaken in the catacombs in this period; due to the increasing vulnerability of the city of Rome to external attack, burials were increasingly made within the city boundaries, in violation of the ancient pomerium.⁴⁵ At the same time, though, the burials of the catacombs' first period, dating to the second and fourth centuries, began to be visited as part of standard pilgrimage itineraries. The spaces became museums of a sort, or shrines, to the martyrs and saints who were interred there.⁴⁶ This second, later period is not of concern to the bulk of this dissertation, which is primarily concerned with the initial period, except for those instances in which the

⁴² MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 69-94.

⁴³ Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 156.

⁴⁴ Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 60.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 65. The catacombs were not completely forgotten, as they were known locally, and through works like the *Mirabilia Romae*. The locations and full extent of them were forgotten, though, setting up the work of explorers and scholars like Bosio.

⁴⁶ Martyrdom and pilgrimage will be among the subjects discussed in Chapter 6.

pilgrims' visits altered the Callistus Catacomb and other catacombs, which will be examined at the end of Chapter 6, where I argue that pilgrimage to the catacombs in late antiquity underscored and codified the heterotopian nature of the spaces.⁴⁷

History of the Catacombs and the Callistus Catacomb: Abandonment (Seventh through Sixteenth centuries) and Rediscovery (Sixteenth Century to Present)

A third period in the history of the catacombs came on the heels of this period of pilgrimage activity, in the seventh and eighth centuries and beyond. Facing the threat of invasions and the repeated sacking of the city, and eschewing the task of maintaining subterranean environments prone to collapses, water infiltration, and vandalism, the early medieval church abandoned the catacombs and removed many of the most important human remains to basilicas and cathedrals within city walls.⁴⁸ The catacombs were then largely forgotten until the end of the sixteenth century.⁴⁹

In 1578, workers in the Vigna Sanchez, a vineyard near the Via Salaria in northern Rome, uncovered an underground cavity that was determined to be a catacomb. This discovery, coming at a time of high tensions between Protestant and Catholic Christians over the origins of Christianity, sparked interest in discovering other early Christian underground burial sites, and an explosion of catacomb discovery and

⁴⁷ That the catacombs were the sites of such intense pilgrimage activity suggests that they were understood early on as significant repositories of meaning and information about earliest Christianity. It tells us that the spaces were understood as powerful signifiers of the Christian thing, even in the era before the rediscovery of the catacombs.

⁴⁸ The way the removal of relics is described is often reflective of the theological leanings of the work's authors. Roman Catholic authors (the preponderance of interpreters) describe this move as one designed to protect sacred relics. This strikes me as a romanticization of the event; it seems more likely that the removal of remains just as often would have been to bring prestige to a new edifice by installing ancient relics on its premises.

⁴⁹ But not completely forgotten, as an inscription from a Scottish pilgrim in 1467 demonstrates. Hugh McEwan, "A Scottish Inscription in the Roman Catacombs," *Innes Review* 7 (1956).

exploration ensued.⁵⁰ Catacomb-hunting quickly became a kind of religious devotion for some, with each newly rediscovered catacomb providing ammunition for the theological battles of the day.

The first scholar of the catacombs, and still one of the most influential, was Antonio Bosio (1575-1629).⁵¹ Bosio visited the Domatilla Catacomb as a young man and was moved by the experience, and henceforth dedicated his life to the study of the catacombs.⁵² Bosio noted that the catacombs tended to cluster along the roads leading out of Rome, and so he undertook a systematic survey of the areas along and around those roads. Aided by medieval pilgrimage itineraries, which sometimes pointed the way to catacomb entrances by still-extant landmarks, Bosio rediscovered many of the catacombs known today.⁵³

Bosio's work, outlined in his *Roma Sotterranea*, published posthumously in 1710, set the agenda for the study of the catacombs for more than two centuries.⁵⁴ By having excavated and catalogued the many catacombs of Rome, Bosio guided generations of scholars who followed him. These scholars were often dependent on his accounts and illustrations for access to the catacombs, because of restrictions on access, geography, or the continued degradation of the sites. His work also set an agenda for interpretation;

Bosio was a Roman Catholic living and working in the wake of the Protestant

⁵⁰ Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, 12.

⁵¹ This section is not meant to be an exhaustive list of scholars and explorers who helped to shed light on the catacombs. Rather, it is a thumbnail sketch, covering only two or three figures, of the way the catacombs emerged from obscurity following the period in which they were forgotten.

⁵³ Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, 15-25.

⁵⁴ Antonio Bosio, *Roma Sotterranea: Opera Postuma*, ed. Giovanni Severano (Roma: Michel'Angelo e Pietro Vincenzo Fratelli de' Rossi, 1710).

Reformation, and his interpretations of the catacombs often exhibited the marks of Counter-Reformation polemics. In particular, Bosio's interpretations tended to try to read the catacombs as evidence of the perseverance of the Roman Catholic tradition, unchanged, back into the second and third centuries. Although his Catholic reading of the catacombs would be challenged, it has remained the dominant one, in some circles, until today.⁵⁵

While Bosio's work has remained influential—and was strongly so for over two centuries—another major interpreter also began to make his mark on catacomb studies in the middle of the nineteenth century. Giovanni Battista de Rossi received a copy of Bosio's *Roma Sotterranea* when he was eleven years old, and became enthralled with the idea of taking up Bosio's mantle.⁵⁶ As an adult, de Rossi did indeed assume Bosio's work, continuing the search for undiscovered catacombs and systematically studying the ones already known.⁵⁷ de Rossi is best known for his scientific approach to his work; in contrast to Bosio and others, de Rossi largely eschewed theological agendas and motivations, preferring to focus on evidence and a more scientific or rational analysis of

⁵⁵ Rutgers offers a profile of Jacques Basnage, a French Huguenot who vehemently challenged Bosio's interpretations of the catacombs, suggesting that Bosio was treating inferences as observations and legends as histories. Although Basnage's critiques did little to dissuade Bosio's intellectual heirs, his work did raise questions that, as Rutgers points out, still concern catacombs scholars today. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, 25-29.

⁵⁶ de Rossi lived 1822-1894. He would have received Bosio's book in about 1833, or when the book was already about 120 years old. *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁷ de Rossi discovered about thirty catacombs, bringing the total rediscovered to about sixty, or roughly the number known today. *Ibid.*, 34.

the materials.⁵⁸ His legacy to catacomb studies is the scientific rigor he brought to the field.

In 1864 and 1867, de Rossi published an enormous two-volume set of catacomb research titled *Roma Sotterranea Cristiana*.⁵⁹ These works are still valuable to scholars today, primarily for their detailed plates, often rendered in color, of artwork that since has been degraded or has been destroyed altogether. de Rossi's ambition of finishing Bosio's work, and of cataloging the Christian catacombs of Rome, was largely successful. And his scholarship helped to set a tone of seriousness and intellectual rigor that was in contrast to the earlier period of catacomb scholarship, in which Reformation and Counter-Reformation polemics often took precedence over evidence and reason.

Scholarship in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

The study of the catacombs in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is still heavily reliant on the legacy of those early interpreters. While traditional archaeological methods and interpretations continue to dominate the field, other modes of inquiry also have been employed, diversifying the study of the catacombs. To the tradition begun by Bosio (called the "Roman School" by Snyder, a designation I use here) have been added the efforts of art history and several different forms of social and cultural analysis. This latter category includes interpretations born of folk religion or popular religion, religious

⁵⁸ This is not to say that de Rossi was free of theological bias. Rutgers notes that de Rossi, too, could show signs of defending Catholic orthodoxy, although he was adamant about his scholarly neutrality. de Rossi famously escorted Pope Pius IX on a tour of the Crypt of the Popes in the Callistus Catacombs, during which the Pope is said to have burst into tears at the names of his predecessors inscribed on the wall. *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁵⁹ de Rossi, *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana Tom. II*; G.B. de Rossi, *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana Tom. I* (Rome: Litografica Pontificia, 1864).

studies, and comparative mythology. I will briefly sketch these contributions here, before concluding by arguing to include a voice for spatial analysis in the conversation.

The “Roman School”

This turn away from theological disputation and toward more scientific analysis, precipitated by de Rossi in the nineteenth century, helped to make later catacomb scholarship less ideologically driven. But the concerns of earlier interpreters, who like Bosio often had a theological axe to grind, have never fully receded from view. This is in part due to the realities of geography: the catacombs themselves are mostly owned and administered by the Roman Catholic Church through the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology. This Commission oversees research on the catacombs. The individual catacombs are sometimes overseen by religious orders, which undertake routine maintenance and tourism if the site is open to the public.⁶⁰ Thus access to the sites is restricted, including a strict prohibition on photography inside the catacombs. This means that any research undertaken on the catacombs must first be approved by the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology, and any images analyzed or published must come from its archive. For these reasons, in practice research on the catacombs rarely challenges the perspective first set forth by Bosio, that the catacombs are evidence of an intact Catholic tradition stretching back into the second century.

Graydon Snyder has called this tradition of interpreting the catacombs the “Roman School.”⁶¹ Snyder characterizes the Roman school as overly obsequious to literary sources, especially the biblical record and the writings of the church fathers. The

⁶⁰ The Callistus Catacomb, for example, is now overseen by the Salesian order.

⁶¹ The quotes are in the original. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 10-11.

Roman School's method of interpretation, Snyder argues, is to begin with the assumption that the literary record is an accurate account of events, and then interpret the material data to support the literary. Snyder understands the Roman School's ultimate goal as synthesizing the literary and material evidence, but when that is not possible, "the literary tradition will be preferred."⁶²

Having been born out of the contestation of the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation, it is easy to understand how this tradition of catacomb interpretation might have developed. Bosio and other early interpreters saw the catacombs as an opportunity to establish the precedence and dominance of the Catholic tradition, and so their interpretations of the material discovered in the catacombs were necessarily inclined to favor that position. This was mitigated by later interpreters like de Rossi, but the early patterns of interpretation, which see Counter-Reformation Catholicism in the second and third century catacombs, still persist.

Art-Historical Analysis

Given the frequency and importance of images in the catacombs, art history has a prominent role to play in their interpretation. Interpretation within the field has frequently occurred under the rubric of iconographic analysis. The art of the Christian catacombs is not *sui generis*; it belongs securely to the tradition of late antique Greco-Roman art. Iconographic analysis, then, can play a significant role in the analysis of the catacombs, including helping to determine the socio-economic locations of the catacombs' patrons,

⁶² Snyder is obviously critical of the Roman School's methods and conclusions, as are many scholars, especially Protestant ones. *Ibid.*, 10.

the social and cultural influences on early Christianity, and the dating of certain parts of the catacombs.

The work of art history and the analysis of iconography is, in the words of Paul Corby Finney, “not an exact science.”⁶³ It is always a work of interpretation, and interpretations of the art of the catacombs vary greatly from scholar to scholar. Finney casts the iconographic debate in terms of two opposing viewpoints on the art of the catacombs: minimalism and maximalism.⁶⁴ Minimalist interpreters are those who view early Christian art like that in the Callistus Catacomb as existing in significant continuity with Greco-Roman artistic tradition, having few distinguishing characteristics, and therefore few particularly Christian meanings. Christian art, in this view, is run-of-the-mill fare for the period, and limited in its ability to convey much about the people who painted or sponsored the painting.⁶⁵

The opposite position, in Finney’s view, is the maximalist opinion, reading meaning in images created by or for Christians, even when those images have a long history in pagan art. The maximalist position tends to be held by those with training in history or religious studies, and not purely in art history.⁶⁶ This dissertation tends toward

⁶³ Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 186.

⁶⁴ Although Finney is discussing early Christian art generally, it happens that in this section he is especially focused on the art of the Callistus Catacomb. *Ibid.*, 186-91.

⁶⁵ Finney includes a good account of this debate across several time periods, focusing especially on the figures of the *kriophoros* (ram-bearer, or in Christian terms, Good Shepherd) and the *orant* (praying figure). *Ibid.*, 187-89.

⁶⁶ The works of Sister Charles Murray, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, and Graydon Snyder, for example, exhibit maximalist tendencies, while all coming from a religious studies perspective, as the next section will demonstrate. However, one of the most maximalist analyses recently published was written by Thomas Mathews, an art historian, so the rule is not hard and fast. Sister Charles Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife: A*

a maximalist reading, seeing meaning even in images with long usage in Greco-Roman art. It is nevertheless dependent, as nearly all analyses of the catacombs are, on the work of art historians doing traditional iconographic analysis. Exact science or not, art history continues to reside alongside archaeology at the center of the study of the catacombs.⁶⁷

Social and Cultural Analyses

Besides the archaeological/historical work of the Roman School and the iconographic work of art history, several other forms of analysis have informed the study of the catacombs in recent years. These will all be addressed elsewhere in the dissertation, and so their inclusion here is perfunctory. The first of these makes use of the category and idea of folk religion or popular religion to explain the construction and usage of the catacombs. Recently, this strain has been best characterized by MacMullen's work *The Second Church*, which argues for an important role for the catacombs and other early Christian cemeteries in the daily religious lives of normal Christians.⁶⁸ The second form of cultural analysis is from the field of religious studies, where scholars are increasingly aware of the possibilities of the catacombs and their art as data points, comparable to texts, for understanding the lives and worldviews of early Christians. The writings of Sister Charles Murray, Graydon Snyder, Robin Jensen, and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon in particular have helped to bring the tools and sensibilities of religious

Study of the Transmutation of some Pagan Imagery in Early Christian Funerary Art (Oxford: B.A.R., 1981); Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus: Neofitus Iit ad Deum* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990); Snyder, *Ante Pacem*. Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993).

⁶⁷ By "archaeology," I mean the work of the "Roman School" and others who are concerned with locating, cataloging, and interpreting the physical catacomb spaces.

⁶⁸ MacMullen, *The Second Church*.

studies to bear on the catacombs and the religious people who built them.⁶⁹ This dissertation seeks to add to this kind of analysis. Finally, catacomb studies has had to take account of the contribution of Thomas Mathews, whose book *Clash of Gods* created a stir in the field. In this book, Mathews assails what he calls “the mistake of the emperor mystique.”⁷⁰ What Mathews is challenging is a long-standing interpretive standard, and indeed one of the bedrock principles of the interpretation of early Christian art: that Christian art may be divided into pre-Constantinian and post-Constantinian periods, with the former being primarily a private affair, and the latter being a public, propagandistic, and ultimately imperial enterprise.⁷¹ Instead, Mathews understands early Christian art, including that of the catacombs, as illustrative of the Christian cosmology, which is set in contrast with the more dominant cosmology of normative Roman society.⁷²

The Plan of the Present Work

While this dissertation rests upon and draws from all the modes of analysis just enumerated, it also seeks to break new ground. Grounded in the field of religious studies, and sharing scholarly sensibilities with interpreters like Snyder, Malbon, and Murray, this project adds another tool to the toolbox: a spatial analysis informed by the notion of

⁶⁹ See Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*; Sister Charles Murray, "Art and the Early Church," *Journal of Theological Studies* 28, no. 2 (1977); Sister Charles Murray, "Early Christian Art and Archaeology," *Religion* 12, no. 2 (1982); Snyder, *Ante Pacem*; Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Robin Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christian Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*.

⁷⁰ Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 12ff.

⁷¹ This is a distinction that I hold, contra Mathews but with Snyder, in this dissertation.

⁷² Although Mathews is not a significant source for this dissertation, I am guided by his willingness to challenge long-held positions and engage in polarizing and disruptive scholarship. It is my opinion that the study of the catacombs deserves more works like his, whether they ultimately win acceptance, or simply force useful questions and definitions.

heterotopia as articulated by Michel Foucault and others.⁷³ Through the lens of heterotopia, which describes the ways spaces exist in relation and opposition to other spaces, the catacombs and the communities that created and used them will be brought into sharper relief. The aim of this dissertation is not to perform historical or archaeological work, as the Roman School might do, or to perform iconographic analysis, as Art Historians might do.

My work here has more in common with the social and cultural analysis of scholars like Mathews, MacMullen, and Murray, who seek to see the catacombs in relation to early Christian culture and early Christian worldviews. But this project is distinct even from those; my aim in this dissertation is to describe the ways that early Roman Christians, by their construction and use of the catacombs, imagined themselves within and against the imperial city and world in which they lived. Focusing on the Cubicula of the Sacraments, through the lens of heterotopia, this dissertation will understand the catacombs as Christian mimicry, mirroring, subversion, and critique of normative Roman culture, religion, and politics, and as a construal of Christianity and its place in the world.

⁷³ While this work is inspired by the approaches of these authors, it is not heavily dependent on their arguments.

CHAPTER 2: HETEROTOPIAS

“We don’t live in a black and white neutral space, we don’t live [...] in the rectangle of a paper sheet. We live, die and love in a squared space, cut, variegated, with bright and dark areas, with drops, steps, depressions and bumps, with some hard regions and other crumbly, permeable, porous.”

--Michel Foucault, *France-Culture*, December 7 1966

Dionysios’ Jonah and the Problems of Catacomb Analysis

Sometime in the third century of the Common Era, a man we will call Dionysios began to paint pictures onto the walls of a burial chamber in the Callistus Catacomb.⁷⁴ He would have required a small ladder or a stool, as the upper reaches of the wall where his work was to be done were higher than a man could comfortably reach for hours at a time—higher than the highest row of loculi that marked the wall. Perched against the ceiling, Dionysios began to paint scenes from the life of Jonah: Jonah on a ship on the sea, Jonah being cast to a fierce-looking ketos among the waves, and then finally Jonah in repose, having made his way back to shore again, resting from his struggles. The narrative formed by his paintings moved from right to left, tracing the experiences of one

⁷⁴ The painter of these images, like those of all catacomb images, was anonymous. Here I call him Dionysios, to imply Greek derivation, which is characteristic of artisans, slaves, and early Christian populations alike. Bernard Green places the work of the first catacomb artists, like Dionysios, at about the year 235. Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*. A good view into Cubiculum A3, which is described here, can be found at Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 81.

of the heroes of the Septuagint as he unwillingly undertook a mission from God.⁷⁵

Dionysios' work would have looked out of place in the finer homes of Rome, crude and simply drawn as it was, but taking into account the challenges of painting on a stool in dim light several stories underground, his work was quite passable.

There are many ways to think about Dionysios' work. Art historians might ask which iconographic traditions he drew upon, and at whose feet he had studied. Those with a Marxist bent might ask about the means of the images' production: was Dionysios a paid artist, a member of the community that owned and controlled the burial site, one of their slaves, or someone else?⁷⁶ Archaeologists might try to discover whether Dionysios

⁷⁵ It is curious that the Jonah cycle is here depicted from right to left. In at least one other instance in the Callistus Catacomb the Jonah cycle is depicted right to left, but elsewhere, like the sarcophagus reproduced by Rutgers, the cycle proceeds left to right. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, 95. The implications of this difference are at least two. First, it weakens arguments by Weitzmann and others who posit the existence of miniature book versions of illustrations (perhaps in illustrated versions of the Septuagint, of which none are extant); if artists were copying miniatures to make larger catacomb paintings and monumental mosaic and painting installations, it is unlikely they would have reversed the order. Kurt Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine Manuscript Illumination* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 96-100. Furthermore, it might imply something about the literacy of our half-fictional Dionysios: he might have either been illiterate, and have painted the cycle without a preconceived notion of which way a narrative flows, or he might have been literate or semi-literate in a language that flowed right to left. Hebrew and Aramaic are the obvious intriguing options, although there is not much to suggest that identification beyond this circumstantial evidence. In that case, Dionysios is poorly named. Robin Jensen also notes the oddity of the right to left flow. Jeffrey et al. Spier, *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009), 173.

⁷⁶ As stated earlier in note 12, the notion of "community" is a difficult one. In this dissertation I assume that there was "a community" or "some communities" behind the catacombs; that is, they arose out of the communal life of a group or groups of people. Those communities are difficult to define. Peter Lampe has produced an excellent work on the probability of various concentrations of Christians in Rome in this period, based on textual and archaeological evidence, but even his work involves a great deal of inference and speculation. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*. Whether Dionysios and others like him would have "belonged" to the Christian community in any way, or whether they would have been hired artisans, or well-trained slaves on loan from a wealthier member of the community, is difficult to know. Here I assume that there was a single "community" broadly construed behind the Callistus Catacomb and others like it, and that there were likely more than one "community" more narrowly construed that were concerned with a particular catacomb during a particular time. I also assume, contra many others, that the artisans themselves had some connection to and investment in the "community," although I am not certain that they would have been "members" in a modern sense. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5. As noted earlier, Stanley Stowers has critiqued the use of the concept of "community" in early Christian studies, noting that it is a

also plastered the wall, where the hallway outside led at the time he did his painting, and whether his scenes from the life of Jonah were contemporary with any other work in the same place. Social historians might point to Dionysios' work in a cubicula, a comparatively more luxurious environment than the simple loculi nearby, and ask from what social class he or his employers might have derived.⁷⁷ These are all worthwhile and indeed necessary modes of analysis; without them all conspiring together, our understanding of this and other ancient Christian burial sites would be diminished.

What is missing from these and others inquiries that scholars might make into Dionysios' work and the chamber that contains it is attention to the space itself—to the cubiculum in which Dionysios set to work and its relationship to other spaces around it. A basic question underlies all others: how did it come to pass that a man should find himself high on a stool deep underground, painting scenes from the life of a prophet recorded in Jewish scriptures in a chamber built for housing Christian dead in the capitol of the Roman Empire? And another question follows quickly after: what could it have meant?

To put it another way, the environments of Cubiculum A6 following the completion of Dionysios' work and the work of others like him far surpassed what was necessary for burial, and differed markedly from even other tombs in Rome that were most similar. At the most basic, burial in Rome might have meant disposal in one of the

notion born of modern social structures and what he calls a “romantic historiography” of Christianity's origins. Stowers, "The Concept of 'Community'," 239.

⁷⁷ As noted in Chapter 1, there are significant differences between spaces in the catacombs. That these spaces were cubicula, and richly decorated ones, suggest a higher social and economic level. This distinction was outlined in Chapter 1, and will be noted in Chapter 3.

puticuli, wretched common pit graves so foul that the odor was still overwhelming upon their excavation in the nineteenth century.⁷⁸ A more proper burial in Rome could have consisted of cremation or interment in a simple hole in the ground, with no adornment or extra lengths taken.⁷⁹ A more luxurious burial might have involved a mausoleum and a sarcophagus, perhaps decorated with images from the deceased's life and work, with stock images from mythological and patriotic sources, or with aspirational ones of joviality and plenty in an afterlife.⁸⁰

The chamber where Dionysios worked was different from most other burial sites.⁸¹ It was part of a vast network of underground tunnels, dug by a minor class of the clergy for a Christian community, overseen by a church-appointed administrator who would later be referred to as a Pope, and decorated with a range of images drawn from Jewish and Christian texts and depicted with adapted sub-antique iconography.⁸² While it

⁷⁸ Valerie M. Hope, *Roman Death: The Dying and the Dead in Ancient Rome* (Continuum, 2009), 258.

⁷⁹ A thorough examination of Roman burial custom can be found in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. For a review of Roman burial traditions, see Richard P. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife: A Cultural Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 118.

⁸⁰ Katherine M. D. Dunbabin has written a comprehensive overview of Roman banqueting traditions and artistic representations, including three chapters with implications here. Dunbabin understands Roman tomb decorations as an extension of the "Totenmahl" motif, an iconographic tradition in which a single diner is depicted enjoying a banquet, and in Roman contexts sometimes extended to an intimate symposium of friends. Dunbabin understands the purpose of such tomb decorations as communicating plenty, joviality, and to use a term from her subtitle, "conviviality." According to Dunbabin's interpretation of this common motif in late antique Roman funerary art, Romans were interested in projecting status and a confident merriness in the world to come. Katherine M. D. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). See especially chapters 4-6.

⁸¹ Here the comparison is to typical Roman burials and ash deposits; the practices of Jews in Rome were more similar to those of Christians than those who were neither Christians nor Jews, and, as we discussed in Chapter 1, Jewish communities in Rome did bury their dead in catacombs, perhaps even earlier than Christians did.

⁸² Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome, appointed a deacon named Callixtus to oversee the catacombs, which eventually took his name. It was the first church-administered catacomb. Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St.*

shares features in common with other burial spaces, it is unmistakably a distinctive space, the product of a particular community and its engagement with its world, its texts, and its own theology. Dionysios' Jonah images play a part in a grander drama: a Christian group's construal-in-space of its view of itself and its world.⁸³

As outlined in Chapter 1, the interpretation of the catacombs and their images has tended to be a disjointed and provincial business. Work on the sites has been carried out across several disciplines, with little conversation across disciplinary lines and relatively few attempts at synthetic readings.⁸⁴ In the case of Dionysios' Jonah images, traditional modes of analysis have left us with an assortment of interpretations that struggle to cohere. Art history notes that artists like our fictional Dionysios were at home in late-antique or sub-antique techniques and styles, and that they borrowed liberally from the iconography of Endymion in enacting his work. Archaeology contributes an understanding of when the rooms themselves might have been constructed—in this case,

Callistus. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife*, 106. For the position of fossore among the clergy, see the entry in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, which reports that “in very early Christian times they were regarded as inferior clergy,” with their status rising until the closing of the catacombs between the fourth and the sixth centuries. ODCC, 3rd edition, F.L. Cross, E.A. Livingstone, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 626.

⁸³ David H. Kelsey uses a novel phrase from G.K. Chesterton to escape the overly deterministic ways of talking about Christianity and Christian communities that plagues scholarship. See Stowers, “The Concept of ‘Community’.” Kelsey uses the phrase “construal of the Christian thing,” or some variation thereof, thereby escaping totalizing definitions of what it means to be Christian. Here I adopt his language, speaking whenever possible of the ways the people who made the Callistus Catacomb (and those who made the other catacombs) *construe* their *Christianity*. While not escaping the implication that there is something called “Christianity” that is definable and discrete, the phrase does move toward an understanding of Christianity as something that can be significantly locally determined, with a great deal of liberty for the local community in its own unique expression of the religion. This dissertation is, in large part, about that “construal.” How does this one group of Christians behind this one underground edifice in this one place and time construe their collective faith? David H. Kelsey, *To Understand God Truly: What's Theological about a Theological School* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 211.

⁸⁴ As noted in Chapter 1, the work of Thomas Mathews is an exception, and is a good example of the willingness to question traditional conclusions that characterizes the project I undertake here. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*.

Cubiculum A6 was likely one of the first areas of the catacomb, probably completed by the early or middle third century.⁸⁵ Biblical exegetes note the themes of foreignness, estrangement, and resurrection in the story of Jonah's journey, and social historians connect those themes to the experiences of Christian Romans and the funerary context. But rarely are the conclusions of each discipline in conversation with each other, and almost never are they taken together under a still larger umbrella.

A comprehensive theoretical structure will allow for an integrated reading that takes account of the insights of various disciplines while also transcending their boundaries. In this work that structure comes from spatial theory generally and the idea of heterotopia specifically. Heterotopic analysis helps to account for the complexities of the cubacula, to synthesize the insights of various disciplines, and to arrive at a more holistic reading of the cubacula as social and cultural products. With Dionysios' Jonah and its context in A6 as a point of departure, this chapter will develop the idea of heterotopia as it was expressed by Foucault and developed by later theorists.

Jonah in Space: The Place of a Part in the Whole

That Dionysios painted Jonah on the wall of Cubiculum A6 was not accidental. The room we call A6 was built as a place for a placeless people—a space for those with few or no other permanent communal spaces, in a time before imperial patronage made Christians embarrassingly rich with sacred space. The room itself was a project of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but also of the common Christians who undergirded the hierarchy, including, probably, Dionysios himself. It was the first in a series of similarly-

⁸⁵ Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 79., Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 159-60. The iconography of Endymion is not of much concern to us here, except that Christian Jonah images copy it.

shaped rooms, lining a hallway deep underground, all comparably decorated with richly symbolic images. In the place where Dionysios worked, already there were across the room paintings of a dove and of a banquet with oddly plentiful and large baskets of bread in front. A spatial analysis like the one undertaken here argues that the images Dionysios painted were in conversation with these other images, and indeed with the symbolic diners themselves, as well as with the dead who were buried there, and perhaps with the real diners at Christian meals above the surface, whose burial space this was. A spatial analysis argues that his paintings were in conversation with the books from which the story of Jonah was taken, with the place in those books called Nineveh, a foreign and hostile-feeling place where Jonah was an alien—an experience many in Dionysios' community knew well.⁸⁶ They were in conversation with the story of Endymion, whose face and posture Jonah inherited, and with the artists who painted *those* images. And perhaps most of all, Dionysios' depictions of Jonah were in conversation with Rome—the place and the idea—as under her soil they spoke to a community that saw itself both as resident aliens and citizens with competing loyalties.

In other words, Dionysios' Jonah images entered into and contributed to a space where the complexities of some Christian Romans' lives were given full expression—or at least as full as they dared—in contrast to the other real spaces of their lives, in which their discourse was more circumscribed. This vision of Cubiculum A6 and its environs is made possible by viewing them as heterotopia—a term borrowed from medicine by

⁸⁶ Jonah is referenced not only in the eponymous book of Jewish scripture, but also in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, and in minor references in 2 Kings, 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, and 3 Maccabees. The references in the gospels will be treated in Chapter 5.

Foucault and developed by him and others to describe spaces which mirror, mimic, subvert, critique, and even polemicize other spaces.⁸⁷

Other Spaces: Foucault's Heterotopia

In 1967, in a lecture given to a gathering of architects, Michel Foucault borrowed a term from medicine and appropriated it as a spatial term.⁸⁸ In its original medical context, heterotopia was a part found out of place in a body: a tooth in the skull, a pancreas in the neck, and the like. For his presentation to the architects (later published as an article in the journal *Diacritics* in 1986), Foucault adapted it to the discourse of space.⁸⁹ It was a short and frustratingly incomplete introduction for the concept, but it was auspicious all the same: heterotopia has been taken up by a diverse cross-section of scholarship as a way of explaining certain spaces in the world, particularly those that operate in or on the margins of what might be termed “hegemonic” or “normal” space.⁹⁰ It has become a useful tool for those interested in analyzing and understanding the operations of power and meaning within and between spaces, especially in the field of geography. While the concept has been developed significantly by subsequent theorists,

⁸⁷ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

⁸⁸ Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996), 15.

⁸⁹ All references to Foucault's formulation of the concept of heterotopia are from the 1986 article in *Diacritics*, not from the original lecture. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

⁹⁰ For some of the diverse ways in which heterotopia has been deployed, see Tavakoli-Targhi, "Modernity, Heterotopia, and Homeless Texts," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 18, no. 2 (1998). Andre Jansson, "Beyond 'Other Spaces': Media Studies and the Cosmopolitan Vision," *The Communication Review* 12 (2009). Bruce McCoy Owens, "Monumentality, Identity, and the State: Local Practice, World Heritage, and Heterotopia at Swayambhu, Nepal," *Anthropological Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (2002). Joseph Pugliese, "Crisis Heterotopias and Border Zones of the Dead," *Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 23, no. 5 (2009).

any discussion must begin with Foucault's appropriation of it in his lecture and subsequent article.

In his article, Foucault identified two major kinds of heterotopias—crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation—and six “principles” shared by all heterotopias.⁹¹ Foucault was not clear whether these were the only two major options for heterotopic spaces, or whether he imagined other major kinds of heterotopias that he simply declined to describe.⁹² The two he did describe, however, are both pertinent to the use of the more general idea of heterotopia in the *Cubicula of the Sacraments*. Crisis heterotopias, says Foucault, “are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis.”⁹³ Among such individuals, Foucault counts women who are pregnant or menstruating, elderly people, young men in military service, and young women who are sent away from home to an “other” place to lose their virginity. For Foucault, crisis heterotopias are society's way of isolating and putting into a “nowhere” place those who are undergoing some socially-othering experience or change in status—removing from the society's hegemonic space people whose existence temporarily

⁹¹ Foucault is unclear whether there are only two varieties of heterotopia, or whether these two are simply the only ones worth mentioning, or if they were the only ones he had thought of at the time. To this author, the two varieties cited explicitly by Foucault are likely not meant to be exhaustive, and in any case do not seem to describe all possible heterotopias. This notion will be further developed below.

⁹² Foucault is clear that “heterotopias obviously take quite varied forms,” and that significant differences might exist between varieties. This discussion concerns what Foucault describes as the “main categories,” and whether there might be other, unarticulated “main categories.” Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

challenges, pollutes, or intrudes upon norms.⁹⁴ Although Foucault does not specify mourners as belonging to such a marginal group in society (and indeed he does not specify many groups at all, but gives just a few examples), it is easy to see how the bereaved could fit into the description outlined by Foucault. Those who mourn are marked by the experience of and contact with death, and so at a very basic level the space devoted to their mourning is a form of crisis heterotopia.⁹⁵

The second major kind of heterotopia outlined by Foucault is what he calls “heterotopias of deviation.”⁹⁶ These, according to Foucault, are more characteristic of modern society, and have gradually displaced crisis heterotopias, which he views as on the decline. Where crisis heterotopias were more concerned with a person’s status (pregnancy, menstruation, sexual impurity, etc.), heterotopias of deviation relate more to a person’s behavior. Heterotopias of deviation are locations for those “individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm.”⁹⁷ On the basis of this description, a space set apart by and used exclusively by a marginal sect like Christianity would appear to qualify as a heterotopia of deviation, but here Foucault’s lack of specificity is at its most frustrating: he uses the passive voice to describe deviant

⁹⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁹⁵ Indeed, for the city of Rome generally, all cemetery spaces were in some sense heterotopias. Burial was forbidden inside the city walls and inside the sacred pomerium, and so cemeteries both above- and below-ground proliferated just outside the Aurelian walls. The Catacomb of Callistus is such a site, located very near the city walls to the south of the city. For more detail, see Chapter 3.

⁹⁶ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 25.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

individuals' relationship to the heterotopic space—they “are placed” there.⁹⁸ This emphasis on societal sequestration of persons is in clear continuity with others of Foucault's concerns, particularly around incarceration and surveillance.⁹⁹ Here again, however, Foucault's lack of clarity is an obstacle; in the next sentences, he goes on to place rest homes for senior citizens on the “borderline” between the two kinds of heterotopia, suggesting that those sequestered of their own free will might also qualify, and further suggesting that the kinds of heterotopias he describes might not be absolute or exhaustive.¹⁰⁰

Foucault's use of the passive voice notwithstanding, it seems clear that heterotopias of deviation might be either self-imposed or imposed by authoritarian structures. Foucault's example of the rest home is but one example of a self-imposed heterotopia of deviation; locations such as night clubs, gay bars, all-you-can-eat buffets, internet pornography sites, vacation homes, and speakeasies all consist of self-imposed and in some cases self-created sites of deviation from norms.¹⁰¹ Given Foucault's own ambiguity, I understand heterotopias of deviation in the broader sense, not limited only to penal or institutional contexts, but encompassing all “other spaces” that function to

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977).

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 25. See also Foucault's discussion of leper houses and voluntary and involuntary segregation. Michel Foucault, *History of Madness* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 3-6.

¹⁰¹ I do not mean to imply that the behaviors that occur in such places are wrong or even that I personally consider them deviant; I simply mean that they are behaviors that are marginalized in broader culture, but tolerated when put into a confined heterotopic space. Heavy drinking is stigmatized in mainstream society but lionized in a bar. Gluttony is frowned upon generally but is a virtue at a buffet. Excessive leisure is labeled as sloth, but while on vacation it is celebrated. In this view, the entire city of Las Vegas is a self-imposed heterotopia of deviation.

separate deviant behavior from the rest of society. I also do not understand Foucault's enumeration of two particular kinds of heterotopia to preclude the existence of others, or to draw a clear boundary between the two that he did describe. Heterotopias might exist in any number of varieties, depending on the social contexts in which they form and the particular persons or community to which they belong.

The Christian catacombs of Rome do seem to qualify as both kinds of heterotopia—as crisis heterotopias in their function as sites of burial and mourning, and as heterotopias of deviation in their function as sites of self-imposed sequestration by Christians—suggesting that the divisions are not so rigid or decisive. Since they are funerary spaces, they easily qualify as crisis heterotopias, given the experience of death and mourning that characterizes their use. And given early Christianity's relationship to the rest of Roman society, which could range from harmless peculiarity to adversarial belligerence, the catacombs (as the community's only permanent communal space) were also a site of difference, a self-imposed heterotopia of deviation. The catacombs, then, were doubly heterotopic, in a general way as all cemeteries were, as well as in a specific way tied to the nature of the Christian community that built them.

In addition to the two major kinds of heterotopia, Foucault described six principles of heterotopias. These constitute a more helpful point of departure into heterotopia, as they encapsulate Foucault's own thinking about the idea and have formed the basis of subsequent inquiry by other scholars and theorists. In articulating these principles, Foucault allowed discourse about heterotopia to escape the bounds of his two “main categories” and be applied to any contexts in which the principles might be found.

It is these principles which serve as the most significant articulation of the concept from Foucault's pen.

The first principle is related and linked by Foucault to the two main categories discussed above. It is the principle of universality; Foucault avers that "there is probably not a single culture in the world that fails to constitute heterotopias."¹⁰² This is simultaneously obvious and of crucial importance; it tells us that Foucault would *expect* a group like the early Christian community in Rome to produce heterotopias. We need not wring our hands wondering if a group might have been the sort to produce them; as Foucault conceived of the idea, any given group did produce heterotopias, and our task is to locate and describe them.

The second principle of heterotopias is that of mutability over time. Foucault notes that human groups "can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion" from how it functioned previously, allowing for evolution in the way space is utilized.¹⁰³ Foucault's example of this kind of change is, coincidentally, cemeteries; he notes that the location of cemeteries in relation to city centers has changed over time, as ideas about the dead and their influence on the living have changed. Ironically, Foucault begins this discussion by asserting that cemeteries were formerly located in city centers and have subsequently migrated to the periphery. The opposite holds true in a city like Rome; in the period during which the Catacomb of Callistus and other early Christian burial sites were in use, all burials and cremations took place on the city periphery.

¹⁰² "Human groups" is Foucault's language. He also uses "society," "culture," "human environment," and other words and phrases synonymously to mean groups of human beings. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 25.

Subsequent Christianization of the city led to the movement of the bones from the catacombs on the periphery to newly-constructed basilicas and cathedrals in the center during the Middle Ages.¹⁰⁴ The particulars of Rome notwithstanding, Foucault's point stands: the physical locations and reasons for existing of heterotopias change over time, but in no case does a society simply dispense with them.

This principle, change over time, is useful for the catacombs only in a general way that does not relate directly to this project, aside from one section in Chapter 6: it accounts for the ways the catacombs' use and meaning changed over time, from their early function as burial sites, their medieval function as pilgrimage destinations, and their most recent *nachtleben* as tourist attractions and sites for theological disputation.¹⁰⁵

While this aspect of the catacombs certainly lends credence to their identification as heterotopia, here I am interested mostly in the period of their creation and early use, in the second, third, and fourth centuries. These first two principles leave the impression

¹⁰⁴ The bones of those buried in the catacombs were removed as the great basilicas and cathedrals were being built in the late antique and medieval periods. These new edifices created demand for relics of saints and martyrs to lend their legitimacy, and the catacombs were essentially looted by the early medieval church. Nicolai et al take a rather more apologetic view of the removal of relics, writing that "already by the mid-seventh century, the impossibility of maintaining the sanctuaries in an adequate way had sporadically suggested a more radical solution to save the venerated bodies, that of transferring them within the city, into the urban churches." They go on to chart a "sporadic" removal under Theodorus and Leo II (mid to late seventh century), but a "systematic" removal under Paul I, Pasquale I, Sergius II, and Leo IV (late eighth to mid ninth centuries). See also Chapter 6 of this work, and the Epilogue that follows it. Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 66. For a comprehensive overview of this period, see Patrick Geary. Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

¹⁰⁵ The medieval history of the catacombs as sites of pilgrimage was discussed in Chapter 1, and will be discussed briefly in Chapter 6 and the Epilogue. See also Debra Birch's description of the medieval catacomb visitations. Debra J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change*, Studies in the History of Medieval Religion (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1998), 89-91. For a brief history of the interpretation of the catacombs and the disputes that attended to those interpretations, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation or Graydon Snyder's introduction to *Ante Pacem*. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 3-21.

that Foucault understood heterotopic space as pneumatic: the subsidence of a heterotopia in one place led to the emergence of a heterotopia somewhere else.¹⁰⁶

The third principle outlined by Foucault is that heterotopias juxtapose several incompatible things into a single physical (and not conceptual) space.¹⁰⁷ The examples Foucault uses show that he understands the effect of this juxtaposition to be the creation of a single totalizing representation of disparate parts into a whole. His first example is the garden, which at its origins in the Ancient Near East functioned as a thumbnail of the cosmos, its corners representing the corners of the world and its center approximating the *axis mundi*, or what Foucault calls the “umbilicus.”¹⁰⁸ The garden functioned as a “microcosm” of the world.¹⁰⁹ Foucault also briefly mentions carpets, originally patterned on gardens, as fulfilling the same function of tying together different and even incompatible parts into a whole, creating a world-writ-small. Heterotopias, then, can in one sense fabricate synthetic worlds. They can create symbolic worlds in which otherwise-incongruent things or ideas are juxtaposed into a heterotopian miniature, a kind of idealized and totalizing vision of the world.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ By “pneumatic,” I mean that the suppression of heterotopia in one place leads to the emergence of heterotopia elsewhere in the system. Although the analogy is imperfect, it might be helpful to think of a closed hydrological system, in which pressure put on a fluid in one place leads to its expression elsewhere in the system, or else to the building up of untenable pressure.

¹⁰⁷ Paraphrase. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 25.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 25-6.

¹⁰⁹ In other words, the garden was, in the minds of ancient people, a way of recapitulating the world in a confined space.

¹¹⁰ A recent art exhibit, titled “Anthropocene,” makes use of satellite map imagery to create the very kind of carpets Foucault describes. David Thomas Smith, *Anthropocene*, 2013. The Copper House Gallery.

This principle, that of juxtaposition of disparate *things* and the making of microcosms, is important for reading the catacombs as heterotopia. One of the most basic but persistent questions about the catacombs is the purpose and meaning of the varied and diverse things that occupy them: bones and graves, obviously, but also decorative glass, pottery used for meals, inscriptions in both Latin and Greek, sarcophagi intricately carved, and painted images of fish, peacocks, heroic figures from Jewish and Christian scriptures, vegetation, geometric shapes, and graffiti made by centuries of visitors.¹¹¹ Many analyses of the catacombs seek some principle of coherence, by which the catacombs and all they contain might be explained. This dissertation is just such a project; it seeks to account for the contents of the Cubicula of the Sacraments in a holistic and systematic way. This principle of heterotopia, though, is a reminder that heterotopias, like the catacombs, do not always *exhibit* coherence, but rather *construct* coherence; by collecting diverse and seemingly unrelated things and ideas into a single space, a heterotopia asserts a microcosm or miniature that overcomes the tensions of difference. To take Foucault's example, a garden might juxtapose columbine (native to North America), azaleas (native to Asia), and African violets (native to Tanzania)—all collected into one space, quite in variance with any “natural” state of things. So too the heterotopias of the catacombs collect and juxtapose things that might not seem to “naturally” belong together, but by the acts of collecting and juxtaposing the catacombs create a newly-fashioned microcosm out of the disparate parts. Like the carpets that

¹¹¹ Here I am reminded of the many lists recorded in Umberto Eco's beautiful and provocative book *The Infinity of Lists*. Much of Eco's contribution in that book is to discovering the cohering principles behind seemingly-incongruous lists. See also Chapter 5 of this dissertation. Umberto Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, trans. Alastair McEwen (New York: Rizzoli, 2009).

Foucault takes as his other example, the catacombs take the world and reduce it to a small and orderly thumbnail sketch of the world, in the process bringing together things that otherwise ought to be far apart.

The fourth principle of heterotopia has to do with time, and what Foucault terms “heterochronies.”¹¹² Four examples suffice for Foucault: museums, libraries, cemeteries (again), and festivals.¹¹³ The first three exhibit what Foucault calls “indefinitely accumulating time,” in which a single space comes to (or aspires to) encompass all times and places, or at least a broad spectrum of them. They function as archives, collecting varied things into a whole with an insatiable appetite. The festival functions in an opposite way, being concerned with only the thinnest slice of time (in a single place) and no others: it springs up out of nothing and then disappears into nothing again. Foucault conceives of heterotopia as symbolic space veined with symbolic time, holding within a real space a dramatic variety of “slices in time,” all held in the present as “immediate knowledge.”¹¹⁴

Of the fourth principle, Foucault writes that heterotopias may be concerned with accumulating different *times* into one space, *or* with one particular *slice of time*. The

¹¹² Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 26.

¹¹³ Here Foucault acknowledges that “the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance.” As the essay progresses, one gets the sense that Foucault is in the process of convincing himself that the cemetery is the heterotopia *par excellence*, as he repeatedly thinks of it as an illustrative example for his descriptions. This, despite a claim at the end of the essay that the ship is the heterotopia *par excellence*—a claim that seemingly arises out of nothing, with no warning or foreshadowing. The ship, Foucault says, “a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea...” It is, Foucault claims, “the greatest reserve of the imagination.” Despite this claim, it appears to this reader that Foucault’s most energetic commentary comes when talking about cemeteries, and it is there he finds the most fecund ground for heterotopian thinking. *Ibid.*, 26-7.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

catacombs function in the first way, as Foucault notes all cemeteries do; they collect objects (bodies and graves, among other things) from different times into one space. This collecting nature can be seen in the successive periods of the catacombs' use: an early period of burial, followed by a second period of burials *ad sanctos* characterized by attention to the earlier graves' locations, followed by a third period of pilgrimage activity, followed much later by our current period of interest from scholars, tourists, and theological disputants.¹¹⁵ Successive times overlaid on the same spaces in the catacombs create the dynamic described by Foucault as "heterochrony."¹¹⁶

Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopia is concerned with "a system of opening and closing that both isolates (heterotopias) and makes them penetrable."¹¹⁷ Access to heterotopias is never truly open; entrance either is compulsory, guarded by ritual or hygienic considerations, or apparently open but really closed, as in the case of certain kinds of guest rooms in South America.¹¹⁸ Heterotopias are simultaneously permeable

¹¹⁵ Here I refer to the theological use of the catacombs, upon their rediscovery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as evidence for either reforming or counter-reforming Christians' positions. See Chapter 1.

¹¹⁶ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 26.

¹¹⁷ Foucault uses the pronoun "them;" I have substituted "heterotopias" for clarity in the sentence. *Ibid.*, 26-7.

¹¹⁸ In describing heterotopias that appear to be open but in reality are closed, Foucault relates a kind of guest room found in houses in South America. The entry door to these rooms "did not lead into the central room where the family lived, and every individual or traveler who came by had the right to open this door, to enter into the bedroom and to sleep there for a night. Now those bedrooms were such that the individual who went into them never had access to the family's quarters; the visitor was absolutely a guest in transit, was not really the invited guest." Here is apparent access that is really sequestration. *Ibid.*, 26.

and exclusive, depending on the person seeking access and the nature of the space. They are not, as Foucault notes, “freely accessible like a public place.”¹¹⁹

This principle describes the catacombs well. The catacombs were both *open and closed*; they were what Nicola Denzey describes as “quasi-public, quasi-private space.”¹²⁰

Popular imagination (and outdated scholarship) often has the catacombs function as utterly hidden, veritable invisibility cloaks for Christians seeking shelter in which to escape persecution. There is little evidence that this occurred; the catacombs were not suitable for habitation and persecution was not as widespread or persistent as popular imagination often has it.¹²¹ They were not utterly private spaces. Neither were they utterly public spaces, though; like all cemeteries, they were primarily meant for those who had loved ones interred there, or whose work it was to effect the upkeep and decoration of the space. In the third and fourth centuries, the church began to assert control over many of the catacombs, adding a layer of bureaucratic oversight and consequently insulation from the general public. Nevertheless, most catacombs were to be found just outside the city walls, along major roads like the Via Appia and the Via

¹¹⁹ If a person knows one thing about the catacombs, it is probably that “Christians hid there during the persecutions.” Scholars of the catacombs never tire of pointing out the historical inaccuracy of this claim, as there is no evidence that the catacombs were ever used for shelter in this way, or even that they would have been suitable for it. Foucault’s fifth principle might provide a way to account for this apparent discontinuity between popular imagination and historical “fact;” it is possible that the catacombs came to symbolize a place of shelter from persecution in popular imagination because they were, in some symbolic sense, filling this role. The historians appear to be correct that the catacombs were not shelters in the literal sense (or at least not very frequently), but they *were* shields from persecution and shelters from danger in a psychic or symbolic sense. This theme will be revisited in the next section briefly, and in later chapters in more detail. Ibid.

¹²⁰ Nicola Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women* (Boston: Beacon, 2007), 38.

¹²¹ For one of the many refutations of this idea, see Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 18-19.

Salaria, and often in the context of already-well-developed pagan funeral grounds.¹²²

They were hardly out of the way. So the catacombs were generally, in accordance with Foucault's principle, both open and closed—open to those who had the purpose and desire to go to them, but effectively shut off from the mass of the population, for whom they would have been an unattractive and pointless destination.

The final principle of heterotopia outlined by Foucault is an important one, and provides for a final mechanism for the classification of heterotopias. Heterotopias are real spaces that adopt one of two approaches to all other real spaces: they either “create a space of illusion that exposes every real space...as still more illusory,” or they “create a real space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed [sic], and jumbled.”¹²³ This former space Foucault calls a space of “illusion,” and the latter kind of heterotopia Foucault calls a heterotopia of “compensation,” Foucault's example of heterotopias of illusion is the brothel, and his example of the heterotopia of compensation is the colony.¹²⁴ This project is concerned primarily (though not exclusively) with the second kind, heterotopias of compensation, as spaces through which groups can construe the world as they wish it to be. A colony, to take Foucault's example, is an opportunity to re-create society in such a way that its problems, challenges, and deficiencies are excised from the start.¹²⁵ Here, Foucault's

¹²² For much more detail on the locations of the catacombs, see Chapter 3.

¹²³ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27.

¹²⁴ Foucault's parenthetical remark about brothels is curious; he suggests “those famous brothels of which we are now deprived” are heterotopias of illusion. What the illusion is, and which reality might be “still more illusory,” is unclear. *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ That such efforts inevitably fail does not detract from the hopefulness incipient in the attempt.

claim earlier in the essay that heterotopias are attempted utopias that exist in a real place reaches its full voice: heterotopias of compensation are reified utopian visions, attempting to construct in the real world a microcosm of the world as the constructing community thinks it ought to be.¹²⁶

This final principle of heterotopia as outlined by Foucault describes heterotopias' relationships to "all the space that remains."¹²⁷ By that, Foucault means that heterotopian spaces take a stance vis-a-vis the rest of the world's spaces, in roles that Foucault describes as "spaces of illusion" and "heterotopias of compensation." The catacombs function as both kinds of heterotopias, but in this project I am primarily interested in the second kind, heterotopias of *compensation*. Foucault describes these as spaces that are carefully crafted to arrange and construe the world in a reassuringly predictable, orderly, and sympathetic way, in contrast to the world outside, which is unpredictable, disorderly, and often hostile. Demonstrating that catacomb spaces (specifically, the Cubicula of the Sacraments) function this way is the core task of this dissertation, and much of the ensuing chapters will be devoted to demonstrating that the Cubicula are spaces constructed to construe Christianity and the world in just this way. Before undertaking that analysis, however, I first turn to describing and defining heterotopia as it will be used in this project.

¹²⁶ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 27.

Describing Heterotopia

Foucault's own description of heterotopia has offered a beguiling vision of how space can be conceptualized and described. Capturing both the frustration and the promise of Foucault's idea, Edward Soja describes Foucault's notion of heterotopia as "frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent," but in the same breath "marvelous incunabula...into the spaces that difference makes."¹²⁸ Because of the simultaneous attractiveness of the idea and difficulty in deploying heterotopia as Foucault left it, those who work with heterotopia as a theoretical model inevitably augment Foucault's words with words of their own. These augmentations have taken various forms, among them emphasizing some aspects of heterotopia at the expense of others, fitting heterotopia into a larger scheme of spatial analysis, or marrying heterotopia to other agendas like Marxism or postmodernism. The result is a diversity of uses and descriptions of heterotopia, many of which are mutually complementary and some of which are mutually exclusive, but which all contribute to a larger discourse about Foucault's "Other Spaces."

In the present work, I draw from Foucault's work and the work of others to formulate a description of heterotopia suited to the task of describing spaces like the catacombs—embedded in urban contexts, filled with art and references to texts, and marked by practices. Like all subsequent re-descriptions of heterotopia, mine is both selective and hybrid: emphasizing some aspects of heterotopia over others and filling in gaps where Foucault's brief lecture/essay left them; here, I draw mostly from those expansions of Foucault's work that deal with urban space, art, texts, and practices. This description is faithful both to Foucault's articulation of the idea and also to his wish that

¹²⁸ Soja, *Thirdspace*, 162.

his works might “be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area...”¹²⁹ In this section I rummage through Foucault’s tool-box, including many of the tools contributed by others, but ultimately selecting those tools that best suit the work at hand—the expression and description of heterotopia that best suit the Cubicula of the Sacraments.

Real and/or Imaginative Heterotopias

One of the most basic distinctions scholars make regarding heterotopias is whether they are “real” sites, or whether they are imaginary or literary sites. Foucault himself was vague on this count; many of his examples of heterotopia are indeed real sites that exist in the world, with walls and ceilings and boundaries and inhabitants. Elsewhere in his writing, however, Foucault also finds heterotopian resonance with literary “spaces,” or spaces that do not exist in physical reality, but only in textual imagination. In the preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault reflects on a passage from Jorge Luis Borges, in which Borges recounts his reading of “a certain Chinese encyclopedia.”¹³⁰ This encyclopedia attempted to enumerate the various kinds of animals, a bizarre taxonomy that amused and then haunted Foucault into writing the book.¹³¹ In those pages, though, Foucault discusses the *literary* arrangement of things, and the

¹²⁹ Quoted in Judy Motion and Shirley Leitch, “A Toolbox for Public Relations: The Oeuvre of Michel Foucault,” *Public Relations Review* 33, no. 3 (2007).

¹³⁰ M. Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Routledge, 1970), xv-xxiv.

¹³¹ The encyclopedia, a product of Borges’ own imagination, lists the kinds of animals: “...(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.”

literary heterotopias that arise from language.¹³² Foucault begins the book, which is significantly concerned with language and literature, with an epiphany about heterotopias and unusual juxtapositions.

Noting this attention to imaginative heterotopias, and noting what *they* see as the careless and contradictory way in which Foucault first described heterotopia in “Of Other Spaces,” scholars like Noel Gray and Benjamin Genocchio have challenged the possibility that such sites could exist in the real world, or that, if they did, we could distinguish them.¹³³ Gray’s critique of Foucault is that his description of heterotopia has a “coherency problem.”¹³⁴ Foucault would have heterotopias exist within hegemonic society and space, embedded in the world. But he would also have them marked by difference, set apart and distinguishable. “Foucault’s argument,” writes Genocchio in agreement with Gray,

“is reliant upon a means of establishing some invisible but visibly operational difference which, disposed against the background of an elusive spatial continuum, provides a clear conception of spatially discontinuous ground. Crucially, what is lacking from Foucault’s argument is exactly this.”¹³⁵

Genocchio is primarily concerned about how Foucault’s idea could possibly function in the real world, or how heterotopias could escape the bounds of “the

¹³² Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii.

¹³³ Benjamin Genocchio, "Postmodern Cities and Spaces," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). Genocchio notes that Gray’s critique came in remarks to the Art Association of Australia (footnote 8), which are reproduced in Sue Best, "Window Dressing Up As Art," *Transition* 35 (1991).

¹³⁴ Genocchio, "Postmodern Cities and Spaces," 38.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

metaphysics of presence.”¹³⁶ “The heterotopia,” concludes Genocchio near the end of his essay, “is thus more of an idea about space than any actual place.”¹³⁷

Genocchio and Neal are right to highlight the usefulness of imaginative or literary heterotopias, and insights from their work will be utilized in Chapter 5 in a discussion of heterotopic texts referenced in the Cubicula of the Sacraments. There are many visual references to literary works in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, and Genocchio’s and Neal’s work will be important in their analysis. I do not agree, however, with their shared conclusion that Foucault’s description was so flawed that all that can be salvaged are imaginative heterotopias, forswearing real ones. This is unsatisfactory for two reasons: first, that Foucault obviously meant to describe real places (cemeteries, ships, boarding schools, etc.), and second, that Foucault’s description was by his own admission brief, incomplete, and provisional, and meant to be taken up and expanded upon by others. Such an expansion has indeed occurred (as the remainder of this section will demonstrate), and the idea of heterotopia has expanded well beyond the bounds of the small text Gray and Genocchio wish to exegete.

For the purposes of this project, then, heterotopias may be both real spaces and imaginative spaces. I argue that the Cubicula of the Sacraments are heterotopian spaces, and indeed they possess real walls, floors, ceilings, and contents in the real world. I take the ancillary point of Neal and Genocchio, however, that there is a real richness in imaginative and literary heterotopias, and so will employ their insights in Chapter 5, where the texts referenced in the Cubicula of the Sacraments will be analyzed.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 43.

Henri Lefebvre: Real Spaces in Context

One consequence of understanding heterotopias as real spaces is that they must also be understood in their contexts in the real world—in the midst of other spaces and physical realities. The Cubicula of the Sacraments were situated within and adjacent to a number of other real spaces: *within* the larger Callistus Catacomb; *beneath* the earth, city, and sky; *outside* the city walls of Rome; *along* the Via Appia. Such a litany of prepositions draws attention to the *situatedness* of the sites themselves, in this case a situation defined in large part by an urban landscape and a unique position along the vertical axis: underground. In his analysis and redescription of heterotopia, Henri Lefebvre pays special attention to the ways heterotopias function within and around urban settings, and his work is therefore important to my own.

Lefebvre was Foucault's contemporary, and they shared many intellectual interests, including an interest in space. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre mentions heterotopias as one of three kinds of "diversified" (or historically-individuated) space: isotopias, heterotopias, and utopias.¹³⁸ He describes heterotopias as "contrasting places," and a moment later, as "divine" spaces, in contrast to the "absolute" isotopias and the "possible" utopias.¹³⁹ Later in the book, he calls these three categories the "broadest" "conceptual grid" that can be applied to space, with the result that spaces falling into heterotopia's section of the grid qualify as "mutually repellent spaces," or spaces that

¹³⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 163.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 163-64.

stand in opposition to other, more normative spaces.¹⁴⁰ By this system of classification, crude by his own admission, Lefebvre has divided space into real and imagined, with real spaces having two sub-categories (isotopias and heterotopias) and imagined spaces only one (utopias). At their most general level for Lefebvre, then, heterotopias are real spaces that participate in social conflict of some kind, as spaces defined in opposition to other spaces. In describing heterotopias in this way, Lefebvre is echoing Foucault's sixth and final principle, that of heterotopias' stance with regard to all other real spaces, and is underscoring heterotopias' role in power relations between groups.

In his earlier book, *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre had used the idea of heterotopia in his analysis of urban landscapes.¹⁴¹ This was a particularly contextualized but nevertheless broadly applicable reading of the concept of heterotopia, and its focus on urban environments will be especially useful to keep in mind in Chapter 3, when we consider the urban environment of Rome. Much of Lefebvre's redescription of heterotopia in this book is similar to what he wrote in *The Production of Space*; heterotopia is here too described as one of the three broadest kinds of space, and here too Lefebvre makes much of Foucault's sixth principle. For Lefebvre, heterotopias are

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 366.

¹⁴¹ *The Production of Space* was published in French in 1974, and *The Urban Revolution* in French in 1970, just three years after Foucault's lecture. In the editions used here, the translators have rendered Foucault's French words *hétérotopie* and *hétérotopies* differently. Donald Nicholson-Smith, translator of *The Production of Space*, uses *heterotopia* and *heterotopias*, while Robert Bononno, translator of *The Urban Revolution*, uses *heterotopy* and *heterotopies*. Here, when referring to both texts I use *heterotopia* and *heterotopias* for the sake of consistency, unless I am quoting, when I use the word used in the quoted original. Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

marked by difference, which “can extend from a highly marked contrast all the way to conflict.”¹⁴²

Lefebvre’s use of heterotopia in an urban context results in some unique and valuable additions to Foucault’s articulation of heterotopia. In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre is interested in cities, and as such is concerned with urban space generally (how cities are laid out, how streets connect and divide, etc.) and with architectural space particularly (how buildings function within the urban setting). These foci of concern allow Lefebvre to make two observations that are useful in thinking about the catacombs. The first is indirect but nevertheless valuable: the heterotopian nature of commercial spaces, in Lefebvre’s view a marginalized kind of space, which in some ways stand in for other marginalized spaces (in this case, catacombs).

The second insight gained by Lefebvre’s redescriptions of heterotopia concerns dimensions of horizontality and verticality within city landscapes. Lefebvre addresses the question of horizontality when he considers the urban landscape as a patchwork of spaces linked together by “neutral spaces” like “crossroads, thoroughfares,” or “broad street or avenue” which function as “cuts/sutures” between urban spaces.¹⁴³ These sutures serve to facilitate the juxtaposition of unlike things, as described in Foucault’s third principle, and in doing so mediate heterotopian spaces in the urban context. This insight is applicable on a micro-scale within city centers, as Lefebvre seems to imagine it in his book. But it is also applicable on a macro-scale, segregating parts of cities from other parts, and the city

¹⁴² Ibid., 38.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 128, 37.

itself from the suburbs and exurbs. As we will see in Chapter 3, this dynamic is particularly strong in Rome in the period of the catacombs' construction.

Lefebvre's spatial analysis of cities did not stop at the obvious horizontal prominences and juxtapositions; he also considered the question of verticality, and his insight there is as applicable to the catacombs as his insight into horizontality. To spaces that either rise above or dive below the urban plane, Lefebvre assigns special significance—as places “of elsewhere, a place characterized by the presence-absence of the divine, of power, of the half-fictional half-real, of sublime thought.”¹⁴⁴ Lefebvre understands “height and depth [as] generally part of monumentality, the fullness of a space that overflows its material boundaries,” irrupting the ground beneath a city (or the sky above it) by force of its importance.¹⁴⁵ Such places are marked “heterotopy,” Lefebvre writes, “a difference that marks it by situating it (situating itself) with respect to the initial place.”¹⁴⁶ In other words the catacombs' monumentality, plunging beneath the earth, was a sign of their heterotopian nature—a marker within the urban landscape that they were set apart and contesting spaces, intersecting at a plane with the rest of the city but simultaneously altogether Other.

These theoretical borrowings from Lefebvre, describing activities at the periphery of urban spaces, the cuts and sutures within urban spaces that delineate different kinds of –topias and join spaces together, and the function of verticality in the urban landscape, will all figure prominently in the third chapter of this work.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Art and Heterotopia

The preceding section first argued for heterotopias as real spaces (and not imaginary ones), and then having done so took a citywide view of Rome, taking into consideration the urban and suburban environments and the catacombs' location within those, and accounting for the ways that the ordering of the city contributed to the heterotopian nature of the catacombs generally (and the Callistus Catacomb specifically). The bulk of this dissertation is not concerned with the catacombs generally, however, but rather with five particular rooms in one of the catacombs, the Cubicula of the Sacraments found in the Callistus Catacomb. These Cubicula are notable for the art they contain; many catacomb spaces contain painted and etched images, but the Cubicula are particularly impressive in this regard, with especially plentiful and relatively well-made images.¹⁴⁷ A major section of this dissertation is concerned with that art and its contribution to heterotopian space.¹⁴⁸ Foucault's articulation of heterotopia must then be adapted to describe the ways art can contain and contribute to heterotopias, and must also be augmented by secondary theoretical tools when necessary. Here, I make three observations with regard to heterotopia and the presence of art in the Cubicula: that the images constitute an example of Foucault's third principle (the juxtaposition of disparate things); that the images can be read as "spaces of representation," making visible the

¹⁴⁷ This is likely a function of economic disparity; cubicula already suggest a higher capacity to spend lavishly on burial spaces than do loculi, so it is not surprising that the art found there is often of a higher quality than that found elsewhere.

¹⁴⁸ Chapter 4 will be concerned with the art of the Cubicula, and Chapter 5 will be concerned with literary heterotopias mediated through art.

space's construal of the social order and the community's position within it; and that the images function to reframe and redouble the heterotopian nature of the physical space.¹⁴⁹

The first observation is the simplest: that the images collected in the Cubicula of the Sacraments constitute a jumbling of unlike things, seemingly unrelated to one another, in accordance with Foucault's third principle. The third principle, it will be recalled, is concerned with heterotopias' ability to collect disparate spaces, things, or ideas into a single space. Foucault's exemplars for this phenomenon are the garden and the carpet, both of which attempt to construct microcosms of some greater realm by symbolically collecting icons, tokens, or thumbnails of objects from that that realm into a single, richly symbolic space. In this way, the garden stands in for the cosmos and all its fecundity by collecting representative plants and topographies, unrelated to one another in provenance, and ordering them into a constructed reality. The carpet is a further abstraction, taking the form of the garden but not its contents, and in doing so making the garden's schema the subject of contemplation.

Foucault's third principle of heterotopia can be applied easily to the Cubicula of the Sacraments, and his examples of the garden and the carpet readily extrapolated to those burial rooms.¹⁵⁰ Leaving aside physical objects like pottery and other vessels, inscriptions, and the physical realities of the spaces, the images painted onto the walls of the Cubicula form a tapestry of sorts, slung over three dimensions, that collect and

¹⁴⁹ "Spaces of representation" is a phrase from Lefebvre, as will be explained below. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39. Reframing and redoubling of heterotopias are discussed below.

¹⁵⁰ If the garden is a three-dimensional heterotopia, and the carpet a reduction of that to two dimensions, then the Cubicula can be viewed as a mapping of two dimensions back into three—a carpet of sorts, projected into an additional dimension.

juxtapose seemingly-unrelated things. In Cubiculum A3 alone, for example, we find images of a sea monster, a man lying in rest, two men wielding picks, seven figures attending a banquet, two figures standing over a small table with bread resting on it, birds, geometric lines, two figures standing with a sheep, a ship, two figures standing ankle-deep in water, and a fisherman. Scholars search for a principle of coherency to explain the inclusion of all of the different images, but at its core the room is a Foucauldian collection of unexpected things, placed into artificial relation to one another. In this it is marked as heterotopian space.

The second observation about art and heterotopia in the Cubicula of the Sacraments comes from the work of Lefebvre, and here is mediated through Edward Soja. In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre divides the book's eponymous activity into three parts: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces (or spaces of representation).¹⁵¹ Spatial practice, for Lefebvre, has to do with the daily and mundane use of space—the living of life in the world. Representations of space are spatial activities abstracted from physical spatial practice—things like the discipline of architecture, cartography, speech about spaces, and so forth.¹⁵² The third aspect of the production of space, representational spaces or spaces of representation, is rooted in “the symbolic dimension of space.”¹⁵³ These are spaces that function semiotically, pointing beyond themselves to something outside of the physical space—facilitated by what

¹⁵¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38-39.

¹⁵² I am indebted to Christian Schmid for guiding my understanding of Foucault's spatial triad here. Kanishka Goonewardena et al., eds., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 36-37.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 37.

Lefebvre calls “more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs.”¹⁵⁴

Schmid lists the referential possibilities of these spaces as “a divine power, the logos, the state, the masculine or feminine principle, and so on,” suggesting that the work of a representational space is in the linkage to an outside power by means of symbolization.¹⁵⁵

Although he was aware of Foucault and his work, Lefebvre’s articulation of spatial production was not made with heterotopia in mind. The ideas of the two men obviously have much in common with one another, and the work of Soja puts them into conversation in the service of articulating Soja’s “thirdspace,” his own way of describing spatial practice.¹⁵⁶ My understanding of how art contributes to heterotopia, then, departs from Foucault and takes a circuitous route through both Lefebvre and Soja, borrowing from both, and arrives at a notion of heterotopia informed by Lefebvre’s emphasis on art and symbolization and Soja’s emphasis on marginal “counterspaces.”¹⁵⁷ For this project, the art of the Cubicula of the Sacraments is the primary symbolic language by which the community behind the Cubicula expressed their marginality within and resistance to the broader Roman culture.¹⁵⁸ This understanding of the role of art in the Cubicula fits well with Foucault’s sixth principle of heterotopia, which describes two ways spaces might

¹⁵⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

¹⁵⁵ Goonewardena et al., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*, 37.

¹⁵⁶ Soja, *Thirdspace*. Soja’s thought, while not used explicitly in this dissertation, demonstrates a successful synthesis of the various strands of heterotopian thought, including those of Lefebvre and Foucault. In this way, Soja underlies much of what I attempt here, although I do not cite his work as frequently as I do the work of others.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁵⁸ I mean this in two ways: first, that art is primary to understanding the catacomb spaces, since it is ubiquitous and obviously a prominent feature of the catacombs, and second, that while heterotopia exhibits in a number of aspects of the Cubicula, in terms of *discourse* and *symbolic representation*, the art is of paramount importance.

relate to all other spaces. The second way, termed by Foucault as a “heterotopia of compensation,” occurs when a community “create[s] a real space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed (sic), and jumbled.”¹⁵⁹ For this dissertation, this “heterotopia of compensation” is created by the community of the Cubicula through (among other methods) the symbolic language of their art, which serves to both emphasize and contest their marginalized position within Roman society.¹⁶⁰

The third observation about art and heterotopia in the Cubicula of the Sacraments comes from the work of Brent Allen Saindon, and his article about heterotopia in the Jewish Museum Berlin.¹⁶¹ Saindon suggests a “doubled heterotopia” for the Museum, with the first having been established by the building itself, designed by Daniel Libeskind and opened in 2001.¹⁶² The museum, Saindon writes, was at its opening *already* recognized as “an exemplary expression of the complex difficulties diasporic groups experience living within a larger dominant culture—“in other words, the museum was because of its architecture, place within the city, and contents, already thoroughly

¹⁵⁹ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27.

¹⁶⁰ A more detailed map of this “circuitous route” will be provided in Chapter 4, where the contributions of Foucault, Lefebvre, and Soja will all be accounted for. Additionally, I will be aided in my discussion of images by several secondary theoretical tools: the idea of “visual exegesis,” as mediated through the work of Robin Jensen, the idea of “hidden transcripts,” as described in the work of James C. Scott, and a discussion of the rhetorical power of art, as given by Brent Saindon. Together, the work of these and Foucault, Lefebvre, and Soja will allow me to construct a framework for the analysis of what Lefebvre calls “representational spaces,” where the symbolic language of art serves to position the space and its community in contrast to and critique of hegemonic Roman space. Jensen, *Face to Face*. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Transcripts* (Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, 1990). Brent Allen Saindon, "A Doubled Heterotopia: Shifting Spatial and Visual Symbolism in the Jewish Museum Berlin's Development," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 1 (2012).

¹⁶¹ Saindon, "A Doubled Heterotopia."

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 27-28.

heterotopian.”¹⁶³ It was, according to a plain reading of Foucault, a straightforward heterotopia.

Saindon’s argument, and the contribution of his thought to this dissertation, is in his claim of a “doubled” heterotopia at the museum. Saindon claims that much of the Museum’s rhetorical power had been diluted in the stages of the project between its conception and the opening in 2001, and that by that time it “needed another strategy of making its historical displays relevant and interesting to a non-Jewish and non-German viewing audience.”¹⁶⁴ That is, attention to Foucault’s second principle, that heterotopias function differently over time within the same society, dictated that the Museum needed to modify its original plan to fulfill its original goal of presenting Jewish culture and history in a meaningful way; it needed to re-emphasize its heterotopian nature. It did so with the installation of a powerful and provocative art exhibit, *Shachalat*.

According to a reviewer, the installation consisted of “a very large number of heavy, circular-shaped, iron discs, forged into the semblance of a frantic screaming face....” Furthermore, “the disks are scattered over almost the whole surface of the gallery floor and the visitor is asked to tread them,” which is “difficult” and produces “profound uneasiness” on the part of the visitor.¹⁶⁵ Experiencing the installation in such a visceral way—a way that evokes questions of culpability, violence, and the disregard for human life—causes the visitor to become intensely aware of the purpose and meaning of the installation, and indeed the museum. The effect of *Shalchet* was to create “a second

¹⁶³ Ibid., 27.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶⁵ Arturo Schwartz, "Shalchet," http://www.kadishman.com/works/shalchet/Articles/Arturo_Schwartz/.

heterotopia within the encompassing one provided by the architecture—“ to “double” the heterotopia.¹⁶⁶ “The second heterotopia,” writes Saindon, “*re-frames* the way in which the first ought to be seen and the potential ways in which viewers make the content relevant to their own context of experience.”¹⁶⁷ In other words, the second, artistic heterotopia creates an interpretive device for the first, architectural (or physical) heterotopia. The space, delimited by walls and floors and ceilings, is heterotopian on its own, but that heterotopian nature is redoubled and re-emphasized by its contents, consisting of a symbolic language enacted in art.¹⁶⁸ The installation had the effect of creating “a second heterotopia within the encompassing one provided by the architecture,” thereby “doubling” the heterotopia.

When our artist Dionysios began to paint, then, he began a process of intensifying and doubling the heterotopian nature of the site. His work, it will be seen in Chapter 3, was carried out in an already-heterotopian context, and served to reduplicate the heterotopia, reinforcing it as a site of contestation and critique. Dionysios would not be the last to do so—other artists would follow, and readers of texts and ritual leaders as well, as the next sections will suggest. But Saindon calls our attention to the importance of Dionysios’ work, which was to note the heterotopian nature of the Cubicula and work

¹⁶⁶ Saindon, "A Doubled Heterotopia," 28.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁶⁸ Another recent exhibit at the same museum, titled “The Whole Truth, everything you wanted to know about Jews,” but known colloquially in the press as “Jew in a box,” has caused controversy, and has similarly underscored and exhibited the marginalization of Jews in German culture. Zoe Mintz, "'Jew in a Box' German Art Exhibit at Jewish Museum in Berlin Causes Controversy," *International Business Times*(2013), <http://www.ibtimes.com/jew-box-german-art-exhibit-jewish-museum-berlin-causes-controversy-photo-video-1166401>.

to emphasize it anew, enhance it, and re-frame it by the symbolic language of his Jonah.¹⁶⁹

Literary Heterotopias

The art of the catacombs is an important marker of heterotopia, but it also serves another function: as visual depictions of texts that were current in the community that created the catacombs. Over half of the images in the Cubicula of the Sacraments are either definitely or possibly textually derived, a figure that is in line with the Callistus Catacomb generally.¹⁷⁰ Even those images that are not obviously textually derived are likely visualized textual allusions; images such as doves, fish, and vines clearly have potential bases in Christian texts.

The effect of such frequent textual referencing is twofold. First, textually derived images draw upon the symbolic reservoir of the texts in order to inform the symbolic language described in the section above. Images derived from texts, and specifically from scripture, are potently symbolic and meaningful. Second, and critically for this section, the presence of visually depicted texts on the walls of the catacombs introduces yet another source of heterotopian influence within the space—those heterotopias conveyed and conjured up by the narratives referenced on the walls.

This referencing of literary heterotopias will be the subject of Chapter 5, where the art of the catacombs will be read with attention to the texts behind the art—the

¹⁶⁹ The images found in the Cubicula of the Sacraments will be described as they are introduced in Chapters 4 and 5.

¹⁷⁰ Eric C. Smith, "Catacomb as List: Reading Scripture in the Art of Two Christian Catacombs," in *Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco 2011).

narratives informing the art.¹⁷¹ This analysis will be undertaken through the lens of “visual exegesis,” a way of understanding the creation of images out of texts articulated by Robin Jensen, among others.¹⁷² Visual exegesis focuses on the artist’s and the community’s interpretive acts when selecting and depicting a text in art; it is useful for understanding why a particular text was chosen, and how that text was understood such that the image was created.

Heterotopian Practices

Heterotopia is ultimately concerned with how space functions within a society or within a social group; what is important is how space influences, contributes to, and arises from the activities, beliefs, and biases of people. Social space is inhabited space, and in any spatial analysis it is important to ask not only what a space might mean, but also how a space is being used, and what a space might tell us about the social life of the people who used it. This is certainly true for the Cubicula of the Sacraments; the spaces had a very specific primary function, as burial spaces, but their importance is not limited to simply warehousing the dead. The Cubicula also provide insight into the activities of the people who created and used them—both activities that took place within the Cubicula and activities that took place elsewhere but merited reference in the Cubicula.

The Cubicula hold echoes of the practices of the community that created them—at least four recoverable practices. These are burial, obviously prominent in this context;

¹⁷¹ In Chapter 5, attention will be given not only to the art found specifically in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, but also to the art of areas surrounding the Cubicula in both physical proximity and chronological proximity. While the Cubicula are probably the greatest repository of artistic works from early Christians in Rome, expanding the scope in this way will allow a fuller examination of the works from the community behind the Cubicula and the Callistus Catacomb.

¹⁷² Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 64-93.

baptism, as referenced in the spaces' art; the acts of textual familiarization and interpretation, evidenced by the ubiquitous referencing of and exegesis of texts; and communal meals, possibly the Agape meal, suggested by paintings, archaeological evidence of meals from other catacombs, and archaeological evidence of funerary banquets in other burial contexts. These practices, I will argue, were integral to the purpose of the catacombs and the life of the community that created and used the Cubicula of the Sacraments. I will further argue that these practices were all in some way at least counter to the broader culture and in some cases subversive of and combative to normative Roman ideologies and practices.

Foucault's sixth principle of heterotopia describes two options for heterotopias: heterotopias of illusion (what he calls "spaces of illusion") or heterotopias of compensation.¹⁷³ The latter, which is the focus of this description of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, is exemplified for Foucault by colonies. Colonies are a good example of the impulse to create spaces that are "as perfect, meticulous, and well arranged" as more normative spaces are "messy, ill constructed, and jumbled;" they arise, in part, out of an impulse to export and perfect society and its behaviors.¹⁷⁴ Colonies are far from space in the architectural sense; rather, what Foucault means here is to describe social space, social constructions, and social behaviors that constitute a space. Although colonies often do mimic the physical spaces and structures of the originating society, what is really being replicated (and in the process being refined and perfected) are the social spaces and structures. Foucault here means to speak of social practices, not simply buildings.

¹⁷³ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

Recovering a group's practices is therefore integral to understanding how it used its space, and how it saw its use of that space. In the case of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, an analysis of these four practices (burial, baptism, textual practice, and communal dining) will reveal aspects of how those who used the Cubicula understood the space and their use of it as a heterotopia of compensation, like Foucault's colonies, where things could be arranged and construed as they ought to be, not as they really were in the real world. Chapter 6, then, will be concerned with this analysis, and will be the final corpus of evidence for reading the Cubicula as heterotopian space.

A Concluding View of Heterotopia

The preceding analysis constitutes the view of heterotopia that will guide this dissertation. At five points, one for each of the middle chapters of the dissertation, I made a determination from among the various opinions about the way I will understand heterotopia. First, in my view, heterotopia is best understood to refer to both real and imaginary (or literary) spaces, and not simply one or the other. Heterotopias exist both in physical reality (Foucault's cemeteries and brothels) and in literature and imagination (Borges' fantastical taxonomy). Second, heterotopias of the physical variety are situated in meaningful ways in the midst of and alongside other space (as Lefebvre's work helps to illuminate). Third, art may be read both as heterotopia and as contributing to the heterotopian nature of a space; it serves to juxtapose disparate things, makes a construal of ideologies and beliefs, and reframes and enhances physical heterotopias. Fourth, texts may also be read as heterotopias, and in this case art may be read as the product of a certain kind of textual exegesis, carrying in it embedded themes, biases, and postures to

and about the broader world. And fifth, as lived social space, heterotopias foster, reference, and host social practices that communicate something of the community's attitudes toward other communities and spaces.

Together these form my own articulation of heterotopia, molded, of course, to the task of analyzing the particularities of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, but also applicable to other spaces of marginalized groups, other religious spaces, and other spaces where artistic and literary activity are clustered. This description of heterotopia is by no means exhaustive, but it represents a synthesis of disparate thinking on the subject that is uniquely suited to the analysis of spaces like the Cubicula of the Sacraments.

CHAPTER 3: THE CUBICULA AS HETEROTOPIA: SPACE AND PLACE

“I built the curia and the Chalcidicum adjoining it, the temple of Apollo on the Palatine with its porticoes, the temple of the deified Julius, the Lupercal, the portico at the Circus Flaminius ... the state box at the Circus Maximus, the temples on the capitol of the Jupiter Feretrius and Jupiter Tonans, the temple of Quirinus, the temples of Minerva, of Juno the Queen, and of Jupiter Libertas, on the Aventine, the temple of the Lares at the highest point of the Sacra Via, the temple of the Di Penates on the Velia, the temple of Youth, and the temple of the Great Mother on the Palatine. The Capitolium and the theatre of Pompey.... I restored the channels of the old aqueducts which in several places were falling into disrepair through age, and doubled the capacity of the aqueduct called the Marcia by turning a new spring into its channel. I completed the Julian Forum and the basilica which was between the temple of Castor and the temple of Saturn... and when the same basilica was destroyed by fire I began its reconstruction on an enlarged site, to be inscribed with the names of my sons, and ordered that in case I should not live to complete it, it should be completed by my heirs. In my sixth consulship, in accordance with a decree of the Senate, I rebuilt in the city eighty-two temples of the gods.... As consul for the seventh time I constructed the Via Flaminia from the city to Ariminum, and all the bridges except the Mulvian and the Minucian. On my own ground purchased for the most part from private owners I built the theater near the temple of Apollo which was to bear the name of my son-in-law Marcus Marcellus. From the spoils of war I consecrated offerings on the Capitol, and in the temple of the divine Julius, and in the temple of Apollo, and in the temple of Vesta, and in the temple of Mars Ultor, which cost me about one hundred million sesterces.”

Res Gestae Divi Augustus, III.19-IV.21

Introduction

The Cubicula of the Sacraments were intimately connected with the city of Rome and its environs, as illustrated by the imagined journey of Callistus from the Roman Forum to the catacomb that would later bear his name, recounted at the beginning of Chapter 1. Accessible by a relatively short walk out from the city center, the catacomb was embedded in the urban landscape, and entwined in the web of relationships and

meanings that attend to urban spaces.¹⁷⁵ This chapter is about those relationships and meanings, and the ways they contributed to the heterotopian nature of the Callistus Catacomb and its Cubicula of the Sacraments.

The image in Figure 1 below serves to illustrate some of the important spatial relationships that contribute to the identification of the Cubicula of the Sacraments as

1. Tiber River
2. Theater of Pompey
3. Tiber Island
4. Theater of Marcellus
5. Crypta Balbi
6. Stadium of Domitian
7. Stagnum Agrippae
8. Pantheon
9. Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on The Capitoline Hill
10. Pons Aemilius
11. Circus Maximus
12. Aventine Hill
13. Imperial Palace on the Palatine Hill
14. Septizodium fountain
15. Aqua Claudia
16. Temple of Claudius on the Caelian Hill
17. Colosseum
18. Temple of Venus and Rome
19. Basilica of Maxentius
20. Imperial Fora
21. Forum Romanum
22. Baths of Titus
23. Baths of Trajan
24. Transtiberim
25. Mausoleum of Hadrian
26. Baths of Diocletian



Figure 1: Aerial view of Rome from the southwest. The Callistus complex is out of frame on the right. The route taken by Callistus begins at the center of the image, between the Circus Maximus and the Flavian Amphitheater, and goes south-southeast to the right.

heterotopia.¹⁷⁶ Mirroring Callistus’ journey from Chapter 1, this chapter will move from the city center to the Cubicula of the Sacraments, stopping at important points along the way to examine the heterotopian import of various juxtapositions and separations. I will begin with a discussion of the city walls and sacred pomerium, which set the city apart from the surrounding exurban areas and countryside, and the ways these boundaries helped to construct catacomb space as heterotopian.

¹⁷⁵ The space immediately outside the walls might also be considered suburban or even exurban space. Here, I mean only that it was space that was part of the urban landscape.

¹⁷⁶ The image demonstrates the location of the city center in relation to its periphery, and gives a sense of the later, Aurelian walls on the periphery. Image used by permission of Bernard Frischer, University of Virginia “Rome Reborn” Project.

Continuing along the journey with Callistus, I will examine the Callistus Catacomb's location along the Via Appia (and the general propensity to locate catacombs along major vias) as a further marker of "other" space. At the site of the catacomb itself, I will address the catacomb's underground location as a sign of heterotopia. Finally, within the catacomb, I will put the Cubicula of the Sacraments in their context among the other spaces within the Callistus Catacomb, describing the five rooms as "doubled heterotopias."¹⁷⁷

Critical to the description of the Cubicula of the Sacraments as heterotopia is the theoretical work described in Chapter 2. This work originated with Foucault, but has been developed significantly by other scholars. In this chapter, the most important of these secondary interpreters and describers of heterotopia is Henri Lefebvre, whose work in urban geography informs our understanding of the various divisions within the urban landscape, and their implications for describing the Cubicula of the Sacraments as heterotopian space.

It was noted above that Lefebvre and Foucault were contemporaries who nevertheless did not converse on the topic of heterotopia.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Lefebvre found

¹⁷⁷ Saindon, "A Doubled Heterotopia."

¹⁷⁸ In his foreword to the 2003 English edition of *The Urban Revolution*, Neil Smith notes that Lefebvre's "discussion of heterotopy clearly engages Foucault." Lefebvre was aware of Foucault's work, certainly, and vice versa, but to the poverty of the idea's wide employment today, the two did not openly debate the topic or attempt to synthesize their views. Smith distinguishes between Foucault's use of heterotopia, which he describes as "evoked almost randomly in relation to time and space," and Lefebvre's use of heterotopia, which by contrast understands them "in a more critical register, rooting them in a sense of political and historical deviance from social norms." Significantly for this chapter, Smith notes that Lefebvre's heterotopias are "places of renegade commercial exchange, politically and geographically independent from the early political city." Here I employ some of Foucault's looseness with the term, and also some of Lefebvre's critical usage, to describe marginal spaces in the Roman context and the various physical structures that contributed to certain spaces' expressions as heterotopias. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, xii.

the concept useful in his work on urban geography, including heterotopia as one of three kinds of “diversified space,” along with isotopias and utopias.¹⁷⁹ Lefebvre’s description of heterotopian spaces was heavily colored by an understanding of their function as locations of conflict, either overt or sublimated.¹⁸⁰ For Lefebvre, heterotopias are often signs of social division and difference, literally mapped onto terrain. The urban landscape, then, can be a kind of cipher for the relationships between and among various groups and communities, defining themselves in terms of and against one another. Spatial relations can describe social relations in the urban setting, and so paying attention to relationships in space can illuminate relationships in discourse and intercourse.¹⁸¹

Defining Center and Periphery

In order to work our way from center to periphery, walking with our traveller Callistus, we must first establish what constitutes a center and a periphery, and what boundaries or marking structures might delineate the space. As our itinerant Callistus

¹⁷⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 163-64. See also the discussion above in chapter 2.

¹⁸⁰ This perspective is critiqued by some, most notably by Kevin Hetherington, who, while seeing some role for marginality and conflict in heterotopia, also believes that this dynamic has been over-emphasized. Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London: Routledge, 1997).

¹⁸¹ It is important to recall from Chapter 2 that this dissertation argues for two major ways of distinguishing heterotopias from hegemonic space, or what Lefebvre might call “isotopias.” These are both present in Foucault’s initial articulation of the idea of heterotopia, but are fleshed out more fully in the work of subsequent interpreters. One way of distinguishing heterotopia can be characterized as ideological, or almost rhetorical: a space that stakes a claim in opposition to other spaces, arguing for one construal of the world against other construals. These spaces need not be juxtaposed physically for the contrast to be effective; to use one of Foucault’s examples, the brothel is not physically adjacent to normative domestic space. The other way of distinguishing heterotopia, however, *does* rely on juxtaposition, at least to some degree; it is a physical adjacency that makes the two spaces’ contrast potent. This way of distinguishing heterotopia features prominently in Lefebvre’s work, and it is this second understanding which undergirds much of the present chapter. This is not an exclusive usage; the first, ideological way of distinguishing heterotopias remains in effect, but for this chapter, what is of primary importance is the way certain spatial features of the city of Rome worked to define certain spaces as heterotopian, and others as hegemonic.

stood in the center of the city of Rome, he stood in the space most readily identified with the idea and presence of the urbs and Empire. As he journeyed down the Via Appia toward the catacomb, his route took him from center to periphery. This transition from center to periphery was gradual, of course, with each step being farther from the center than the last. However, two significant and mostly coterminous boundaries marked important transitions along the way: the city wall and the pomerium. Together, these marked the political, psychological, and religious limits of the city. Everything within the wall and pomerium was city, and everything outside of them was not-city.¹⁸² The center of the city of Rome will be considered that urban space which was inside the wall, and especially the most central civic spaces between the Palatine, Esquiline, and Capitoline hills—namely, the Forum, Coliseum, and surrounding environs. The periphery is simply the space outside the walls. This delineation allows for an analysis of the kinds of activities pushed to the periphery in ancient Rome.

Two insights from Lefebvre inform our understanding of the differences between the various spaces Callistus passed through on his journey. The first insight, that in urban landscapes certain activities are pushed to the periphery of the city, will be the subject of the following section, “Activities on the Periphery.” The second is Lefebvre’s notion of “cuts” and “sutures,” and that will be the subject of the section below, titled “Joining and Separating Structures.”

¹⁸² See the discussion below, in the section subtitled “Activities on the Periphery.”

Activities on the Periphery

As Lefebvre notes, “those places given over to exchange and trade are initially strongly marked by the signs of heterotopy,” and are “excluded from the political city.”¹⁸³ Here Lefebvre has in mind temporarily externalized economic spaces like fairgrounds, but also more permanently marginal spaces like suburbs. By Lefebvre’s reckoning, the merchant spaces of the city were initially distinct from what he calls the “political city,” which occupied the more important center.¹⁸⁴ This changed over time, such that “in the European West, at the end of the Middle Ages, [the] merchandise, the market, and merchants were able to successfully penetrate the city.”¹⁸⁵ But for antiquity, Lefebvre imagines a class of merchants struggling on the periphery, seeking a presence at the center. Whether that was true for commercial activity in Rome is not in the purview of this dissertation, but it does illustrate the kind of contrasting spaces Lefebvre had in mind for cities—spaces and those that inhabited them locked in an almost-Darwinian struggle to occupy niches, perpetually in conflict with one another.

The relegation of funerary spaces to the periphery of the city mirrors that of commercial spaces. For Lefebvre, illicit commerce was the signal heterotopian activity, and its precincts were necessarily on the margins of the city. Because the activity was by its existence subverting and critiquing more licit commerce, and because it was in

¹⁸³ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 9.

¹⁸⁴ Lefebvre here suggests that the relationship between Athens and its commercial city Piraeus is illustrative. *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Like Foucault’s description of cemeteries’ move from the city center to the outskirts over time (Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 25.), Lefebvre’s description of commercial spaces in cities as steadily moving from the outskirts to the center might not hold for Rome. Imperial Rome tended to be economically integrated, with shops, markets, and the like interspersed with dwellings, particularly in the ubiquitous *insulae*. Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 9.

violation of the norms of conduct, it was relegated to the periphery. Here I suggest that while Lefebvre was focused on commercial activity as his example, his insight is not simply one into commerce, but into marginalized groups, activities, and spaces more generally. For Rome in the time of Callistus, what concerns us is not commercial activity, but social activity. There was a robust separation of center from periphery, effected primarily by the wall and the pomerium; what social activities were classified by these separating structures? What activities were included in the center, and what activities were relegated to the periphery? These separating structures divided the social activities of ancient Romans, making some licit, some illicit, and some marginal. The walls, dating to the fourth century BCE or earlier, will be the subject of the next section; the pomerium and its separating functions will be described here.

The pomerium was a line encircling the city, which according to legend had its origins with the founding of Rome and the actions of Romulus and Remus.¹⁸⁶ The line itself was unmarked, although its path could be traced in the imperial era by a series of large stones, set at the line's angles.¹⁸⁷ The pomerium enclosed the sacred city—that part of the city that was considered city for the purposes of augury, politics, and other rituals.

The portable nature of the pomerium stones, notes Beard et al., meant that the line was

¹⁸⁶ For a brief account of the mythology of the pomerium's creation, see Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome: Volume I A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 177. Roger Antaya provides a thorough account of the debates surrounding the etymology of word "pomerium." A derivation from "*postmoerium*" is the most commonly accepted, according to Antaya, but difficulties attend to the various elisions and vowel changes in that reading. This implies, Antaya suggests, a space inside the city walls. Other authors, both ancient and modern, see the term as derived from "*promoerium*," a distinction in the first word of the composite, suggesting a space outside the city walls. In either case, as Antaya notes, the original meaning seems to have been lost to ancient writers like Livy and Cicero, for whom the origins of the Etruscan institution and its Latin name were already receding out of memory. Roger Antaya, "The Etymology of Pomerium," *The American Journal of Philology* 101, no. 2 (1980): 184-89.

¹⁸⁷ Beard, *Religions of Rome: Volume I*, 177.

stable but movable; it was moved, on occasion, for reasons of expansion or logistics.¹⁸⁸

The pomerium, then, unmoored from any permanent station in space and time, was able to form an absolute boundary for the city.¹⁸⁹ Wherever the pomerium was, the city was.

For defining Roman space, the pomerium was more important than the much more physically imposing walls that surrounded the city.¹⁹⁰

Defined by that space was a broad range of enterprises and undertakings, of various political, military, and ritual natures. The line determined what kinds of political activity could occur and when; during the Republic, the authority of tribunes ended at the pomerium, and certain popular assemblies were required to take place inside of it.¹⁹¹ The power of the legions and their commanders ended at the pomerium; only outside of it could a Roman command an army.¹⁹² These restrictions were ultimately ritual ones; the

¹⁸⁸ The stones were movable in the abstract, but not very easily in the concrete. They were, as Beard et al. note, “2 m. tall and 1 m. square.” Hence they were seldom moved without good reason. For an example of a move precipitated by logistics, Beard et al. cite the construction of a flood wall for the Tiber. *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ The awareness of the pomerium on the part of the typical Roman of the time would probably have been on the level of Americans at sporting events. When the national anthem begins to play, people know by rote and experience that they should conduct themselves in certain ways and curtail their behavior in certain ways. No one enforces the removal of hats or standing for the anthem, but there is significant social pressure to undertake these actions. I imagine that enforcement of the pomerium and its strictures was similar; people simply knew by experience what the line meant, and violated it at the risk of social stigma and negative recognition. However, “in times of crisis,” note Beard et al., it was enforced more vigorously. *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁹⁰ Beard et al. calculate that movement of the pomerium under the emperors Claudius and Vespasian increased the area of the city from 325 to 745 hectares. They also note that when replacing the old Servian Walls in the 270s, a generation or two after the journey of Callistus from the Forum to the periphery we follow here, Aurelian largely followed the course of the pomerium. *Ibid.*, 177-78.

¹⁹¹ This was true up to 30 BCE. As Beard et al. note, the advent of the empire changed the way the pomerium interacted with political power, and the ability of the boundary to restrict politicians was first limited and then later abolished. *Ibid.*, 178-79.

¹⁹² The exception was for triumphs. *Ibid.*, 179.

space of Rome's center was sacred space, and activities that required the taking of auspices and augury, like the ones listed above, were bound by the pomerium.¹⁹³

The other major function of the pomerium was in legislating burial and cremation, and that function was the most significant both for the daily lives of ancient Romans and for this project. Burial and cremation were forbidden within the pomerium, with few exceptions, and so the boundary was a crucial distinguishing point for ubiquitous human experience of bereavement.¹⁹⁴ All Romans, regardless of class, religion, or status, found their end outside the pomerium. Whether by burial, cremation, or some less noble means of disposal, all the corpses of the population of over one million people were required to leave the city precincts.

Much in the way described by Foucault, then, the pomerium served to segregate cemeteries from the center of the city, and funerary activity from the cultic and civic heart of Rome. Gathered to the center were the privileged religions and cults of Rome, which flourished within the pomerium and even within the Forum itself.¹⁹⁵ Pushed to the

¹⁹³ Beard's point here is that the activities governed by the pomerium all have a sacred aspect—a ritual basis in augury, a priestly function, etc. The root organizing principle for the seemingly-random collection of prohibitions around the pomerium was that of ritual. Ibid., 178-80. This intersection between space and sacredness calls to mind another ritually constructed space, the *eruv*, which serves to expand the possibilities of action within a ritually bound system. Michael Saltman, ed. *Land and Territoriality* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 94-95.

¹⁹⁴ Exceptions were very rarely made. Julius Caesar received an exception, but his ashes were nonetheless interred outside the pomerium. Trajan's ashes were interred inside the pomerium, at the base of his column which still stands. The exception was justified in terms of the footnote above: since Trajan had died after conquering Parthia, and was due a triumph, interring his ashes in the Forum was a form of honoring this debt. Beard, *Religions of Rome: Volume I*, 180-81.

¹⁹⁵ Jeremy Schott provides a helpful discussion of the categories of *religio* and *superstitio* in antiquity, with particular regard to Christian self-understanding within the system. Cicero constructed an etymology of *religio* based on *relegere*, meaning "to re-read," suggesting that "the religious are those who carefully reviewed and investigated their ancestral traditions," while *superstitio* is undue concern with the furtherance of one's own heirs. The Christian Lactantius, however, recasts *superstitio* as anyone who is concerned with the particular—with one's own family, ancestors or progeny—and true *religio* as the

outside, like the merchants described by Lefebvre, were the crematories, mausoleums, and catacombs.¹⁹⁶ This division, created and codified by the pomerium, could not help but give definition to the two spaces, city and not-city, inside and out, and dictate much of their relationship to each other.¹⁹⁷

The location of the Christian catacombs could not have been anywhere but outside the pomerium, like any other enterprise dealing with the dead. They were not unique in their situation at the periphery. Uniqueness is not a prerequisite for heterotopia, though, and their placement there *did* contribute to their heterotopian nature.¹⁹⁸ The Callistus Catacomb, and the Cubicula of the Sacraments within it, were demarcated from the outset as set-apart space, counter-hegemonic space, and excluded from the normative

worship of a true universal God. In the period of the catacombs, most would have held with Cicero's view, that those cults gathered to the center of the city were *religio* proper, and that those sequestered to the periphery were *superstitio*. While the Empire permitted the exercise of a great diversity of religious traditions, and did little to circumscribe religious practice, it did privilege certain cults above others, through pride of place, imperial patronage, official priesthoods, and other acts of support. Jeremy M. Schott, *Christianity, Empire, and the Making of Religion in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 105-06.

¹⁹⁶ For an overview of Christian and Jewish burial spaces in Rome in relation to all other burial spaces, and in relation to roads and the pomerium, see Yasin. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 56-61. For an overview of collective burial in Rome, especially the role of columbaria and collegia, see Bodel's chapter in Brink and Green. Brink, *Commemorating the Dead*, 177-242.

¹⁹⁷ I am not suggesting an equivalency between these two categories—religions and cults, and the business of death. Rather, I am suggesting that by the spatial categories assigned to them, one was privileged and the other denigrated. This is what Foucault meant to illuminate: cemeteries, quite apart from whose they were, were set apart. This does not, in Foucault's construction, imply sacredness; it simply implies that the activity was powerful or dangerous enough to warrant removal from hegemonic space.

¹⁹⁸ The restriction of funeral activity to outside the pomerium meant that all funeral activity took on a heterotopian character. This is precisely what Foucault meant when he made cemeteries the archetypal example of the concept; because of the heterochronic qualities of the cemetery, and because it so profoundly differed from everyday life, death and its accouterments are inherently heterotopian. This was true for Christian and non-Christian burials alike in Rome. This section does not argue for any *special* heterotopian identity for the Callistus Catacomb (although later sections will); it simply argues that the spaces of death were and always are "other," and that in ancient Rome that otherness was codified more explicitly than in other places and times.

city, because of their function as funerary sites. The most basic division of space in Rome made it so.

Separating Structures

The previous section was concerned with structures that separate one kind of activity from another; in Rome, as elsewhere, some activities were pushed to the periphery and others gathered to the center. For ancient Rome, because of the boundary-setting functions of the pomerium, funerary activities and spaces were always pushed to the periphery, making them inherently heterotopian—“othered” from the city. Of course, in an urban context nothing can be wholly set apart from everything else. In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre is careful to describe the overlapping and adjacent nature of urban contexts, and the ways that different spaces can be joined and/or separated from one another. Here, I discuss how the city wall of Rome separated the city from the surrounding countryside, in ways similar to and different from how the pomerium separated them.¹⁹⁹

Lefebvre described certain features of cities, especially streets and roads, with the metaphor of a cut or suture, joining parts of the city together, or alternately separating them. For Lefebvre, these are “neutral spaces,” found between isotopies and heterotopies, that “simultaneously separat[e] and join...contrasting” spaces.²⁰⁰ They are cuts, in that

¹⁹⁹ The pomerium, as noted above, was physical in some respects. It remained, however, mostly a mental boundary, and not an imposing physical one, like Lefebvre’s streets or roads. The pomerium, then, formed a different kind of boundary than the wall, which was by necessity imposing, absolute in physical space, and more or less permanent. The pomerium was more useful for delineating a center for the city and a periphery outside of it, holding as it did various ritual, political, military, and social significations. The wall was more useful as a separating structure, having a more physical presence, like the streets and roads Lefebvre describes.

²⁰⁰ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 128.

they serve to separate one space from another. Like the medical idea from which the metaphor springs, these cuts are gashes in the landscape—interrupting features in an otherwise continuous field.²⁰¹ They also function as sutures, however. Having been separated by the cut, the two sides of the incision are separate from one another, and it is sutures that bring them back together as a whole. The rejoining is visible and provisional, mediating what are now two separate realities, but forming a necessary boundary point

between them.

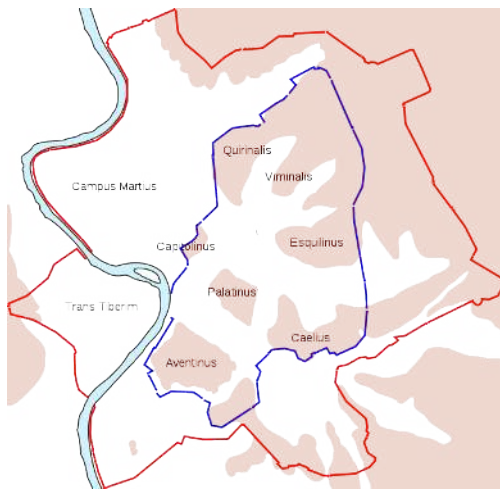


Figure 2: The Servian Wall on the interior, and the later Aurelian Wall, on the outside.

Although Lefebvre made no mention of it, since he was not writing specifically about Rome, the most significant such structure for ancient Rome was the city's defensive wall. The city's defensive wall encircled the city and intersected the many roads leading out of Rome to the countryside. As Callistus walked south of

the city, he would have passed through the Porta Capena, which allowed the Via Appia to pass through the wall.²⁰² In doing so, he crossed a boundary—a cut—that separated two kinds of space.

²⁰¹ Here the physical is in view. These structures are cuts in that they divide an otherwise-continuous physical space. No attention is yet given to social or psychological overlays. See Figure 2.

²⁰² The Porta Capena and other gates will be the subject of the next section.

The city wall of Rome, like that of many ancient and medieval cities, was a practical matter. It was meant to protect the center of the city from invasion by enemies, and was constructed with that goal in mind, as imposing and permanent. It therefore functioned like the pomerium in some respects, separating the essential city from the non-essential. The space outside the wall was part of the urban landscape, to be sure, but in the event of an invasion it could be sacrificed to protect the center.²⁰³

The wall differed from the pomerium in two other respects, however. First, it was a physical separation to a much larger degree than was the pomerium, presenting a much more imposing presence. Second, it joined the center and periphery of the city in an obvious way, making a clear boundary between the two.²⁰⁴ The effect of these two differences was that when Callistus walked southward out of the city, and approached the wall, the distinction between the city and the surrounding countryside would have been very clear. Although traces of urban life would have persisted far past the wall, the wall marked a dramatic cut and suture in the landscape—a cut separating the city from everything else, and a suture joining the two together.

The Callistus Catacomb and all other Christian catacombs, then, aside from their marginality as funerary spaces, would have been accessible only by transecting this cut and suture. The space on the inside of the wall was city, and the space on the outside of the wall was not-city. This is a familiar distinction by now, following the discussion of the pomerium, but it is apparent here in different terms. The wall served as the clearest

²⁰³ Image in Figure 2 above licensed under the Creative Commons. Richardprins: G. Droysens Allgemeiner Historischer Handatlas, "Map of Ancient Rome," ed. Map_of_ancient_Rome.svg (2011).

²⁰⁴ The sense in which the wall joined the two spaces is the subject of the next section, titled "Roads, Gates, and Liminal Space."

boundary delineating spaces, and as Callistus walked through the Porta Capena, he crossed the largest cut and suture and made the most general transition a traveler could make along the Via Appia—he entered the “other space,” the heterotopia, of the Roman countryside.²⁰⁵

Roads, Gates, and Liminal Space

As noted above, Lefebvre was not writing about ancient Rome specifically or ancient cities generally, and so in his discussion of cuts and sutures, for him structures like streets and roads, he did not consider either defensive city walls or sacred boundaries like the pomerium. His insights can nevertheless be applied to these structures, and particularly so to the locations at which these structures are intersected by roads. The wall did more than separate—or cut, in Lefebvre’s terminology—it also joined, or sutured. In Rome, the city wall was permeated at many points by roads leading into the city from the surrounding countryside, appearing on a map like spokes leading into a hub or blood vessels leading into a heart.²⁰⁶ As Callistus walked south out of Rome, he did so on a road, and passed through a gate. These intersections, the gates, were liminal spaces of interface between the city’s center and periphery.²⁰⁷ The roads that passed through them were likewise spaces of transition, the same spot on a road having for the traveler approaching the city the character of ever-increasing Roman-ness, and for the traveler departing the city the character of the ever-decreasing influence of the city.

²⁰⁵ Not to be dismissed is the psychological impact of a city’s defensive wall. The wall was one of the many stark reminders of the strength of the Empire and the power of the Empire to organize space and life according to its structures. In passing through the defensive wall, a traveler like Callistus would have been reminded of the degree to which his life was structured by the designs of the state.

²⁰⁶ See the map above.

²⁰⁷ They were literally liminal; the Latin *limen* means *threshold*.

Nearly every Christian catacomb built at Rome between the late second century and the sixth century was built along one of the major roads leading into the city.²⁰⁸ Practicality likely played a major role in this placement; the most attractive spaces were those that offered ease of access from the center of population.²⁰⁹ But beyond the practical, the construction and maintenance of heterotopian spaces also played a role in the siting of the catacombs. In a remarkable paragraph, Stavros Stavrides offers another way of understanding the relationships between spaces in urban contexts, and of the threshold structures that connect them:

These ‘other places,’ therefore, are being simultaneously connected to and separated from the places from which they differ. We could consider this characteristic of heterotopias as an indication of their relational status. And we could name as thresholds those arrangements that regulate the relationship of heterotopias with their surrounding spaces of normality. Heterotopias can be taken to concretize paradigmatic experiences of otherness, defined by the porous and contested perimeter that separates normality from deviance. Because this perimeter is full of combining/separating thresholds, heterotopias are not simply places of the other, or the deviant as opposed to normal, but places in which otherness proliferates, spilling over into the neighboring areas of ‘sameness.’ Heterotopias thus mark an osmosis between situated identities and experiences that can effectively destroy those strict taxonomies that ensure social reproduction. Through their osmotic boundaries, heterotopias diffuse a virus of change.²¹⁰

Stavrides’ commentary on thresholds provides another view into the physical location of the catacombs generally and the Callistus Catacomb specifically. The catacombs were located along roads for practical reasons, but their locations were also a

²⁰⁸ See the map insert in Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*.

²⁰⁹ The calculation is like that made by modern businesses, which endeavor to place their locations along major thoroughfares, and not in the middle of nowhere.

²¹⁰ Stavros Stavrides, "Heterotopias and the Experience of Porous Urban Space," in *Loose Space: Diversity and Possibility in Urban Life*, ed. Karen A. Franck (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 177-78.

critical part of their meaning and function. Heterotopias always exist in relationship to other spaces, what Stavrides calls “normality” or “sameness.” For the Callistus Catacomb, this meant that the heterotopian catacomb was linked to the hegemonic space of the city by thresholds—spaces of connection, mediation, and liminality.

In his initial exposition of heterotopia, Foucault noted that “heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable.”²¹¹ This dichotomy of isolation and porosity was essential to Foucault’s initial vision of heterotopia, although it has not received as much attention as other aspects of Foucault’s description, and Foucault himself did not develop it as fully as he could have.²¹² This neglect is unfortunate, since the interplay between spaces, heterotopian and not, has much to tell us about the natures of those spaces and the ways they function in relation to one another. Stavrides has ably filled this gap, drawing on the work of ritual theorists to augment Foucault’s thinking on the openings and closings of heterotopias. By augmenting Foucault’s descriptions with the insights of Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner, and Walter Benjamin, Stavrides has achieved an excellent description of the ways urban spaces are simultaneously isolated and porous, both segregating social activities and allowing for interchange between groups and spaces.²¹³

²¹¹ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 26.

²¹² Foucault describes heterotopias that are isolated from other spaces in various ways, or that appear to be porous but are really isolated. One wishes that he had paused to speculate about the flows of social activity from one -topia to another. Lefebvre’s interest in cuts and sutures between urban spaces comes close to the question of liminality and porosity, although he does not cast it in those terms.

²¹³ Stavrides, “Heterotopias,” 175-79. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969). Walter Benjamin, “Naples,” in *One-way Street, and Other Writings*, ed. Walter Benjamin (London: NLB, 1979).

The location of the Callistus Catacomb along the Via Appia, then, mediated and moderated the site's heterotopian nature while *simultaneously* concentrating and reinforcing it. By providing a space of transition between the spaces—a space in which the “osmotic” effects of otherness could flow in all directions—the Via Appia and Porta Capena (and other roads and gates for other catacombs) allowed the Callistus Catacomb to be fully heterotopian. More than the dichotomous city/not-city of the wall and the pomerium, the road and the gate allowed for a flourishing of liminality that nourished the growth of counter-sites like the Callistus Catacomb and the subversive and mirroring words, symbols, and actions that occurred there.²¹⁴

Once such counter-sites had been established, then, it is easy to see how they flourished. Established early on as heterotopias, by the building of an early Christian burial site, certain roads came to be known in terms we would characterize as heterotopian, leading to the flourishing of further sites, such that it came to resemble grapes (catacombs and martyr churches) on a vine (the roads). Chief among the roads with funerary complexes built along them were the Via Salaria, established as a site of catacombs by the late second century by the Priscilla Catacomb, the Via Aurelia Nova, established as an early Christian burial site by traditions about Peter's and Paul's deaths as early as the first century, and most significantly the Via Appia, defined in the second

²¹⁴ Stavrides' paragraph ends with a note about social change. Although it is not my intention to argue a connection here, it is interesting to note that 1) the only permanent Christian spaces in the city of Rome (that history or archaeology are aware of) in the second and third centuries were these catacomb spaces, and 2) by the beginning of the fourth century Christianity was no longer an illicit religion. Although the situation is far more complicated than can be explained with a simple examination of the city of Rome, there is something to Stavrides' metaphor of osmosis with regard to the diffusion of Christianity throughout the Empire. Could these spaces of liminality and threshold have served as the medium for the explosive growth and adoption of Christianity in the third and fourth centuries?

century by the San Sebastiano, Domatilla, and Callistus complexes.²¹⁵ The Via Appia and the nearby Via Latina became the most heavily developed roads in terms of catacombs, with seventeen located along the former and twelve along the latter, all within about two miles of the city wall.²¹⁶

Verticality and Monumentality

The above analysis has concerned horizontal relationships: the center of the city and its relationship to the periphery of the city as separated by the pomerium and the city wall, and the Callistus Catacomb's situation outside the city as mediated to the inside of the city by the Via Appia and the Porta Capena. These horizontal relationships constitute the most evident spatial signs of heterotopia at the Callistus Catacomb. However one final, non-horizontal aspect of the physical reality of the Callistus Catacomb bears mentioning: the Callistus Catacomb's location underground.

That a location underground contributes to a site's heterotopian nature might qualify as common sense; after all, we speak colloquially of alternative sites and movements as "underground."²¹⁷ This popular understanding of the subversive and critical powers of subterranean sites is given theoretical voice by Lefebvre, who sees

²¹⁵ The Priscilla Catacomb, according to Snyder, was joined from three separate earlier structures in the late third or early fourth centuries. The earliest of those structures, the cryptoporticus, dates to the end of the first century or the beginning of the second, meaning that it contains, as Snyder notes, the earliest known examples of Christian art. He dates the Callistus Catacomb to the late second or early third centuries, the Domatilla Catacomb to the middle of the third century, and the San Sebastiano complex to around the year 200. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 156, 59-61, 61, 83-84.

²¹⁶ See the map included in Nicolai, Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*.

²¹⁷ Films, music, art, literature, and political movements all might be described as "underground" to denote their alternative or hidden nature.

verticality as a sign of monumentality and “elsewhereness,” or heterotopia.²¹⁸

“Verticality,” writes Lefebvre,

“a height erected anywhere on a horizontal plane, can become the dimension of elsewhereness, a place characterized by the presence-absence: of the divine, of power, of the half-fictional half-real, of sublime thought. Similarly, subterranean depth is reversed verticality.”²¹⁹

Lefebvre continues by connecting these kinds of spaces to monumentality: space that is “diffused, radiated, becomes condensed, concentrated.”²²⁰ “Height and depth,” Lefebvre notes to conclude the movement, “are generally part of monumentality, the fullness of a space that overflows its material boundaries.”²²¹ Lefebvre is articulating a kind of fulcrum-and-lever function of verticality and space; by raising (or sinking) space, its ability to signify is multiplied. Space that is distinguished vertically is “condensed, concentrated,” like a fulcrum that allows a lever to move more than it otherwise could. Its power is multiplied.

Here, Lefebvre has noted something essential about human interaction with space: that perhaps more than horizontal space, vertical space signifies the monumental. Rome was certainly no stranger to monumental structures; the city was replete with official symbols of imperial power and informal tributes to human hubris in the form of towering

²¹⁸ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 38.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 38-39.

buildings.²²² But the Callistus Catacomb, located outside the city, exhibited a different kind of monumentality, expressing a different version of power. Located underground, its extent and symbolic power were known only to those with occasion to enter it.²²³ It was a hidden totem of subversive symbolism, countering the more hegemonic monuments of the imperial city just a few miles away.

As a monumental space, the Callistus Catacomb certainly “overflowed its material boundaries,” as Lefebvre suggests.²²⁴ Its bounds were impressive; reaching underground and out of sight of the city and its inhabitants, the Callistus Catacomb’s four or five levels routinely measured in subterranean depth as far as the legal height of tenement buildings in the city, and at its extremes likely matched even the tallest buildings of Rome.²²⁵ The catacomb at its peak encompassed forty acres of horizontal space and twelve miles of tunnels.²²⁶ But even these dimensions were “overflowed,” as

²²² Jerome Carcopino relates some of the history of Rome’s extreme architecture, including the infamous Insula of Felicula, an ancient skyscraper so audaciously tall that it was used as a cautionary tale by the early Christian Tertullian. Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, 24-30.

²²³ Although the catacombs were not sealed off or sequestered solely for Christian, they likely would have been visited by mostly Christians and non-Christian Romans with family graves there. While the sites were open in theory, in practice they were likely accessed only by those with a good reason to access them.

²²⁴ Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, 38.

²²⁵ Baruffa notes that “the catacombs are dug on different floors or levels (half-floors), and in some cases they spread out on four floors or five levels. The first floor may be three to eight meters in depth, depending on the slope in which it is excavated. The second floor is generally between ten and fifteen meters down, the third about twenty meters, the fourth still deeper....The maximum depth, as evidenced in one zone of the “Callixtian complex,” is about thirty meters.” Thirty meters is about one hundred feet. Augustus forbade the construction of buildings more than twenty meters high, although some, like the Insula of Felicula, probably reached higher. Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 45. Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*, 24.

²²⁶ These figures are widely circulated but rarely sourced. The most authoritative source I could locate was a coffee-table book by National Geographic. National Geographic, “Roman Catacombs,” in *Sacred Places of a Lifetime: 500 of the World’s Most Peaceful and Powerful Destinations*, ed. National Geographic (China: Toucan Books, LTD, 2008), 346.

Lefebvre puts it, by the grand dimensions of the symbolic space created by the location of the catacomb.

The Callistus Catacomb was located underground and monumentally constructed. It was situated along the Via Appia, and through the Porta Capena, spaces that acted as thresholds for the conveyance of heterotopian meaning. It was located outside of Rome, space separated from the city's space by the wall's cut and joined to the city by the wall's suture. And it was outside the pomerium, the sacred symbolic limit of the city, and was therefore decidedly not-city. These various situations and locations combined to make the Callistus Catacomb highly heterotopian, as a space, before any consideration of the catacomb's contents. The space already "overflowed its material boundaries" with meaning and symbolism, as a counter-site to Rome. As the following chapters demonstrate with specificity, what early Roman Christians did inside the Callistus Catacomb only served to strengthen the space's status as heterotopia, and its mirroring, mimicry, subversion, and critique of the imperial city just over the hill. More generally, however, one aspect of the Cubicula of the Sacraments merits mentioning here, as it concerns not the specifics of the spaces but their very place within the larger complex.

Doubled Heterotopias

The Cubicula of the Sacraments were some of the earliest parts of the Callistus Catacomb. Along with the Crypt of Lucina, the area of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, which also includes the so-called Crypt of the Popes, were the earliest sections to be dug by Christians, and served as "nuclei" for the rest of the complex.²²⁷ As early sites, they

²²⁷ Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 161.

set much of the tone and structure for the rest of the complex, which was constructed over the following centuries; those digging the catacomb learned from the experience of digging the Cubicula and their surrounding environment, and applied it throughout the site. Although the complex came to be quite extensive, encompassing tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of graves, the so-called “first area,” where the Cubicula of the Sacraments were located, continued to be distinct within the larger site.²²⁸

Bernard Green convincingly posits that the Cubicula of the Sacraments had their origin a few decades after the construction of the first simple galleries. In about the year 235, he suggests, the five rooms (and the Crypt of the Popes) were constructed. Significantly, Green notes, this differentiation of space, with cubicula set apart for wealthier clients and loculi reserved for the masses, coincided with the beginnings of art in the catacombs.²²⁹ This social division of space, and its attending implications for iconography, will be addressed in Chapter 4.

Saindon’s model of doubled heterotopias provides a crucial tool for understanding the role of art in the Cubicula, and indeed the role of art throughout the catacombs. This chapter has been concerned with understanding various aspects of spatial construction—how spaces’ locations, verticality, juxtapositions, and separations affect the nature of the spaces themselves. But Saindon also guides our attention to the diachronic, and reminds us of Foucault’s second principle of heterotopia: that heterotopias develop and change over time, both internally and in their relationships to the world. His insight—that

²²⁸ Informal estimates of the kind given on tours of the site give the total number of graves at about 700,000.

²²⁹ Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 182-83.

heterotopias can be intensified or doubled by the presence of art in them—points the way to the next three chapters of this work.

In those chapters, we will see that when the Christians began to paint images on the walls of the Cubicula, they worked not with a blank canvas but with a canvas already inscribed with meaning—heterotopian meaning. Because of the Callistus Catacomb's location within Rome's urban landscape, along the Via Appia, and plunged vertically beneath the ground, the space was already marked by heterotopia. As we will see, the Christians' work was a doubling of that heterotopia—a reaffirmation of that initial posture toward the world, and a reframing of it for a slightly new time, through art, the evocation of texts in art, and the practices that they undertook in the spaces. Like *Shalchet* in the Jewish Museum Berlin, the art, references to texts, and practices with which the Cubicula of the Sacraments were filled were crucial doublers of the spaces' heterotopia.

The addition and decoration of the Cubicula of the Sacraments early in the third century intensified the already-heterotopian site. It re-asserted the site's counter-hegemonic meaning, making explicit the implicit markings of heterotopia inscribed on the urban landscape. With the first brushstrokes on the Catacomb walls, the Christians were giving full intentional voice to their critiques and subversions of Roman hegemony, in the mirroring and re-combining of iconographic and artistic resources from the broader culture. The accounts of those critiques, made through art, stories, and practices, are the subject of the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4: ART AND HETEROTOPIA

“In the last resort the graphic art of the Caduveo women is to be interpreted, and its mysterious appeal and seemingly gratuitous complexity to be explained, as the phantasm of a society ardently and insatiably seeking a means of expressing symbolically the institutions it might have, if its interests and superstitions did not stand in the way. In this charming civilization, the female beauties trace the outlines of the collective dream with which they extol in their ornamentation, since they have no code in which to express it, and whose mysteries they disclose as they reveal their nudity.”

--Claude Levi-Strauss²³⁰

Art as Heterotopia

I began Chapter 2 by describing the work of a man called Dionysios, an imaginary person who worked to paint the images of the Cubicula of the Sacraments. Dionysios was one of a group of artists who decorated the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other spaces within the Callistus Catacomb and other catacombs, and his work and the work of other painters remains one of the great material legacies of early Christianity.²³¹ As Graydon Snyder points out, the corpus of material evidence of pre-Constantinian Christianity is really quite small, and the art of the catacombs is certainly

²³⁰ Claude Levi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. J Weightman and D. Weightman (London 1973), 269. Jas Elsner cites the same quotation. Jas Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 253.

²³¹ The status of Dionysios and others like him is a crucial question. Were the artists who painted the catacombs hired and paid by the community, much as would be the case for house decoration? If so, how much flexibility did they have in portraying their subjects? Or were the artists members of the community itself, and therefore more directly connected to the context—the “canvas”—in which they worked? These considerations are crucial to the question of the art of the catacombs, and will be the subject of a later section. Finney understands that the Callistus images were made by “journeyman wall painters,” and is dubious whether there is any evidence that the more skilled “figure painters” are responsible for any extant work in Callistus. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 153.

one of its major constituent parts.²³² The work of Dionysios and others is then crucially important both for understanding the catacombs and their community, and for understanding early Christianity as a whole.

I make two overarching claims in this chapter. The first is that the art of the Cubicula of the Sacraments *is* heterotopia—that the images themselves are spaces of representation that exist as heterotopias. The second is that the art of the Cubicula of the Sacraments *makes* heterotopia—that the art reframes and redoubles the already-heterotopian spaces, which were described in Chapter 3. These claims are not absolutely distinct from one another, of course, but these two heterotopian functions of art—being and constituting—serve to encompass all of the various arguments presented below. They claim a dual role for the images found in the Cubicula of the Sacraments and elsewhere, as both the containers and markers of heterotopia, and this dual role is crucial to the understanding the function of art within these early Christian spaces. The following analysis will reveal that the images of the Cubicula of the Sacraments were, more than any other aspect of the spaces, the explicit bearers of mimicry, mirroring, and critique, and the primary voice with which the community behind the Cubicula of the Sacraments expressed its construal of Christianity and its place in the world.

Two sets of theoretical resources aid in this analysis. One set, drawn from spatial theory, begins with assumptions about space and its production and use, and reaches out to encompass art. These resources include Foucault's own articulation of heterotopia,

²³² "Material" is here distinguished, perhaps artificially, from "textual." By no means do I wish to minimize the observations of those who, like Larry Hurtado, have called attention to the materiality of early Christian texts and manuscripts. I simply mean that the archaeological record of pre-Constantinian Christianity is surprisingly thin, and that the catacombs and their images are a major part of that record. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*.

especially his sixth principle, as well as formulations from Lefebvre.²³³ Joined together, the insights of these two lay the groundwork for how symbolic language, like art, might fit into a spatial framework. These theories embrace alterity and marginality as characteristics of socially produced space. In them, visual art resides somewhere at the periphery—included implicitly as one of many forms of social activity and abstract expression, but not discussed explicitly or in much detail.

The other set of theoretical resources takes a contrasting path. These move from the visual arts toward marginality and resistance, and on their margins visit spatial matters. These resources include the notion of “visual exegesis,” here expressed primarily by Jensen, Jas Elsner’s reflections on “resistance” in the visual arts, Scott’s theoretical articulation of the ways various kinds of speech convey implied or “hidden” critiques of more powerful parties, and finally Saindon’s description of the doubling effects of art inside heterotopias.²³⁴ While appearing to be an unwieldy collection of disparate items juxtaposed into a single place, taken together these resources comprise a simple and coherent whole. There are some (Foucault, Lefebvre, Soja) who mostly describe spaces but also describe things like art, and there are some (Jensen, Elsner, Scott) who mostly describe art or speech but whose insights can also be used to describe the way art or speech function in space. The effect of these myriad resources, then, is to throw multiple bridges across a divide, rather than just one, to span the distance more effectively. In the

²³³ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Soja, *Thirdspace*.

²³⁴ Robin M. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004). Elsner, *Roman Eyes*. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. Saindon, "A Doubled Heterotopia."

end, however, they all span the same divide; all are tools for joining the diverse discourses about heterotopia with the still more diverse discourses about art.

This chapter will proceed, then, with the building of these bridges (or the exposition of these resources), followed by a synthesis of sorts, in which the divide will have been spanned and the work of analysis can begin. The second part of the chapter will be given over to that analysis, with case studies of images from the Cubicula of the Sacraments serving to test the soundness of the bridges, and to traverse the divide, understanding the ways the images of the Cubicula both are and contribute to heterotopia.

Resources from Spatial Theory

Michel Foucault

In “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault considers neither images nor the role symbolic languages like art might play in the formation of a heterotopia. This is a function of the piece’s brevity, and nothing else; those who have taken up the mantle of describing heterotopia have ably demonstrated a robust role for what Lefebvre calls “more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs.”²³⁵ Foucault’s aim in his short piece was simply to affirm the existence of heterotopias and to describe a few different kinds and functions of them; he had no interest in what Lefebvre later called the “production” of social space, or, more vividly, its “secretion” from the “spatial practice” of a society.²³⁶

Nevertheless, Foucault’s initial articulation of heterotopia does provide a basic framework for those interested in discerning the role of the visual in the construction of heterotopias. This framework is most visible in Foucault’s discussions of the ways

²³⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 39.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

heterotopias exist “in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect.”²³⁷ When heterotopias are performing their function of mirroring hegemonic space and simultaneously critiquing and subverting it, there will be some method of conveyance for this critique—some sort of symbolic language employed, whether it be a verbal language employing words, alphabets, and the like, or some other expression of semiotics, such as art.²³⁸ This is implied in Foucault’s description, and is not made explicit, but it is assumed, at least for certain spaces. The cinema or theater, for example, is one of Foucault’s instances of heterotopia, because it “brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another.”²³⁹ The method by which it conjures these spaces is purely symbolic; although there may be physical elements on the stage or screen, like actors and props, it is the words that are spoken and the meanings conveyed by costumes and scenery that bring diverse places and spaces together.

²³⁷ “The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place,” writes Foucault. “In the mirrors, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.” Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 24.

²³⁸ Architects would undoubtedly claim that space can function as its own kind of semiotic system, and indeed something of this is implied in the previous chapter’s argument that the subterranean and outside-the-walls location of the catacombs is meaningful.

²³⁹ Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 25.

On whatever “stage” a heterotopia plays out, then, we can expect there to be some form of symbolic language by which the space’s relationship to other spaces is conveyed. In the case of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the “stage” of this project, there are precious few words (although there are some). There are many more images, painted onto the walls and ceilings and in one case the floor.²⁴⁰ It is obvious to any observer that art is the chief symbolic language of this stage, the one chosen to invoke places, ideas, and meanings from off-stage.

Foucault anticipates two main kinds of heterotopias: the “space of illusion,” of which the brothel is the paradigmatic example, and the “heterotopia of compensation.”²⁴¹ This second kind, exemplified for Foucault by the colony, exists when the group producing the heterotopia is embedded in but in apart from a larger society or social group—like early Christians in Rome. Heterotopias of compensation, Foucault writes, are designed “to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.”²⁴² In either kind of heterotopia described by Foucault, we can expect to find a language of some kind to express the purpose and orientation of the space. But in the case of the heterotopia of compensation, we can expect to find a symbolic system capable of expressing this within-yet-opposed-to aspect, so well typified by the colony, and the attending critiques of other spaces and the social structures that produced them.

²⁴⁰ Cubiculum A4 has a geometrically patterned floor.

²⁴¹ As discussed in Chapter 2, this dissertation is primarily, but not exclusively, concerned with the second kind, the “heterotopia of compensation.”

²⁴² Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 27.

In the catacombs, then, and the Cubicula of the Sacraments particularly, we can expect there to be some method of expression by which the sub-group (the colony, as it were) could make clear its position against and relative to the more dominant group. For the catacombs, the only reasonable candidate is art. Although space itself can express something of the relationships between the groups, and although the written texts of the community of the Cubicula and the rituals it performed there can be reconstructed using the art, it is the art itself that serves as the major and definitive self-expression of the early Christians behind the catacomb. It is the visual language, painted onto the walls, that must be the voice they have left to speak about themselves, and so when we search for a record of early Roman Christianity's construal of its world, we can find it overwhelmingly in the art of the catacombs. Beginning with Foucault, we can expect to find a language for critique and mirroring, and on the walls of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, we find it.

Henri Lefebvre

Lefebvre's reflections on spatial production were not made with heterotopia in mind. That Lefebvre and Foucault worked somewhat synchronously but also for the most part independently is a loss in one sense, given the ways they might have sharpened each other's iron on the subject of heterotopia, but also a boon, since their ideas now represent something like convergent evolution, with two independent sets of ideas attempting to solve the same problem. Lefebvre, like Foucault, was interested in the ways social groups defined themselves by and through space, and the ways those spaces arose out of social practices. Like Foucault, Lefebvre's analysis often took him to social conflict, either

overt or sublimated, where space served as markers for social distinctions and boundaries. And so Lefebvre's conclusions, while arrived at differently than Foucault's, are nevertheless useful.

The Production of Space is a sprawling book that in some ways attempts to found (or revitalize) an entire field while simultaneously critiquing it.²⁴³ In it, Lefebvre seeks to recast spatial studies out of the geometric and abstract and into a Marxist analysis of social activities. The clearest articulation of Lefebvre's conception of space actually comes near the beginning, in two different numbered formulations of a "triad," or three-part categorization of space.²⁴⁴ The first part of his spatial triad he calls "spatial practice," which is simply the activities of people in space in the world. The second part he calls "representation of space," by which he means abstract ideas about space removed from the spatial practice of everyday life—architecture, geometry, cartography, and so on. The third part of the triad is representational spaces, and it is here that Lefebvre's work is at its most applicable to this project. Representational spaces are "embodying complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art...."²⁴⁵ Later, Lefebvre describes them as "directly *lived* through [their] associated images and symbols.... [They] overlay the physical space, making symbolic use of [their] objects."²⁴⁶ In this description of space, Lefebvre is

²⁴³ Lefebvre is keen to point out earlier spatial constructs, such as Cartesian and Euclidean space, but he means something altogether different when he discusses space. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 1.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 33, 38-39.

²⁴⁵ Lefebvre adds parenthetically, regarding art, that it "may come eventually to be defined less as a code of space than as a code of representational space." Ibid., 33.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 39. Emphasis in original.

claiming a function for lived physical space as the reservoir of social meaning and action: a potent role for space, rising out of his Marxist sensibilities, and fully in keeping with Foucault's much briefer but equally powerful "heterotopia of compensation." Both are ways to talk about space holding social power—about space being inscribed with rhetorical power—for and by dominated groups. Like distinct organisms that have evolved to fill the same niche—termed "convergent evolution" by biologists—Lefebvre and Foucault converge on this point: that dominated groups employ space to effect coded (or sometimes not-coded) expressions of their self-understanding.²⁴⁷

Robin Jensen and Visual Exegesis

In the preceding section, we began a bridge across the divide between spatial theory and the visual arts, beginning at the starting point of spatial theory. Both Foucault and Lefebvre began from a discussion of spatial theory, and their ideas and insights have been developed above to include space for the visual in the spatial realm. Visual art, as established in the previous section, may certainly function as the symbolic language by which space is described by its inhabitants. To complete the work of spanning the divide, though, we must also build a bridge from the visual side of the divide—the one populated

²⁴⁷ The most sustained attempt to integrate creatively Foucault and Lefebvre is found in the work of Edward Soja, particularly his *Thirdspace*. While *Thirdspace* is in its own right an excellent reading of both Lefebvre and Foucault, and one to which I am much indebted, I do not share Soja's postmodernist interpretation of either writer—or at least not his *particular brand* of postmodernism. Soja rightly points out the usefulness of both Foucault's and Lefebvre's "thirthing" of space, his word for escaping the binary oppositions traditionally opposed by space. Additionally, he draws on a number of critical thinkers in the area of marginality, notably bell hooks, to demonstrate the power of thirthing or "Thirdspace" to defeat the binary oppositions brought on by modernity. While I appreciate his efforts, and find them convincing, I am engaged in a rather different project—one that does understand heterotopias as existing in opposition to other spaces, as I believe Foucault did, while also holding in tension the multi-directional realities of religious and cultural power dynamics in the Roman Empire. Therefore, while I owe quite a lot to Soja as a secondary source, I do not share his conclusions for the purposes of this project, but build upon them, and refer instead to the "primary" sources of Foucault and Lefebvre.

by art historians, art theorists, and students of religious studies who think critically about the relationship between art and a community's ability to describe itself.

The first part of our bridge from visual art to spatial theory comes from someone working at the intersection of religious studies and the visual arts, Robin Jensen.²⁴⁸ Jensen is interested in how art can express religious meaning and narrative content, and she frequently employs a useful phrase to describe the process by which religious art is created: visual exegesis.²⁴⁹ Visual exegesis applies when a work of art is created as a reading of a text—in the case of Jensen's and my subject matter, a biblical text. Much in the same way as an interpreter might read a text and create another text, a work of exegesis, an artist might read (or hear) a text, and then create a painting, sculpture, mosaic, or other work of art that functions as an interpretation or exegesis of the text. In this way artists are exegetes, and the images on the walls of the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacombs spaces are not simply innocuous and pretty decorations. Certainly some of the images can be that, but many are rather meaningful works of exegesis. As works of exegesis, then, the art of the catacombs can tell us how the artists

²⁴⁸ An alternate but allied perspective on the role of artists as exegetes can be found in the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. His terms *Wirkungsgeschichte* and *Rezeptionsgeschichte*, argues Martin O'Kane, can provide a useful lens for viewing the work of painters and other visual artists as they depict biblical narratives, as compared to the work of textual exegetes. O'Kane, in explaining Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutical aesthetics, writes that "we experience truth in art when the work draws us into its play of meaning and allows us to see something previously hidden about the everyday world in which we live." This notion is in harmony with the theoretical construct of this chapter, which posits a role for art in the exposition of story. Martin O'Kane, "Wirkungsgeschichte and Visual Exegesis: The Contribution of Hans-Georg Gadamer," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 2 (2012): 149.

²⁴⁹ Most references to Jensen's use of "visual exegesis" come from Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*.

or exegetes—or those commissioning or sponsoring the art—were reading the texts, and what they found meaningful and important about them.²⁵⁰

As exegetes, artists like Dionysios and others like him faced a series of choices.²⁵¹ As Jensen points out, he faced decisions with regard to source material, the selection and omission of defining vignettes from a story, emphasis of certain characters and plotlines, and style, among other things.²⁵² In the same way a verbal exegete emphasizes one aspect of the text over another, and makes choices about meanings and the relative importance of a text's parts, a painter must also make choices when he begins to work.

Jensen's case study is the Jonah cycle from a cubiculum in the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, in Rome.²⁵³ In her analysis of it, she makes several observations that are useful when considering visual exegesis, and which I will employ in my own analysis.

Jensen notes that the exegete has chosen to depict only certain scenes of the Jonah story,

²⁵⁰ For the purposes of this dissertation I would like to maintain a distinction between text and art. This chapter is concerned with art and the ways it exists as, creates, and doubles heterotopia. The next chapter, Chapter 5, is concerned with the texts behind that art—the source material for our visual exegetes. Therefore, while some attention will necessarily be given to texts in this chapter, all in-depth analysis of texts will come in the following chapter.

²⁵¹ Recall that Dionysios is a fictional name meant to stand in for the artists who painted the images in the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacomb spaces. It is also critical to recall that there is little evidence about who was painting these works, and under what guidance. The traditional relationship between patron and artist would have the patron dictating the content of the work, and the artist simply creating it, bereft of much individual control. I assume that in the catacombs, however, some greater degree of autonomy must have existed on the part of the artists. Even if this were not the case, however, the discussion simply moves from one about the artist to one about the person or people who commissioned the art. In either case, exegetical and artistic decisions were made, and were meaningful. For the purposes of this dissertation, the question of the autonomy of the artist is not as important as the outcome of the art itself, which functioned to create and underscore the heterotopian nature of the spaces. While questions of the economics and artistic control of the work are both important and interesting, they are ancillary to this work.

²⁵² Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*, 30-31.

²⁵³ Cubiculum A3 contains a series of Jonah images, which will be the subject of discussion later in this chapter. The image from the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus can be found in Jensen's chapter. *Ibid.*, 28.

assuming the reader is familiar with the whole story and that she will fill in the blanks.²⁵⁴

This may also, however, be a sign pointing to the parts of the text that the exegete considered important or especially powerful. As with written or verbal exegesis, selection is an inherent part of the process; both texts and images are polysemous, and any act of interpretation involves both a narrowing and a broadening of meaning, simultaneously, as the interpreter focuses her attention on one part of the source “text” and then considers the multiplicity of meanings that might attend to it. Jonah images, as selective as they are from the range of narrative possibilities, are actually among the most complete narrative images in the catacombs; for most others, we have simply one scene, meant to stand in for an entire source text. The interpretation of visual exegesis, then, must be an exercise in the judicious discernment among possibilities. Is the paucity of depiction a function of limited space and resources, or is it an exegetical choice? Is it possible that it is both, and that given restrictions, the exegete chose the most important parts? Or does the image set participate in some already-established tradition—a shorthand of sorts, from which images of distilled and known power might be drawn?²⁵⁵

Jensen also notes that certain scenes—notably the scene commonly referred to as “Jonah in repose,” where Jonah is reclining under the bush—are modeled on common

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 43.

²⁵⁵ This is the essence of one intriguing possible source for the catacomb images: illustrated Septuagints. It has been suggested by Weitzmann and others that illustrated versions of the Greek translation of Jewish scriptures might have served as the basis of some early Christian art, both in catacomb and monumental settings. This is a fascinating hypothesis for which there is unfortunately very little evidence from the period in question; it relies on putative first, second, and third century exemplars of later fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth century extant works. Were an early example to be found, it would certainly clear up a great deal about the genesis of early Christian art, while also invigorating discussions of Christian appropriations of Jewish texts and images, and opening to reevaluation the timing of the so-called “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity. Weitzmann, *Studies*, 45-75.

Greco-Roman iconography, in this case the iconography of Endymion.²⁵⁶ She is careful to note that “this image is Jonah and not Endymion, no matter how clearly the iconography of the one is based on the other,” and that “early Christians weren’t mistaken about what they saw.”²⁵⁷ Here arise questions of audience and the kind of symbolic language referenced above in the discussions of Foucault and Lefebvre, and to be revisited with the discussion of Scott below. Can we trust that the images were meaningful to their audiences? Can we be assured that no matter the origins of the iconography, the images carried particular and specific symbolic value for the early Christians who made and frequented the catacombs? The answer has to be affirmative.²⁵⁸

These questions lead to larger questions about creativity. To what degree were the exegetes of the catacomb walls creative? What amount of liberty did they possess in their employment of already-existent motifs and iconographies, and how free were they to interpret texts and stories as they saw fit? Some traditional art-historical analysis has operated on an assumption that the re-use of iconography current in other Roman contexts meant that the artists painting in the catacombs were simply making rote reproductions of old images. Some have even suggested that the Christians simply hired the cheapest artists they could find, who only knew how to paint certain images from the Roman repertoire—hence the repurposing of Endymion as Jonah, the Orant as various

²⁵⁶ Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*, 28-29.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁵⁸ The work of Dennis MacDonald has succeeded in demonstrating the penetration of broad cultural knowledge about Homer into the texts of the New Testament and other early Christian literatures. Something similar occurred with art; the standard iconography of various texts and mythologies of the Mediterranean was part of the cultural repertoire of the time, and it could be used, reused, swapped, and repurposed for meanings both old and new. Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: the Odyssey, Plato, and the Acts of Andrew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

figures, and the kriophoros as the Good Shepherd.²⁵⁹ But this view is most successful when images are taken in isolation from one another and analyzed for style and iconography. One of the great contributions of a spatial analysis is that it takes into account the ways images are juxtaposed together and with other entities—texts, walls and ceilings, practices—to form a coherent space. A spatial analysis cannot take images in isolation, without considering their contexts and their neighbors. It depends on the confines of Foucault’s “stage:” a venue upon which a narrative is spun, a screen upon which a world-view is projected.

Here the perspective of Sister Charles Murray augments and underscores Jensen’s notion of visual exegesis. For early Christian art, she argues, “there is again nothing original to be found. . . .newness. . . .must be sought for elsewhere.”²⁶⁰ She finds it not in iconographic innovation, but in the employment of “Christian themes,” and “in the technique of selectivity and choice among a whole range of available symbols, which caused the artists to adopt some and disregard others as suitable for their purpose.”²⁶¹ In other words, for the exegetes of the catacombs, creativity was to be found not in the production of new images, but in the recombination of old images into new syntaxes, and

²⁵⁹ Paul Corby Finney calls this cohort the “minimalists,” and to them he assigns a pervasive bias against assigning particularly Christian meaning to images found in Christian contexts like the catacombs. This position is especially strong with regard to non-Biblical images (a distinction to be made in a later section below): the *kriophoros*, orant, etc. The minimalists argue that there is no reason to understand many early Christian images as anything but decorative, and that they are certainly not exegetical products or story-telling venues. Finney argues against the minimalists, although he sees value in their work, primarily in the re-assertion of a connection between early Christian art and other late-antique art forms, which had been damaged by the work of Wilpert and others, who understood Christian art as a formal break. Finney’s own conclusion is that while the early Christians were not innovators in iconography, they were re-imbuing old images with new meanings. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 188-91. The orant, Jonah, and the kriophoros are all common images in early Christian art, and will be described below.

²⁶⁰ Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 7.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the reconfiguration of a symbolic language to carry specifically Christian meanings.²⁶² In a different but related setting, an early Christian sarcophagus, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon strikes a similar note, claiming that the work of her book, and by implication the work of understanding early Christian art, is discovering “the significance of the choice and combination of scenes—and thus themes—“of the art.”²⁶³ When Dionysios painted Jonah, he drew from his knowledge of the iconography of Endymion, but he did so with Jonah in mind, with an eye to conveying something of Jonah’s story, and for his audience, those Christians who made their place in the Cubicula of the Sacraments.²⁶⁴ It was a painting for them, and for Dionysios himself, in which he wrestled with the mythologies and narratives of his social group and produced art that spoke to their self-understanding and self-identity within the Roman context. It was an act of exegesis, but it was not undertaken in a vacuum. It was by and for a community, and Dionysios’ exegesis in pigment was a powerful statement of his community’s self-understanding.

Jas Elsner

Jas Elsner begins the tenth chapter of his book *Roman Eyes* with a disclaimer: his interest “is far from attempting a general theory of art as anticultural system or defining precisely art’s place among the various armories of potential resistance.” His humbler goal, he notes, is to “look at images in the specific context of their use within religion as

²⁶² Again, there is considerable congruity between the way Murray describes the early Christian use of art and the way MacDonald describes the early Christian use of texts.

²⁶³ Malbon, *The Iconography of the Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus*, 12.

²⁶⁴ That is, the way Jonah was painted was patterned on the way Endymion was usually painted. Iconography refers to the standard or traditional way of depicting a thing, and iconography can be lifted from one context to another. This is what happened with Jonah—he “borrowed” the way Endymion was usually painted.

self-affirming and self-defining statements of cult identity within the Roman world at the dawn of late antiquity.”²⁶⁵ His disclaimer notwithstanding, Elsner does succeed in providing the foundation of a theory of how to *read* images for resistance. His subject matter, some of the extant religious buildings of Dura Europos, includes the Christian church there, destroyed and preserved along with a synagogue and a Mithraeum.²⁶⁶

Elsner is careful about what he means by “resistance.” As he notes wryly, “we tend to find subtle resistance to the notion of ‘resistance’ in the Roman empire....”²⁶⁷ In response, he takes an approach similar to the one taken in this project, which is to gloss “resistance” not in terms of outright rebellion, open condemnation, or what he calls “conscious motivation and explicit articulations,” but rather by what he terms “self-definition.”²⁶⁸ Faced with a totalizing, homogenizing, imperial power like Rome, Elsner finds that fringe religious groups employed not open rebellion, but rather intense forms of self-definition and self-referential identity building.²⁶⁹ In the art of the church,

²⁶⁵ This chapter, titled “Viewing and Resistance: Art and Religion in Dura Europos” was previously published as Jas Elsner, “Cultural Resistance and the Visual Image,” *Classical Philology* 96, no. 3 (2001). Citations here are from the book. Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 254.

²⁶⁶ Vladimir Weidle (sometimes listed Wladimir Weidle or Vladimir Veidle) notes of Dura Europos that the house church there, with its fine examples of early Christian art contemporaneous with the art of catacombs such as Callistus, mitigates the charge that catacomb art is too funerary to stand in for the broader church. Given the similarity between the catacombs (which are obviously funerary) and the church at Dura (which is not funerary), we can assume that the images in the catacombs were not particularly funerary, although they might have been employed in particularly funerary ways at Dura. Vladimir Weidle, *The Baptism of Art* (Westminster: Dacre), 11-12.

²⁶⁷ Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 255.

²⁶⁸ Elsner here is informed by Comaroff and Comaroff. J Comaroff, and J Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. I (Chicago 1991), 191-97, 260-64. Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 284.

²⁶⁹ Reuven Kimelman examines this kind of vigorous self-definition in a different context in his essay in E.P. Sanders’ three-volume work. Reuven Kimelman, “Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity,” in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, ed. E.P. Sanders (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

synagogue, and Mithraeum of Dura, these took the form of depictions of insider mythologies and ceremonies and mysteries for the initiated—a way for the central self-understanding of the community to be fully on display in its building decoration, while still remaining profoundly inaccessible to the uninitiated.²⁷⁰

For the Christian church at Dura, here the most pertinent of Elsner's three subjects, he understands resistance in just this way: the employment of mythology connected to and evocative of the group's initiation rites and the knowledge that comes with them.²⁷¹ In the site's dual visual moves—depicting an arc of *heilsgeschichte* beginning with the Jewish scriptures and ending with Jesus as its capstone, while also excluding any mention of competing or official religions or mythologies—Elsner detects a move to resist. It is a resistance disguised as self-definition, but for Elsner the two can be coterminous; in a pluralistic society where ideas are commodities to be imported and exported, and the hegemonic core culture actively assimilates new cultural and religious systems into itself, staunch self-definition and guarding one's mythologies and mysteries for the initiated is a form of resistance. This is the kind of resistance I claim for the Cubicula of the Sacraments: not active or forthright resistance, but the kind Elsner describes, a resistance of affirmative self-understanding. With this kind of resistance in

²⁷⁰ It is worth noting, as Elsner does thoroughly, that Rome was not a colonizing power in the modern sense (and actually, as he notes, was itself “culturally colonized by one of its conquests,” Greece). Furthermore, Elsner is careful to note that the geographical situation of Dura, on the Syrian frontier, was very much at the shifting periphery of the Empire, quite a different location than the Christian community in Rome. Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 254, 56.

²⁷¹ Elsner draws a distinction between the Christian and Mithraic sites that is related to this project: that while the Mithraeum contains mostly depictions of texts, the Christian site contains both texts and evidence of exegesis of those texts. For instance, in the juxtaposition of a scene of Adam and Eve with one of the Good Shepherd, Elsner reads a visual version of the typological interpretation of Christ that would come to characterize Christianity—that Jesus was the completion and natural end of the salvation history as explicated in Jewish scriptures. Together, the two images form a kind of *Urzeit und Endzeit* sensibility of history. *Ibid.*, 269.

mind, we turn to the final piece of our bridge from art to spatial theory, one whose work Elsner himself cites and uses, James C. Scott.

James C. Scott

James C. Scott, curiously enough, introduces his notion of “hidden transcripts” with the same spatial metaphor used by Foucault: the stage.²⁷² A “hidden transcript” is, at its core, “discourse that takes place ‘offstage,’ beyond direct observation by powerholders.”²⁷³ At the center of Scott’s theory is audience: for whom are certain utterances meant, and what meanings are meant to be conveyed to which persons? Like Elsner, Scott detects that certain kinds of speech are restricted, confined, or precisely calibrated for certain audiences, and not meant for generic consumption.

Scott’s theory of transcripts is operative whenever an imbalance of power exists between two social groups—as certainly was the case with early Christianity and the broader Roman culture, city, and state. In such unbalanced social situations, Scott claims, there will be varying “transcripts,” or modes of discourse, depending on the speakers and hearers of the speech. While in a public setting a member of the dominated group might speak approvingly of her dominators and their associated attributes, in a private setting her discourse will be quite different: she might criticize her superiors, long openly for change, or even advocate for an overturn of the status quo.

To say that the “hidden transcript of the subordinate” is “hidden” is tautological, but it is also a crucial point. To be effective but not dangerous, they must be uttered “offstage,” away from the ears (or eyes) of the dominant. Here, there is something of

²⁷² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 4.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

Elsner's self-definition: the hidden transcript is the self-description of a group when it is talking to itself, free from the prying oversight of their more powerful dominators.

In the catacombs, the fledgling Christian movement in Rome had an opportunity to enact just this kind of speech—transcripts hidden from more normative, hegemonic Roman society and government. This speech took the form of the paintings with which they adorned the walls of spaces like the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the only dedicated permanent space they possessed. In the analysis that will follow, we shall see that many of the images of the Cubicula functioned in just this way—revealing speech to the initiated that articulated and underscored a self-understanding, while also hedging against the dominant and its ability to “hear.”

Brent Allen Saindon

The final resource with which we span the divide between spatial theory and the analysis of visual images is also the only resource to make that move explicitly. Saindon's description of the installation of *Shalechet* in the Jewish Museum Berlin as a doubled heterotopia provides the framework for thinking about how an already-heterotopian space can have its heterotopian nature reinforced by the visual arts.²⁷⁴ In Chapter 3, Saindon's work helped to explain how the situatedness and characteristics of the Cubicula of the Sacraments reinforced and redoubled its heterotopian nature. Here, Saindon's work functions as a capstone of sorts, encompassing all the other theoretical

²⁷⁴ Saindon, "A Doubled Heterotopia."

work above. Saindon here explains how art functions within heterotopian environments—to “re-frame” and redouble them.²⁷⁵

But Saindon’s piece also contributes something to our understanding of what he calls “spatial rhetoric.”²⁷⁶ Near the end of his article, Saindon remarks that the rhetoric of a space, or the construal of the world it broadcasts to its audiences, changes over time, as its audiences change.²⁷⁷ What was initially obvious about a space’s rhetorical position in time becomes more obscure, and the role of art (and presumably other kinds of rhetoric) is to underscore and refocus the rhetorical commitments of a space. For the Jewish Museum Berlin, this meant underscoring the rhetoric of the space by introducing visual art that refocused its rhetoric on the tragedy and inhumanity of the Holocaust; for the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacomb spaces, this meant adding art to the already-heterotopian environment to underscore the community’s vision of itself and its world.

Synthesis: A Model of Art and Heterotopia

The effect of all this bridge-building—from spatial theory to the interpretation of visual art, and from the interpretation of visual art to spatial theory—has been to construct a model by which we can understand the way art functions as heterotopia and

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 42.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 43.

²⁷⁷ This is in accord with Foucault’s second principle, which holds that “a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion; for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another.” In other words, heterotopias do not remain static over time, but acquire differing meanings at different points in time. One of the great questions of early Christian art is why it exploded onto the scene, without warning, in the early third century. Perhaps Saindon can illuminate this question; it is possible (although I do not wish to claim this too strongly) that the heterotopias of the previous generation, like the Jewish Museum Berlin, had lost something of their spatial rhetoric, and needed to be reinforced, reframed, and redoubled. Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 25.

functions to create and redouble heterotopia. Foucault and Lefebvre, in their descriptions of spatial functioning, leave room for some mechanism of symbolic language, by which the discourse of the space and its inhabitants might be conveyed. While Lefebvre is more explicit about this, Foucault's formulation also calls for such a language, since he understands that heterotopias exist in relation to all other spaces, mirroring them and critiquing them.

Jensen contributes an understanding of how art speaks as exegesis—how the visual can convey a person's and/or community's engagement with texts and stories. Jensen's model of visual exegesis takes into account the various decisions the exegete makes, ranging from how to depict to what to depict. Likewise, Elsner outlines how art can convey both resistance and self-definition (a form of resistance)—precisely the kind of activity understood in Foucault's formulation of heterotopia's sixth principle. Together, Jensen and Elsner help us understand how art can be the vessel of a group's simultaneous assertion of itself and critique of its world; by asserting its own identity in word, image, and space, it defines itself over and against others.

Scott's theory of hidden transcripts helps account for marginality and social dynamics of dominance and subordination. It describes the way discourse operates in situations where social groups' power is unbalanced, and the ways the subordinate group's speech is constructed in such a way to speak to itself but remain hidden from and unheard by the dominant group. And finally, Saindon describes the way art connects with heterotopian space and contributes to heterotopia, by reframing and redoubling already-heterotopian spaces.

The effect of all these ideas taken together is a model of how art functions in heterotopia that will inform the analysis of images that will follow. This model asserts that art is a symbolic language, the product of individuals and groups within a community defining and expressing the group's understanding of itself and its construal of the world. It is speech—resistant and hidden, heterotopian and parochial—is meant to cast an image, on the “screen” of the heterotopian space, of the world as it should be: orderly, meticulous, well-arranged.²⁷⁸ Art is, and makes, heterotopia—“heterotopia of compensation,” in Foucault's words, where the world is imagined as it ought to be and the community's construal of itself reaches its full idealized form.

Art in the Cubicula of the Sacraments

As noted in Chapter 1, the Cubicula of the Sacraments are a group of five rooms, located in a row along the north wall of a hallway in the first area of the Callistus Catacomb.²⁷⁹ These five rooms have long been noted for the particular quality and variety of their art, making them some of the most-described and most-photographed areas of any catacomb. This does not mean, however, that the Cubicula of the Sacraments are particularly easy to study. While they are part of the standard tour given at the Callistus Catacomb, they are shut off behind plexiglass barriers, making it all but impossible to examine the rooms carefully.²⁸⁰ Comprehensive publication of the rooms' contents

²⁷⁸ This is a paraphrase of Foucault. Ibid., 27.

²⁷⁹ It is likely that the Cubicula of the Sacraments were formed over a period of years, not all at once, and that is almost certainly true of the decorations they contain. Wilpert, following De Rossi, understands that A2 and A3 were formed first, followed by A6, A5, and A4. For the purposes of this analysis I will assume that they all derive from the early third century. Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Sacramentskapellen in der Katakomben des hl. Callistus* (Friburg im Breisgau: Herder'sche Verlagsanstalt, 1897), 1.

²⁸⁰ The images on the entrance wall are completely out of view.

began with De Rossi's *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana*, published in two volumes in 1864 and 1867, and was continued by Josef Wilpert's *Die Malereien Sacramentskapellen* in 1897.²⁸¹ More recently in 1993, Aldo Nestori has published a list, without illustrations, of images organized by room, relying on De Rossi and Wilpert to fill in images that have become corrupted over time. His *Reportorio Topografico delle Pitture delle Catacombe Romane*, published for the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Archaeology, is the most recent comprehensive account of the rooms' contents.²⁸²

Taking Nestori's account, there are 91 discrete images in the five rooms.²⁸³ These are not evenly divided between the rooms, but cluster in A2 and A3, which together contain more than half of the total, 48 images.²⁸⁴ There were almost certainly more images, but damage to the walls and especially the ceilings of several cubicula has led to the loss of large sections and presumably many images.²⁸⁵ Nevertheless, in the images

²⁸¹ de Rossi, *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana Tom. I*; de Rossi, *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana Tom. II*. Wilpert, *Die Malereien*.

²⁸² Aldo Nestori, *Reportorio Topografico Delle Pitture Delle Catacombe Romane* (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Di Archeologia Cristiana, 1993).

²⁸³ In determining what constitutes a "discrete" image, I simply follow Nestori's notation. If he lists two doves as a single unit, I too count them as a single image, but if he lists them as two images, then I do as well. Counting images is particularly difficult with what he terms *motivi decorativi* or *motivi ornamentale*, which are widespread decorative patterns, but which Nestori counts as a single image. In many cases, Nestori was able to discern images that I was not able to see on my own, probably owing to his superior access to the site or through his cross-checking of Wilpert, De Rossi, and the Vatican photographic archives. In such cases Nestori's account wins the day; even if I was unable to see an image during my visit, I operate under the assumption that Nestori has a valid source for it. Nestori's list also necessarily involves many acts of interpretation. For instance, he refers to a scene of a meal in Cubiculum A3 as a *banchetto eucaristico*, or "Eucharistic banquet," a theological identification that would by no means be accepted by all scholars. For the purposes of this account, however, I accept his identifications.

²⁸⁴ A2 contains 25 images, A3 contains 23 images, A4 contains 12 images, A5 contains 13 images, and A6 contains 18 images.

²⁸⁵ This is especially true in the higher-numbered cubicula. Wilpert makes special mention of the damage in Cubiculum A4. Wilpert, *Die Malereien*, 36-37.

that do survive, we have a good sense of what the entire corpus might have been like, since we have two more or less intact cubicula (A2 and A3) and three partial ones.

The images found in the five rooms can be divided into three categories: narrative images, symbolic images, and decorative images.²⁸⁶ Images in the first category, narrative images, include scenes from Jewish and Christian texts such as the raising of Lazarus, various scenes from the life of Jonah, Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac, among others. Images in the second category, symbolic images, include the orant, the shepherd, the banquet, and the fisherman. Images in the final category, decorative or unclear images, include a great many linear motifs, flowers, birds, peacocks, fossors, and the like.

These are by no means easy categories to populate, and it is no wonder that scholars have arrived at many different ways to divide them. A banquet scene, for

²⁸⁶ Many scholars recognize some kind of distinction between kinds of images in early Christian art. At Dura Europos, Elsner sees evidence of textually-based images and "non-place-specific images like the Good Shepherd," which may be more the product of pure exegesis than of narrative depiction. Elsner, *Roman Eyes*, 270. Charles-Murray makes the distinction between "biblical" and "symbolic" images. Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 3. Finney is more circumspect, suggesting that many images may have had "symbol-specific" meanings tied to texts, practices, and ideas, but warning against undue confidence in identifying them. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 184-87. At the other end of the spectrum are scholars like Baruffa, whose book presents an unabashedly theological reading of all images, glossed with contemporary Roman Catholic theology and citations from early Christian authors like Tertullian. Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 81. Grabar, one of the giants of the field, sees the primary aim as decorative, with "ideal evocations" like the orant alternating with "'historical' Christian subjects," by which he means identifiable personages. Andre Grabar, *Early Christian Art: From the Rise of Christianity to the Death of Theodosius*, trans. Stuart Gilbert and James Emmons, *The Arts of Mankind* (New York: Odyssey, 1968), 95. Jensen is perhaps the most careful of all, drawing a distinction between "first, those derived from classical, pagan prototypes that had been adapted to express aspects of the Christian faith; second, religiously 'neutral' images of essentially decorative quality, but that were probably understood to carry particular Christian symbolic significance; and third, narrative-based themes or cycles that were drawn from favorite biblical stories." Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 17. My categories—narrative, symbolic, and decorative (or those whose meaning is unclear or in dispute)—roughly follow the sense of most scholars' divisions, which is to distinguish three categories: images based in a text; images evocative of a text or theological idea but not specifically tied to one; and images of either a purely decorative nature or of a theological nature so speculative as to appear spurious.

instance, probably appears first to the modern viewer as an early example of the Last Supper; since we have come through the Renaissance and the work of Leonardo, we are perhaps inclined to see the iconography of his work and the work of others in any communal meal scene. This identification would make the image a narrative one, with ties to the Synoptic gospels. There are arguments for both of the other categories, however. The image could be understood as a symbolic one, depicting an idealized banquet, either eschatological in nature or lionizing the meal practices of the local community.²⁸⁷ And it can also be seen as decorative, depicting the mourning party and its *refrigerium*, the meal consumed for and with the dead at grave sites.

This is but one example, albeit a common one, but difficulties attend to nearly every image found in the Cubicula. Even images with clear narrative grounding, such as the frequent Jonah images, have precedent in Greco-Roman iconography, leading some to minimize their particularly Christian import.²⁸⁸ Is the baptism scene, which appears twice, depicting the baptism of Christ, as is commonly supposed, or is it simply an abstracted reference to the practice?²⁸⁹ The former identification makes it a narrative image, and the latter makes it a symbolic one. From the other direction, some images that would seem to have little symbolic or narrative meaning, such as birds, peacocks, vines, and fossore, have been argued as bearers of specifically Christian meaning.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ This second way is how I understand it. See below.

²⁸⁸ Finney includes a sustained discussion of this impulse. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 188.

²⁸⁹ Baptism scenes appear in A2 and A3.

²⁹⁰ A good example can be found in Charles-Murray's discussion of vine motifs, in which she notes that one particular vine is in full summer form, except that it has produced no fruit—a theological statement. Murray, *Rebirth and Afterlife*, 71.

In order to proceed with analysis, some decisions must be made, in full light of the competing possibilities, about the categorization of images. I have therefore arrived at the following classifications, presented with the frequency of that type of image, using Nestori's identifications, in the five Cubicula of the Sacraments:

Narrative: Jonah (8),²⁹¹ Moses Striking the Rock (3), Baptism of Jesus (2), Raising of Lazarus (2), Bread and Fish (2),²⁹² Jesus and Samaritan Woman (1), Healing of the Paralytic (1), Sacrifice of Isaac (1)

Symbolic: Banquet (5), Orant (4), Shepherd (3), Fisherman (2)

Decorative/Unclear: Ornamental or Decorative Motifs (16),²⁹³ Birds (15),²⁹⁴ Floral Motifs and Flowers (12),²⁹⁵ Fossore (4), Peacocks (2), Dolphins (2), Philosopher (1),²⁹⁶ Person with Scroll (1),²⁹⁷ Geni (1), Vessels (1)

²⁹¹ All Jonah images—whether of Jonah on the ship, being thrown overboard, or in repose—are included together.

²⁹² Bread and Fish are included as a narrative image, while the Banquet is listed as a symbolic image. There are specific textual allusions to bread and fish, while the Banquet is too nebulous a concept to be tied to any specific text.

²⁹³ Included in this category are images Nestori describes as linear motifs, decorative motifs, ornamental shapes, and linear décor.

²⁹⁴ Includes Nestori's generic "birds" and his specific "doves," but not peacocks. Finney ascribes symbolic meaning to birds, especially in Callistus. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 203-06.

²⁹⁵ This category includes items Nestori describes as flowers, vases with flowers, cups with flowers, and floral motifs.

²⁹⁶ This image is the subject of some debate. The figure is sitting alone, wearing the palliatus, a garment associated with mourning. Nestori calls him a "philosopher," and Finney a "palliatus," suggesting that he is in a class with the standing "palliatus" in the same cubiculum. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 207-08. The website of the International Catacomb Society lists the figure as Job, referencing Baruffa, but there is nothing in Baruffa to suggest that identification.

²⁹⁷ This is Finney's "standing palliatus." See the preceding footnote.

These categories are full of compromises and close calls, but they succeed in making a rough division between the different kinds of images found in the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The first two categories—narrative and symbolic—will be the subject of analysis below. The final category, decorative or unclear images, will not be analyzed here.²⁹⁸ Rather than undertake to discuss every image listed in the narrative and symbolic categories, I will instead choose three narrative images and four symbolic ones for analysis. The images chosen—Jonah, Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, the Raising of Lazarus, the Shepherd, the Fisherman, the Banquet, and the Orant—are indicative of their larger categories, and among the most frequently represented in the Cubicula.²⁹⁹ While these images lend themselves to analysis as the bearers and makers of heterotopia, any of the images in either of the first two categories could be understood this way.³⁰⁰ The forthcoming analysis, then, will take place along the lines of the program described above: reading images for their exegetical activity, for their attempts at self-definition over and against the broader Roman world, and for the ways they enact their speech, or agendas, in subtle or “hidden” ways to effectively create what Foucault calls a “heterotopia of compensation.”

²⁹⁸ This is because the images do not have a meaning clear enough to be analyzed here, or because in my judgment their meaning is neutral, decorative, and does not contribute to a heterotopian analysis.

²⁹⁹ These images will be described as they are introduced.

³⁰⁰ Indeed, almost any image (or other semiotic unit) could be viewed as an exegetical or interpretive product, the result of combining pre-existing notions with creative activity. The analysis below will be concerned with *how* that creative activity occurs, and what it says about the resources being brought to bear in the act of exegesis.

Jonah

The textual basis for this image is found, of course, primarily in the book of Jonah in Jewish scripture, but also in the Christian gospels of Matthew and Luke, and in passing mentions in 2 Kings, 1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, and 3 Maccabees.³⁰¹ While it is possible that the inspiration for the myriad Jonahs in the Cubicula of the Sacraments came from one of the minor references in the Jewish scriptures, it is more likely that it was known mostly through two sources: the book of Jonah itself, read and heard in Greek translation, and the accounts found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.³⁰² The Matthew and Luke accounts represent an already-extant exegetical tradition, begun or transmitted by Q, that read Jonah as a prefiguring of Jesus' own death and resurrection.³⁰³ "For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster," reads Matthew 12:40, "so for three days and three nights the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth."³⁰⁴ There was already, by the time Dionysios began to paint, a lengthy tradition of interpreting Jonah as a sign of Jesus' own death and resurrection.

Jensen devotes an excellent chapter to the analysis of Jonah imagery in early Christian art, and her efforts need not be duplicated here. Many of her conclusions,

³⁰¹ Jonah appears in several scenes from the book bearing his name: on a ship, being tossed to the *ketos*, and in repose under the gourd vine. In the Cubicula of the Sacraments, these images are sometimes found serialized, and sometimes appear individually. For a very good view of the Jonah images in context and a reconstruction of one of them, see Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 81-82.

³⁰² Matthew 16:4 and 12:40, Luke 11:29.

³⁰³ "Q" is a hypothetical but widely accepted source shared by Matthew and Luke in the composition of their gospels. Material that Matthew and Luke share, but which Mark does not, is considered to have been part of Q.

³⁰⁴ Translation NRSV.

though, are applicable to our attempt to understand the art of the Cubicula as heterotopian, and bear mentioning.

Jensen notes that Jonah images are the only serialized narratives in early Christian art, which gives us a better look into the exegetical process behind the Jonah images than we have for most others.³⁰⁵ The life of Jonah is often (although not always) depicted in vignettes: a scene of him on the ship, heading in the opposite direction of Nineveh; a scene or two scenes of him being tossed into the sea, usually with a fearsome *ketos* looming in the water; and a scene of him lying on shore, “in repose,” as it is usually described, beneath the shade of a gourd vine.³⁰⁶ It is this last scene that is made in the mode of Endymion.

Whether depicted in three or four images, Jensen points out, the story of Jonah is incomplete. She counts seven possible episodes from the tale of Jonah, of which two very important ones are always left out: Jonah fleeing God’s call to Nineveh, and Jonah preaching to the Ninevites (which sets up his later “sulking,” as Jensen puts it, under the gourd vine). The result is that the focus is on the parts of the story that chronicle Jonah’s peril and deliverance—and the parts that mirror Jesus’ experience in the tomb, as explicated by Matthew 12:40.³⁰⁷

The depiction of Jonah, then, is not simply for the beautification of the tomb, nor is it a simple telling of the story of Jonah. It carries two specific meanings, both

³⁰⁵ Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*, 27, 30.

³⁰⁶ Jensen is working with Jonah images from the ceiling of a cubiculum in the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, where the Jonah story is divided into four images, while in Cubicula A6 the serialization is in three images (see image above).

³⁰⁷ Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*, 43.

immediately applicable to the context of the images and both constructive of heterotopian meaning. First, the images tell the tale of someone undergoing an intense trial characterized by foreignness and the endangerment of his life—Jonah is thrown into the sea, to the mercy of a sea monster. The narrative images, sparse though they are, tell the story of how he was delivered from this danger, even in a foreign and hostile land, and culminate in Jonah at rest, perhaps perturbed by the experience, but in one piece, beneath a gourd vine. This evocation of danger and deliverance, set against the backdrop of an unwilling sojourn into a land of people Jonah considered outside of his sphere of concern and inimical to his worldview, is potent. Jonah is a stranger in a foreign land, sent by his God into the frontier to speak a different message to the people there.

Second, the images of Jonah tell a story of resurrection. Although the notion of resurrection is hardly a shocking one in the modern world, in the ancient world claims of a bodily resurrection earned Christians the derision of their pagan neighbors.³⁰⁸ Bodily resurrection was one of the most distinctive of Christian beliefs, and one of the primary markers of group identity. To claim it in their most common and most prominent images, those of Jonah, meant that the community behind the Cubicula of the Sacraments were emphasizing what Elsner describes as their mythologies and their initiate knowledge. The

³⁰⁸ Celsus, for example, wrote derisively of Jesus' death: "But we must examine this question whether anyone who really died ever rose again with the same body. Or do you think that the stories of these others really are the legends which they appear to be, and yet that the ending of your tragedy is to be regarded as noble and convincing—his cry from the cross when he expired, and the earthquake and the darkness? While he was alive he did not help himself, but after death he rose again and showed the marks of his punishment and how his hands had been pierced. But who saw this? A hysterical female, as you say, and perhaps some other one of those who were deluded by the same sorcery, who either dreamt in a certain state of mind and through wishful thinking had a hallucination due to some mistaken notion (an experience which has happened to thousands), or, which is more likely, wanted to impress the others by telling this fantastic tale, and so by this cock-and-bull story to provide a chance for other beggars." Origen, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 109.

images of Jonah were not meant for the world, but were rather meant for members of the community, as declarations of self-definition in contrast to the rest of the world: *we* believe in resurrection, *we* are an alien people in this land, *we* are the distinctive ones.

Jonah, then, makes the Cubicula of the Sacraments heterotopia—or at least he contributes to its heterotopian nature. By enacting speech, intelligible to the initiated and exclamatory of the group’s core values, the images of Jonah make the space into one that argues for the distinctiveness of the early Christians, and sets them over and against the “Nineveh” in which they lived.

Jesus and The Samaritan Woman

The story of the Samaritan woman appears only once in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, in Cubiculum A3.³⁰⁹ It is located on the entrance wall, and therefore is out of view to the present-day visitor, who is barred from entering the space. It is not serialized like the story of Jonah; only one image stands in for the entire narrative of John 4:1-29.³¹⁰ In it, the woman stands at the well, drawing water, while Jesus sits in the background,

³⁰⁹ Versions of this scene are known in other catacombs. It appears in the famously vexing and religiously diverse Via Latina Catacomb, in Cubiculum F. Ferrua, *Le Pitture*.

³¹⁰ Although there is no “caption” or identifying mark for the image, scholars agree that it is Jesus and the Samaritan woman, and not any of the other well encounters of Jewish scripture—although it should be noted that for 2nd and 3rd century hearers and readers of John’s gospel, the story of Jesus and the woman at the well already contained echoes of those earlier stories, and it depended on them to heighten its meaning and resonance. For people familiar with the tales of Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29:1-14), Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 24), and even Moses and Zipporah (Exodus 2:16-21) would have formed a backdrop of expectations for the story of a man meeting a woman at a well. In Cubicula A3, this image is relatively small, perhaps less than a foot tall, with a figure in the foreground standing over a well with a bucket, drawing water, and a second figure sitting in the background, hands outstretched. For a photograph of the image, see Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 84. (All measurements are approximate).

arms slightly extended. All else about the story as it is found in John is implied—left to the viewer.³¹¹

This image is a prime instance of the kind of “hiddenness” that Scott talks about, and the kind of insider-language to which Elsner refers. As noted extensively above, early Christian art had deep roots in late antique artistic conventions. One of those conventions was bucolic decoration; for city-dwellers like the Romans, many of whom were immigrants from more rural areas, the pleasures of the countryside were a constant source of longing. A scene like this one, set in the narrative at a well (whereas fountains predominated in Rome), would not have seemed out of place among the innocuous decorative birds, fish, trees, and flocks of sheep that sometimes adorned Roman spaces. To the uninitiated, the image would have blended in to the walls, typical of decoration but nothing more. For the initiated, however, the two figures stood for much more.

The artist depicted the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at precisely the moment when they began to speak—at about 4:7 in John’s account, as Jesus calls out to her and she draws water. As the story unfolds, Jesus had to pass through

³¹¹ This is precisely opposite of the interpretation offered by Snyder, who understands that it is Jesus standing at the well pointing to it, and the woman who is seated in the background in the pose of an orant. I see no reason for this identification. Nowhere in the narrative in John does Jesus stand at the well, and nowhere does the woman sit. In the only other pre-Constantinian exemplar of this scene, from the church at Dura Europos, the woman is at the well, leaning over it in precisely the manner she is in this image, and Jesus is out of view. In terms of both iconography and textual source, then, there is nothing to suggest to me that in this image from Callistus Jesus stands and the woman sits. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 118-19. Finney argues that it is likely the woman who stands at the well and Jesus who sits, but he adds a further interpretation based on the image he reproduces: that Jesus here reads from an open scroll. Although this scroll is invisible in Figure 9, Finney’s figure 6.52, which is printed in black and white, clearly has a long object stretching between the seated figure’s two hands. Finney has Jesus “imposing his own midrash” of several relevant texts from the Jewish scriptures. This is in stark contrast to Snyder’s female in the orant pose. This difference in interpretation is due to differing reproductions of the image, and it underscores a serious problem with catacomb art: that images are scarce and of poor quality and that access to the site is severely restricted. The scroll in the image might be attributed to a conflation with Luke 4:16, although that sort of cross-gospel conflation would seem to be unlikely. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 216-19.

Samaria on his way from Judea to Galilee.³¹² Stopping at the well around mid-day, he sat until a woman arrived to draw water. Having asked her for a drink, they conversed for a while about Jews, Samaritans, the differences between them, and the “living water,” which Jesus presented as a way to talk about eternal life. They concluded their conversation by discussing the woman’s relationships, which were plenty, and Jesus’ disciples interrupted their conversation. The woman ran off to tell of her encounter.

Three themes characterize the story of this encounter: foreignness, the crossing of social boundaries, and salvation. The theme of foreignness is evident from the start. Jesus was in a foreign land; he had crossed into the land of the Samaritans, with whom, the author of John reminds us, Jews did not associate.³¹³ Like the story of Jonah, this tale begins with the protagonist’s traverse into a strange and presumably hostile place—a distasteful path to take for a Jew who saw the Samaritans as inferior.³¹⁴ Indeed, many early Christian images, and not just those in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, are just this kind of image; scenes taken from the book of Daniel are among the most common among the catacombs, although relatively rare in Callistus. Tales of travel in foreign places seem to have had an outsized place in the early Christian imagination in Rome.

The second theme of this story, the crossing of social boundaries, is related to the first. Jesus was traveling in a strange place, but he was also transgressing social boundaries in his conversation with the woman. He was a Jewish man, and she was a

³¹² This would *not* have been a route dictated by geography, as many commenters have pointed out.

³¹³ This may be more editorial comment than historical reality.

³¹⁴ The Greek ἔδει, at the outset of verse 4, implies necessity. Thayer cites John 4:4 as an example of “necessity brought on by circumstances.” Though the Johannine Jesus was not wont to undertake anything unwillingly, we are to understand that, at least in the eyes of the author of John, Jesus would have preferred a different itinerary.

Samaritan woman; by those facts alone they should not have been talking, as the woman points out in 4:9. This movement across boundaries would have been significant to early Christians in Rome. The Roman church was very likely a diverse one; scholars like Peter Lampe, Rodney Stark, Robert Jewett, and Bruce Longenecker have all pointed out that Christianity was constituted by a cross-section of society, and perhaps concentrated among the poorer and more marginalized elements of society, such as immigrants and day laborers.³¹⁵ Lampe in particular points out that much of the evidence of Christian communities, including from the locations of the catacombs themselves, points to locations within immigrant and marginal parts of the city of Rome.³¹⁶ As a community composed in at least a significant part of immigrants, foreigners, and people well below the floor of social respectability, the Roman church of this period would have viewed narratives about the crossing of social boundaries as powerful affirmations of its existence and unique expressions of its ethos.

The final theme is that of salvation, and here we return again to Elsner's idea of initiate knowledge and language as a marker of self-definition over and against the world. Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman about salvation, available through him and described as "living water." The moment at which the image is frozen is the moment at which the water has become available—the instant at which it has been drawn to the surface. "Salvation is at hand," chimes the image, in its funereal setting. Reading this

³¹⁵ Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermenia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*.

³¹⁶ Lampe places early concentrations of Christians in the Trastevere, a notably diverse neighborhood, the Aventine, a mixed but densely packed neighborhood (and probably one of the locations of Callistus Catacomb Christians), and the Field of Mars. See especially Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 44-45.

image as an affirmation of an imminent soteriology is uniquely the province of the insider; no one who had not been initiated into both Christian scriptures and Christian theology could hope to cobble together the meaning. But for those who *had* been initiated, the meaning becomes inescapable, even as it is mingled with the themes of foreignness and the crossing of social boundaries: like the community, Jesus found himself in a strange land and speaking with a stranger, but all the same, he was offering salvation.

Heterotopia, for Foucault, exists in a space's relationship to all other spaces. In the Cubicula of the Sacraments, and here especially in Cubiculum A3, this image of Jesus and the Samaritan woman rested on the wall as an emblem of the space's relationship to all other spaces—an expression of salvation, proclaimed in the midst of a land perceived as foreign and disjunctive. Like the images of Jonah, it was a symbol and a sign that pointed to the unique affirmations of the community that made it—and against other affirmations of other persons and communities. And it pointed to a posture toward the rest of the city and the world above ground that made the community of the Cubicula of the Sacraments unique. It existed as a critique of and tacit commentary on the world that lay beyond the wall upon which it was inscribed, and as an anchor of the space it inhabited—depicting an “other space,” but also at the same time creating one.

The Raising of Lazarus

The final narrative image we will consider here is the depiction of Lazarus, being called out of the tomb by Jesus. Like the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the account of Lazarus' resurrection is found only in John's gospel, in 11:1-53. It is, in that

gospel, a pivotal tale, acting as the hinge upon which the gospel turns from a narrative focused on Jesus' self-disclosure and signs to one focused on Jesus' impending death and resurrection. The raising of Lazarus functions narratively to raise the stakes of Jesus' ministry, call him even more fully to the attention of his opponents, and set off the chain of events leading to his death.

The story is a natural candidate for depiction in a funerary context. With its themes of death and resurrection, mourning and the power of Jesus to defeat mortality, it is no surprise that it appears with some regularity in early Christian funerary art. Snyder cites unanimity among scholars that this is a profoundly funereal image, meant to comfort mourners and remind them of the promise of resurrection.³¹⁷

The image itself is in poor condition, and is fragmentary.³¹⁸ It begins on its left side with most of a tomb, characteristic of the way tombs were depicted in Lazarus scenes in early Christian art: boxy and square, with a peaked roof.³¹⁹ Continuing left to right, it includes a human figure, badly faded with a crack running through him, and then another figure on the far right, lost except for part of the torso, one arm, and the head. Were it not for other early exemplars of the Lazarus image, it might be difficult to identify this as a depiction of the story, faded and fragmentary as it is. With the

³¹⁷ Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 116-18.

³¹⁸ This image is badly degraded in Cubiculum A2, but is nevertheless identifiable because of the strong iconography of the raising of Lazarus in early Christian art. Visible are part of the tomb's roof, a figure standing just outside of it, which iconography identifies as Lazarus, and the torso and head of another figure, which the iconography suggests is Jesus. Photographs of this image are exceedingly rare. Among all books on early Christian art and the catacombs I have consulted, and in all image databases and all internet website searches, I have found only this black and white photograph, from Finney's book. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 205.

³¹⁹ It is curious that Lazarus' tomb was so uniformly depicted, especially since it was being depicted in tombs markedly different than the one in the painting.

knowledge of the Lazarus iconography, however, it is undisputedly a Lazarus scene, similar in most ways to other depictions of Lazarus.³²⁰

It differs in two ways—both mitigated by the poor condition of the image. First, in most depictions of this story, Lazarus is depicted wrapped in strips of cloth, like a mummy. Here, Lazarus appears to be either naked, or, in Snyder's estimation, draped in a cloth.³²¹ Second, in most images, Jesus appears with his arm outstretched toward the tomb, often with a stick in hand, pointed toward Lazarus.³²² It is possible, given the degraded original in Cubiculum A2, that there was once detail showing both strips of cloth and a stick in Jesus' hand, and that they are now too faded to view.

In either case the meaning does not change: it is a depiction of Lazarus, and almost certainly meant to suggest comfort and assurance to mourners. It is possible to read that meaning as a surface form of meaning: that the image is *just* a placard to call attention to the promises of the faith, and that is *all* it is. But the overwhelming message of Elsner, Jensen, Scott, and others is that of polysemy: that images (and other kinds of speech) can and usually do carry more than one meaning. Images are by their nature multivalent, and this image of Lazarus is no different. It bears meanings on many levels; the first and most obvious level is comfort to mourners, but it is a mistake to construe this meaning as a surface meaning.

³²⁰ Note, also, the view from outside the community. The iconography of this scene, recognizable to the insider as the story of Lazarus, would be inscrutable to the outsider. Here, Scott's hidden transcripts function to limit comprehension to those already initiated into the community.

³²¹ Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 118.

³²² For a typical image depicting both of these differences, see the bottom image at <http://www.ou.edu/class/ahi4263/byzhtml/p01-04.html>

The story of Lazarus does not carry connotations of foreignness, like the stories of Jonah and the Samaritan woman. It does not involve any journeys into foreign and hostile lands. It does, however, share something with the Jonah cycle: the descent of a character into death, and his miraculous re-emergence back into life, delivered from his plight by the power of God. In this way it reiterates a central claim of Christian theology: that death does not prevail over life. This is such an obvious meaning that it's tempting to stop here, ascribe Lazarus to the sepulchral context, and move on, as many interpreters do. But this would be to miss the full import of the image.

The Lazarus image was not just a comforting reminder; it was a stark claim of distinctiveness. It reminded the people gathered there, in all likelihood mourners, of one of the main points of distinction between them and their pagan, Mithraic, Isiac, Zoroastrian, and even Jewish neighbors: that their tombs, in which they stood, were temporary.³²³ Lazarus' tomb stands empty on the wall of Cubiculum A2, and the expectation of the image's viewers was that the tombs in which they stood would someday stand empty as well.

Foucault speaks of heterotopias as reservoirs of "indefinitely accumulating time."³²⁴ For this characteristic, cemeteries are exemplary for Foucault, since they exhibit and encompass "this strange heterochrony," the simultaneous embrace of the past, the present, and the eternal future.³²⁵ Cemeteries are and were assumed by everyone to be

³²³ Beard, *Religions of Rome: Volume I*, 279-91.

³²⁴ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

“final resting places,” where whatever being a human retains will remain forever—a place, in Foucault’s words, “outside of all time and inaccessible to its ravages.”³²⁶

The image of the Raising of Lazarus explodes this notion. It depicts the destruction of a heterotopia; beyond simply critiquing the normative space of normative Roman culture and society, it also destroys its heterotopian space. The cemetery—the tomb—is no longer indefinite. It is no longer heterochronological; it no longer accumulates. Its power is, the image claims, broken.

The Raising of Lazarus is a fractured heterotopia nested within a heterotopia expected to be fractured soon, by the resurrection of the dead. It is a radically subversive image that strikes at the core ideology of life and death in hegemonic Rome, while simultaneously asserting the Christian belief that death is temporary. It was comforting to mourners, to be sure—but not as discomfoting as it would have been to the typical Roman. The Raising of Lazarus was a succinct symbol of self-definition, contrary to the worldview of most Romans—a tidy summation of Christianity’s construal of itself in the world.

³²⁶ Ibid. Snyder exemplifies the opinion that normative Roman ideas of death held that tombs were permanent houses for the dead. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 118.

The Shepherd and the Fisherman³²⁷

In the interpretation of “narrative” images, it was important to note their connections to their texts, how the artist or exegete was interpreting the text, and what meanings the resulting exegetical products would have had to their audiences in the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The task with “symbolic” images is different; in most cases, there is a text to which the image can be tied, but the art is not an attempt to depict a single vignette from the text. It is not a snapshot of a part of a story; rather, symbolic images attempt to distill ideas or beliefs into a single emblem or icon, standing in for theological tenets or parts of belief, not stories.³²⁸

Of the “symbolic” images in the catacombs, the shepherd is one of the most common.³²⁹ In the Cubicula of the Sacraments, its numbers are less overwhelming than they are elsewhere, but it is still the fourth most common among narrative and symbolic

³²⁷ It is difficult to avoid theological and ideological agendas in the nomenclature of the shepherd imagery. Most scholars call it either the Good Shepherd or the *kriophoros*. The former is already a profoundly theological interpretation, grounded in Christian theology and Christian scripture. The latter is a shorthand way of claiming absolute continuity with prior Greek art, and often therefore denying it very much unique Christian meaning. I therefore use the most innocuous term I can think of, the lower-case “shepherd,” to denote neither the “Good” of Christian theology nor the proper-name connotations of upper case usage. Likewise, I use “fisherman” in the lower case, although there is considerably less controversy about that image.

³²⁸ Norman Perrin helpfully summarizes the work of Philip Wheelwright and Paul Ricoeur on symbols and the ways they relate to the ideas and mythologies they reference. Perrin uses the phrase “tensive symbol,” which he derives from Wheelwright, to refer to a symbol with “a set of meanings that can neither be exhausted nor adequately expressed by any one referent.” This fecundity of symbolic meaning is certainly in play in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, where symbolic referents are easy to spot but difficult to exhaust, and where polysemy is the defining characteristic of most symbols. Norman Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 30.

³²⁹ The shepherd is typically a standing figure with a lamb or sheep draped over his shoulders, sometimes accompanied by further sheep standing on the ground, and sometimes surrounded by shrubs, trees, or grasses.

images, following images of Jonah, the orant, and the banquet.³³⁰ The fisherman is a less common image across the catacombs, but it is represented prominently in the Cubicula of the Sacraments twice, in A2 and A3, in both spaces on the west (left) walls. The frequency with which the shepherd is depicted in the catacombs has vexed interpreters. As with most images, the shepherd attracts what Finney calls a “minimalist” perspective. This perspective holds that since the iconography termed the κριοφόρος had a long history in Greco-Roman art, there is little to suggest that it is the bearer of much unique Christian meaning. Furthermore, claim the minimalists, since “in numerous Christian contexts,” including in Callistus but not in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, “the figure is represented in multiple renderings in the same place,” it cannot represent Jesus, who would not have been depicted in multiple images in the same setting.³³¹ It must instead refer to something less divine, claim the minimalists—perhaps shepherds of nonspecific meaning, or even just bucolic decoration.³³²

As we saw with Jonah and the iconography of Endymion, and as Charles-Murray reminded us there, there is a distinction between originality and creativity. While Dionysios’ depiction of Jonah in repose was creative, in that it conveyed something of the community’s worldview while also critiquing more hegemonic worldviews, his work was not original. It drew on existing iconography, and repurposed it, creatively, into new work. The same is true for the shepherd; while the κριοφόρος had a long history in Greek and Roman art, its usage in Christian art does not imply a lack of creativity. To the

³³⁰ Jonah: 8; banquet: 5; orant: 4, shepherd: 3. There are also three images of Moses striking the rock.

³³¹ Finney, *The Invisible God*, 188.

³³² This position Finney especially ascribes to Dölger and Klauser.

contrary, the Christian usage of the classical ram-bearer was among the most creative of the faith's symbolic works. In it, the community of the Callistus Catacomb and others took a relatively innocuous Roman symbol—mostly denoting bucolic idealist notions of rural life—and turned it into its foremost emblem of its savior, Jesus, in the time before Constantine.³³³ But it was a hidden emblem, speaking only for and to the community of initiates.³³⁴

The idea that the shepherd stands in for Jesus is not a new one; in fact, the most common nomenclature for the image, “The Good Shepherd,” implies this identification. My own opinion is shared with that of most other interpreters: the shepherd is a way of portraying Jesus, in a time before there was an iconography of Jesus, in a way that was recognizable to the initiated and unrecognizable to outsiders.³³⁵ For those familiar with the “I am the good shepherd” discourse of Jesus in John 10: 11 and 14, and with the parable of the lost sheep as told in Matthew 18:12-14 and Luke 15:3-7, understanding

³³³ Snyder somewhat curiously claims that the image was clearly a way of depicting Jesus after Constantine, but that before Constantine it did not refer to Jesus, since it did not appear in “biblical scenes,” and the animal often had horns, meaning that it was “most unlikely there was any conscious attempt to portray Jesus and the lambs.” To this, I would respond that a post-Constantinian tradition would seem to imply a pre-Constantinian tradition (rather than a new tradition of meaning for a popular symbol springing up at that time out of nothing), that it is difficult to imagine a biblical scene in which the symbol would make sense as a way of portraying Jesus (would he be baptized with a ram on his shoulders? Heal a paralytic with a ram on his shoulders?), and that the horns of the ram probably owe more to iconographic inertia than anything else. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 42-43.

³³⁴ It may be that the horns that sometimes appear on the sheep (see note above) indicate that this image represents a conflation with Genesis 22, in which God provides a ram in lieu of the sacrifice of Isaac. Here, perhaps, Jesus is the bearer of the ram for the sacrifice—the one who brings (and is) the replacement sacrifice for Isaac, and indeed for the community of believers. I am indebted to Gregory Robbins for this intriguing suggestion.

³³⁵ Although Jesus was portrayed in this period, in scenes like the baptism and the encounter with the Samaritan woman, there was no established iconography for him.

Jesus as a shepherd was no stretch at all.³³⁶ In both parable and open declaration, Jesus had identified himself as such. To the Christian familiar with the faith's texts and stories, it would have been natural to think of Jesus as a shepherd. To the outsider, it would have been natural to view the shepherd as just that—a shepherd. The image, painted and inscribed into nearly every extant space of early Christianity that still carries art, was the kind of statement that drew boundaries between those with insider knowledge and those without it. It was a symbol imbued with meaning for Christians: “here is what our savior is like, guiding and watching over us.” It was a possessive symbol, concerned with the flock, and inherently inimical to the world outside: it is from the “wilderness” that the sheep was protected. There is in the symbol a space—a heterotopia of flock, perhaps, or one of refuge—that applies only to those who know the stories and know the faith.

Having understood the shepherd in this way, the fisherman follows easily after.³³⁷ Like the shepherd, it is a symbol standing in for Jesus, and based on Jesus' own declarations about himself and his actions in Christian texts. In contrast to the shepherd, Snyder notes, the fisherman was not a pre-functioning symbol in Greco-Roman art.³³⁸ It appears in Christian art as something of an invention, in the parlance of Charles-Murray, both original and creative. While it is less common than the ubiquitous shepherd, it appears twice in the Cubicula. The instance in A3 is particularly instructive as we think

³³⁶ Again, the Callistus catacomb demonstrates great fondness for John and Matthew.

³³⁷ The fisherman, found in Cubiculum A3, is a curious image. It appears as part of a scene focused on water; to the right of the image, two figures stand ankle-deep in water. One appears to be a youth, and one an adult. This scene is traditionally understood to represent the baptism of Jesus. To the left of these two figures sits an adult figure, holding a fishing rod, casting into the same body of water the two are standing in. For an excellent reproduction of this image, see Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 80.

³³⁸ Snyder points to Eisler's book as an attempt to establish a lineage for the image in the traditions of Orpheus, but notes that neither he nor very many others have been convinced. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 122.

about its meaning; there, it appears as part of the same image, sharing both a red frame and a body of water, with the image usually described as the Baptism of Jesus.

This juxtaposition is not accidental, and offers a clue to the meaning of the symbol. Here again we have a cryptic depiction of Jesus, available only to those with access to or knowledge of the Christian scriptures. Jesus' call of the disciples in Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17 equates fishing with salvation: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of people."³³⁹ This image, then, stands in for Jesus and Jesus' salvific work, and for a communal call and purpose: to spread the faith, and by proxy, salvation through Jesus.

The shepherd and the fisherman, then, are both ways of depicting Jesus in a time before Jesus was depicted in any identifiable, iconographic way. They were both examples of cryptic speech, available only to those with special or initiate knowledge, and "hidden" from outsiders, who would have seen only bucolic idealism. For the early Roman Christians of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, these images, which together appear five times in the five rooms, were rallying points of communal identity, defined against the values of the world and in terms of the community's own values. Like the images of Jonah, Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, and Lazarus, they helped to create a discursive space accessible to its community but hidden from everyone else: a heterotopia of compensation, where the world was orderly and belief was inscribed on the walls.

³³⁹ The use of a fishing rod instead of fishing nets need not be of much concern. In this particular instance, the pairing with the baptism (in a river) mitigates against the use of nets. Roman artists also would have been less likely to be familiar with large fishing nets, and would have known inland rivers and streams more intimately. It is entirely conceivable that the image was first painted with a rod and not a net for this reason, and then iconographical momentum preserved the feature for future paintings, even those not paired with baptismal scenes.

The Orant³⁴⁰

Along with the shepherd, the orant is the most common image in early Christian art.³⁴¹ It appears frequently both on its own and as a character in narratives, where it is used to depict Noah in the ark, Jonah on the ship, the three men in the furnace of Babylon, and other characters from Jewish and Christian scripture. In later, post-Constantinian Christian art, it was often used to bear the face of the deceased—the occupant of a grave might be depicted, as an orant, in an attitude of prayer, on the exterior seal of the space.³⁴² In the period of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, though, it was usually painted alone or as part of a narrative.

Curiously, it was also often painted as a female or with ambiguous gender, regardless of the gender of the character it was meant to depict. In the Priscilla Catacomb, for example, the youths in the fiery furnace are depicted with female features, while in Daniel they are male. Although it has been suggested that this is evidence of a female priesthood in early Christianity (with the female orant depicting these female clergy), this position is completely spurious.³⁴³ More convincing is the idea that the orant is in

³⁴⁰ Portions of this section were originally delivered as a paper titled “In Plain Sight: The Orant as a Hidden Transcript of the Subordinate” at the 2010 meeting of the Rocky Mountain/Great Plains Region of the AAR/SBL.

³⁴¹ The orant is a praying figure, standing with hands outstretched. For a view of several orants in Cubiculum A3, see Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 81.

³⁴² Loculi were typically sealed with stone, marble, brick, or plaster. Many of these seals have since been broken, including all of those in the Cubicula of the Sacraments.

³⁴³ There is much to suggest that early Christianity was more gender-equal and gender-inclusive than the Christianity that came afterward in the fourth, fifth, sixth centuries and beyond. There is ample evidence, both textual and material, arguing for a larger role for women in Christianity’s first centuries than later orthodoxy allowed. The female orant, however, is not part of that evidence. See, for example, Wayne Meeks, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *History of Religions* 13 (1973). Karen Jo Torjensen, “The Early Christian *Orans*: An Artistic Representation of

continuity with one of its pagan usages, as a symbolic pose of Pietas, the goddess Piety, or particularly the idea of filial piety.³⁴⁴ The orant appeared frequently on Roman coins, often as a female member of the imperial family, accompanied by inscriptions relating to Piety.³⁴⁵ This numismatic use was an attempt to instill and reinforce the notion of filial piety within the empire. Therefore, according to this theory, the Christian use of the orant in ecclesiastical and funerary art was also an attempt to invoke the notion of piety—devotion to family—within “the new, adopted family—the Church.”³⁴⁶

The most basic understanding of the orant, of course, comes from its name. The English “orant” is a variant of the Latin verb “*orare*,” to pray. In this view, the figure is a reflection of Christian devotional practice. There are two main variants: one attempts to see the orant in light of the resurrection of the dead, and the other understands the image in light of Christian ritual and devotional postures as a reflection of Jesus’ crucifixion.

The funerary origins of the orant lend credence to this first variant, especially in later periods when the face of the deceased was placed onto the orant. In this view, the orant represents a soul’s ascent to heaven at the resurrection. Some suggest that the

Women's Liturgical Prayer and Prophecy," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne and Pamela J. Walker Kienzle (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 44-46. For an expansion of her argument regarding women in early Christianity, see Karen Jo Torjensen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993).

³⁴⁴ The term “piety” is polyvalent here. It can refer to a general religious sensibility, a more specific sense of commitment to family, culture, and empire, devotion to Pietas, the Roman personified divinity of piety, or, most frequently, all three. I capitalize it when it refers to the Roman deity, and leave it lower-case when it refers to the sentiment or virtue.

³⁴⁵ Seth William Stevenson, C. Roach Smith, and Frederic W. Madden, "Piety," in *A Dictionary of Roman Coins, Republican and Imperial* (London: B.A. Seaby, Ltd., 1964).

³⁴⁶ Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 20.

nature of the soul, the feminine *ψυχή* in Greek, lent itself to depiction as a female.³⁴⁷ This interpretation, however, is inconsistent with the earlier use of the orant, its insertion into biblical narratives in place of major characters. In those contexts, the soul or *ψυχή* is not being evoked, nor is anyone ascending to heaven or being resurrected.

The second variant, the interpretation of the orant as devotional, draws on evidence from several sources. In this view the orant is a depiction of prayer, perhaps even in continuity with pagan attitudes of prayer, as recorded by Cicero, Virgil, and Apuleius.³⁴⁸ Yet this continuity is not sufficient to identify the orant as deriving from that tradition. The two are analogous, but the Christian image is not necessarily dependent on the pagan practice.

There are, however, early Christian descriptions of ritual or meditative posture that seem to describe the stance of the orant. One of these descriptions come from *The Odes of Solomon*, a Christian collection of hymns dating from the first and second centuries, containing two descriptions of Christian prayer.³⁴⁹ Ode 27 reads:

I extended my hands
And hallowed my Lord,
for the expansion of my hands
Is His sign.
And my extension
is the upright cross.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 35-6.

³⁴⁸ Torjensen, "The Early Christian Orans," 44. The primary source references are Cicero's *Ad Familiares* 7.5, Virgil's *Aeneas* 687, and Apuleius' *De Mundo* 33.

³⁴⁹ Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity*, 2nd Edition ed. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter and Company, 2000), 222-4.

³⁵⁰ There are also several references in Jewish and Christian texts to lifting hands in an attitude of prayer: 1 Timothy 2:8; Psalms 28:2, 63:4, and 134:2; and Lamentations 3:41. James Hamilton Charlesworth, *The Odes of Solomon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 106.

This passage makes an explicit reference to a Christian practice of praying with hands outstretched, and links it to a specifically Christian understanding: the cross of Jesus. However, *The Odes of Solomon* is not the only early Christian text to do so. Tertullian, in *De Oratione*, writes: “We, however, not only raise, but even expand them; and, taking our model from the Lord’s passion, even in prayer we confess to Christ.”³⁵¹ This too describes Christian prayer practice as compatible with the posture of the orant, and derived from the emulation of Christ on the cross. Furthermore, Eusebius describes the posture of Christians persecuted in the arena in orant-like terms: “You would have seen a youth not yet twenty standing unchained, his arms spread in the form of a cross and his mind at ease, in leisure prayer to the Deity.”³⁵²

These textual descriptions of early Christian devotional practices and postures probably explains the figure of the orant, but it does not mean that its meaning is simple. Here, as with the other images we have discussed, are polysemy and polyvalence. The orant meant several things at once, depending on its creator and viewers. It carried three main meanings, each nested within the others, available only to those with eyes to see. The first and most innocuous meaning was prayer. As the name suggests, the orant was at its most literal level a depiction of prayer and devotion, completely at home in a funereal context. The second level was as a reflection of piety or Piety—a gesture of fealty to both the Roman state and hegemonic Roman religious culture. Here, Scott’s notion of transcripts is at work: the public transcript of the image is obsequiousness and

³⁵¹ The Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. III, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885), 685.

³⁵² Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius: The Church History* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 296.

capitulation, and the reproduction of official propaganda iconography. In the public record of the art of the catacomb walls, the Christians were good residents of the Empire.³⁵³

But the third meaning told a different story. Here the full import of Scott's transcripts becomes apparent: the orant was for pre-Constantinian Christianity both a public transcript and a hidden transcript of the subordinate. While it depicted and endorsed piety and Piety, it also functioned as a crypto-cross, conveying the posture and attitude of the crucifixion in a way hidden to all but initiates.³⁵⁴ Christianity did not portray crosses prior to Constantine, but here the cross and the crucifixion are evoked and called to mind, for the initiate only, by the outstretched hands of the orant.³⁵⁵

The spatial effect of this depiction hinges once more on Elsner's description of self-definition and definition over and against the world. Hiding a depiction of the crucifixion within a depiction a normative Roman image accomplished the colonizing of a Roman discursive space, and characterized the spaces in which it appeared as spaces of resistance and counter-hegemony. By painting orants on the walls of catacombs, Christians were countering the piety generally and the Piety specifically of Roman culture, while also laying claim to another form of piety, rooted in Christians' own world-

³⁵³ This helps to explain the persistent female gender of the orant—she is a reproduction of a female deity.

³⁵⁴ A form of position was taken by D. Plooi, who argued that the orant was a reproduction of baptismal postures, but ones closely associated with crucifixion. In support of his point, he notes that two of De Rossi's reproductions of orants have stigmata, or marks of the cross, on the palms of their hands. D. Plooi, "The Attitude of the Outstretched Hands ('Orante') in Early Christian Literature and Art," *Expository Times* 23 (1912).

³⁵⁵ This helps to explain the curious usage of the orant in narrative settings. It is almost always employed to depict characters in moments of crisis: Jonah on the ship, the men in the furnace, Daniel in the lions' den, Noah in the ark. The exception to Christians' non-portrayal of the cross is in early Christian manuscripts, in a character called the "staurogram." See Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*.

view. This iconographic marking of space, familiar to us by now, defined the Cubicula of the Sacraments in relation to other spaces, iconographic and physical, and argued against them, asserting the truth of Christianity and the power of its symbols to overcome the symbols of Rome.

The Banquet³⁵⁶

Banquet scenes are common in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, appearing five times, the most of any “symbolic” image and the second-most of all images, behind Jonah.³⁵⁷ Although the scenes vary somewhat in their particularities, they all share basic iconographic features that align them with the tradition of banqueting images that prevails in other Roman locations. Typically, the images of the catacombs depict people, often men but sometimes both men and women, gathered on chairs, cushions, or couches, oriented to face the viewer. Food is on the table, although occasionally elements that might be expected in pagan images, such as servants or drinking cups, are absent. In a few instances, though not in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the servants are called by what seem to be symbolic names—*Agape* and *Irene*, Greek for “love” and “peace.”³⁵⁸ Conspicuously present in these images are large baskets, containing bread, placed in the foreground of the images. Despite the sometime absences of drinks and servants, and the

³⁵⁶ Portions of this section were originally delivered as a paper titled *The Eschatological Banquet: Hidden Transcripts in the Funerary Banquet Scenes of the Christian Catacombs*, at the 2010 University of Oxford conference “Dining and Death: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the ‘Funerary Banquet’ in Ancient Art, Burial, and Belief.”

³⁵⁷ These scenes typically show figures seated or reclined at a curved, semi-circular table, sometimes with baskets of bread in front of the table. For a banquet scene from Cubiculum A3 in context, see Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 81.

³⁵⁸ The names appear in the Catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, typically dated to the late third or early fourth centuries.

presence of the baskets of bread, however, the banqueting scenes of the catacombs are immediately recognizable as belonging to the family of Roman banqueting images. Although the images have been adapted by Christians, they nevertheless retain many signs of their origins in the broader artistic tradition.³⁵⁹

The question for interpreters, then, has been why banquet imagery should have been taken up by Christians, and why Christians should have changed the imagery in the ways they did. Four main possibilities have been suggested: that they reproduce particular stories from the Christian scriptures, such as the feeding of the five thousand; that the images are a depiction of an actual or imagined funerary banquet held for the deceased; that the images represent a proto-Eucharist or the communal agape meal; and that they depict a future, eschatological banquet held in heaven.³⁶⁰ We will briefly consider each of these interpretive schemes, before taking yet another approach to understanding these images that seeks to take account of the best insights of each.

The first possibility for interpretation, that the images reproduce scenes from Christian scriptures such as the multiplication of loaves and fishes, is problematic. There is nothing iconographic to suggest the presence of Jesus in any of these images, and it is difficult to imagine what role text such “Agape, mix the wine” might play in the telling of a biblical story. This possibility seems unlikely.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Elisabeth Jastrzebowska, "Les scenes de banquet dans les peintures et sculptures chretiennes des III et IV siecles," *Recherches Augustiniennes XIV* (1979): 88.

³⁶⁰ The history of interpretation can be found in Jastrzebowska, and is well-summarized in Dunbabin. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 8-13, 177.

³⁶¹ Graydon Snyder suggests that the roots of Christian table fellowship, or the *agape* meal, lie in the account of the multiplication of loaves and fishes. If this is the case, then it is possible that the images depict both the *agape* meal (see the paragraph below) and represent an informal account of the

The second way of interpreting the banqueting scenes is by understanding them as depictions of the graveside meals known from both pagan and Christian Roman burials.³⁶² These meals seem to have been common among Christians in the pre-Constantinian period.³⁶³ If banqueting was a central feature of funeral activities, and a central feature of the religious life of early Christians, then it is reasonable to assume that funerary images depicting banqueting were associated with the practice. What is less clear is that there is necessarily a relationship between those funerary meals and the banquet scenes in the catacombs. Those scenes seem to depict indoor meals with couches and tables and the like, and not the outdoor *refrigerium* typical of funerary meals. The possibility that the images depict actual funerary meals seems unlikely.

The third possibility, understanding of the banqueting scenes as proto-Eucharistic, is one of the most common interpretations of the images, with the banqueters understood to be recapitulating the Last Supper as presented in the gospels, a view that might be informed by a reading-back into second, third, and fourth centuries the illustrations of gospel books and mosaics produced in the fifth and sixth centuries, such as *Codex*

multiplication story. If this is so, however, the image is still primarily a depiction of a communal meal, and only secondarily a depiction of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, mediated through tradition. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 124.

³⁶² The funerary banquet tradition includes both banquets accompanying interment and subsequent birthday or anniversary visits. MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 72.

³⁶³ These banquets were so common by the fourth century that they drew the disapproval of church leaders like Ambrose, who sought to curtail the practice and the pagan connotations it evoked. The practice of funerary banqueting proliferated in the third and fourth centuries, so much that some scholars have begun to see the funerary banquet as the primary religious expression of the great majority of early Christians. Although there is little evidence that banqueting took place inside the catacombs themselves, there is a great deal of evidence that it took place above-ground, in fields and later in the structures that stood above the catacombs. *Ibid.* *August. Epist.* 22.6.

Rossanensis.³⁶⁴ In popular Christianity up to the 3rd century, however, it was the *agape* meal that held sway as the primary remembrance celebration, not a stand-alone Eucharist, and the frequent presence of fish in the catacomb banquet imagery suggests a full and actual *agape* meal rather than token or symbolic meal.³⁶⁵ While the Eucharist would seem to be excluded on iconographic and chronological grounds, reading the images as a form of the meal does hold some promise, as we will see in a later section.

The final possibility, that the images depict a heavenly banquet, is difficult to assess. The iconography of the images is decidedly this-worldly, with little to suggest that we are witnessing anything other than a typical meal. No divine figures populate the meal, and at first glance there is not much about the furniture, surroundings, food, or clothing to suggest anything other than an earthly gathering.³⁶⁶ This makes an identification of the catacomb banqueting scenes as “heavenly” banquets unlikely on iconographic grounds. Furthermore, the catacomb images fail to identify any of the participants as the deceased, and none of the inscriptions typical of catacomb memorials, such as the simple phrase “*IN PACE*,” is present. As we will see, however, these objections to the paintings do not automatically disqualify them as heavenly, and in fact,

³⁶⁴ Codex Rossanensis gloriously illustrates the Last Supper, among other narratives, and its Last Supper has Christ reclining with his disciples in a manner that bears more than a passing resemblance to antique banqueting scenes. High-quality images of the manuscript can be found at the website maintained by the Diocesan Museum of Rossano. Diocesan Museum of Rossano, "Codex Purpureus Rossanensis," <http://www.calabria.org.uk/calabria/arte-cultura/CodexPurpureusRossanensis/CodexPurpureusRossanensis.htm>.

³⁶⁵ Hans Leitzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper: A Study in the History of the Liturgy* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 271-74.

³⁶⁶ As another possibility, Snyder points to those who see the meals depicted in the catacomb paintings as examples of the “*refrigerium interim*,” the “in-between state” occupying the time between the present and a future, eschatological reality. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 125.

their mimicry of banqueting scenes current in the broader culture might point to the possibility of eschatological settings, if not heavenly settings, after all.

Banqueting played an important role in the public transcript. Banqueting is notably absent from extant imperial iconography from this period, with no images of an emperor banqueting surviving.³⁶⁷ There are a number of literary sources that speak of imperial dining, most notably Suetonius,³⁶⁸ and with the recent discovery of the foundations of Nero's famous rotating dining hall, there is new impressive archaeological evidence of the culture of banqueting at the highest levels of Roman government.³⁶⁹ The broader society also partook in the largesse and joviality of the banquets, and the practice was an important strand in the web that was Roman social interaction. The practice saturated the upper and middle levels of Roman society, as aristocrats and those on the make alike adapted banqueting as a way of demonstrating a cultured sense of taste, the capacity for leisure, and goodwill towards clients, patrons, and associates.³⁷⁰ In perhaps the surest sign of its cultural currency, the banquet found its way into the life of Petronius' Trimalchio, whose ambition is surpassed only by his ridiculousness, and for whom the banquet is a valuable way of demonstrating his aspiration to belong in the

³⁶⁷ Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 8.

³⁶⁸ Suetonius, *Suetonius II*, trans. J.C. Rolfe, II vols., vol. II, Loeb Classical Library (London: Harvard University Press, 1979), 137.

³⁶⁹ Nick Pisa and Claire Bates, "Roman Emperor Nero's Legendary Rotating Dining Room Uncovered by Archaeologists," *Daily Mail* 2009.

³⁷⁰ Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 12-13.

upper classes.³⁷¹ The public transcript is here fairly easy to identify: banqueting was both a tool and a symbol of Roman society, representing the realities and aspirations of the middle and upper classes, while also constituting one of the rungs on the social ladder.

The hidden transcript of the subordinate—the speech of the subordinate regarding the dominant when they are not present—is more difficult to discover. It is, by its very nature, hidden. In order to discover it, we must examine the speech of the subordinates for language (or in this case, symbolism) that would be intelligible to other subordinates, but not to the dominant group. We must look for speech, and in this case imagery, that is disguised in some way, and we should be vigilant for images and motifs that are simultaneously visible to the subjugated group and invisible to the more powerful group.

This is precisely the situation we find when we examine the banqueting scenes of the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The banquet, as we have seen, was a common image (and actual occurrence) in Roman culture, with its own set of meanings, associations, and references. Christian artistic depictions of banqueting certainly would not have been hidden in any conventional sense; on the contrary, they would have been obvious and recognizable to any Roman with much social awareness who happened to see them. This is very likely what Christians meant for other Romans to see: an image that seemed to include Christians in the broader culture, without seeming out of the ordinary in any way. Such “hiddenness” would have worked to the Christians’ advantage, since identification with the dominant culture likely afforded a higher reputation for “normalcy,” and allayed suspicions of their practices and motives.

³⁷¹ Petronius, *Petronius*, trans. Michael Heseltine, Loeb Classical Library (London: Harvard University Press, 1975), 45ff.

For insiders, however, the banquet imagery would have meant something altogether different. For Christians, the banqueting scenes were not scenes of demonstrative excess, as they were for other Romans, or tools for social climbing or announcing one's magnanimity.³⁷² For Christians, the banquet had an entirely different set of meanings and associations. They were, in the Christian world-view, expressions of solidarity and hope in the midst of the official and unofficial persecution that Christians endured. Likely modeled on the *agape* meals that were central cultic and social events in the Christian church, the meals in the catacomb paintings set forth an idealized community—the social world as they wished it to be.³⁷³

For Christians, the banquets depicted in the catacomb images were eschatological. They were anticipatory and aspirational, expecting rather than depicting a time when Christian suffering would be at an end and when the “powers and principalities” (to use Paul's phrase) would be defeated by God. These eschatological banquets, dressed in the clothing of Roman banqueting customs, functioned as speech from Christians to Christians, bypassing other Romans, articulating a hope in the future victory of God. This victory—this eschaton—was envisioned by Christians not as the end of the world, but rather the end of the ways of the world. Christian eschatology in this period envisioned a world where Christ reigned on Caesar's throne, where justice was no longer perverted and the people of God were no longer oppressed. Christian literature, beginning with the

³⁷² Dunbabin uses “conviviality,” which is ideal for describing the function of the banquet in Roman society. Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*.

³⁷³ Here I argue that the banquet scenes express a kind of eschatological hope and expectation, but I also wish to argue, in Chapter 6 of this work, that these scenes are “modeled,” as I suggest above, on the actual communal meals of early Christian communities. The images of banquets are polysemous and multivalent, and they both express a longing for the world as it should be and depict a version of the world as it is. See Chapter 6 for banquet scenes as representations of actual meals.

canon of the New Testament and continuing through the third and early fourth centuries, abounds with visions of a world where God is acknowledged and the people of God live in peace. Christian rhetoric in this period, especially early in this period, is strikingly egalitarian, echoing the Christian baptismal creed that Paul cites more than once: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male nor female.”³⁷⁴ This is the early Christian eschaton—not the end of the world, but a world profoundly changed by the will of God being done on earth as it was in heaven.

Since the banquet images of the catacombs were meant to hide their full meaning from those not in the know, we cannot expect to find much evidence of their hidden transcripts; we cannot expect to see much of this eschaton within the images themselves. A few possible pieces of evidence do present themselves, however. The first is the frequent presence of a number of large baskets of bread in the foreground of the image. This large quantity of bread, more than could possibly be required by the number of diners present, has confounded interpreters, who have seen it as symbolic, or associated it with distributions to the poor that accompanied funerals.³⁷⁵ When seen in an eschatological light, however, these baskets of bread evoke a plenty and freedom from want that could not have characterized the everyday lives of the majority of lower-class, lower-income Christians. The baskets are in fact evocative of a section of one of early Christianity’s most-used prayers, the Lord’s Prayer, which asks God to “give us this day our daily bread,” or in an ancient translation of the ambiguous Greek, “give us this day

³⁷⁴ Galatians 3:28, NRSV. See also Colossians 3:11.

³⁷⁵ Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 177.

our bread for tomorrow.”³⁷⁶ While the bread baskets in the catacomb images are not likely a literal rendering of the prayer, they may well be an expression of the same Christian hopes and longings that animate the prayer.

Another possible bit of evidence is the presence in some of the images of symbolically-named servants attending to the meal’s guests. Many banqueting scenes from other Roman contexts include servants, who are directed to mix wine, refill cups, fetch water, and the like. Such servants do not always appear in Christian images, but when they do, they are sometimes called by the names *Agape* and *Irene*, love and peace. These names were Christian names in the period, but their assignment to servants for the banquets has aroused suspicions from scholars that something more symbolic was going on. The communal meal of early Christian communities was called the *agape*, and of course both peace and love were important concepts in early Christian rhetoric. It is possible, then, that the servants may be Peace and Love personified, attending to the faithful in the community that is to come.

A final piece of evidence is the presence of women. Women are conspicuously present in the Christian banqueting images, as servants, but more importantly as diners. Women are certainly present in images from pagan contexts, sometimes as full participants, sometimes to the side as wives, and sometimes as erotic adornment for the scene, shown nude or in sexually charged ways.³⁷⁷ In Christian images, women seem to

³⁷⁶ The Greek word is ἐπίουσιος, which is otherwise nearly unattested. In The Gospel of the Hebrews, the equivalent word is *mahar*, which means “tomorrow,” suggesting that at least some ancient readers understood ἐπίουσιος to mean future time. Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (Crossroad, 1999), 116.

³⁷⁷ Dunbabin, *The Roman Banquet*, 67-68.

be full participants in the meal, maintaining as much dignity and decorum as the men, and in some images comprising more than half the diners. This sort of egalitarian stance may be further evidence that the banquets take place in the sort of eschaton imagined by Paul and other early Christians, who repeatedly declared that “in Christ there is neither male and female.”³⁷⁸

The image of the banquet, common in the Cubicula of the Sacraments and throughout pre-Constantinian catacomb spaces, both constitutes heterotopia and depicts heterotopia. In the meal it depicts, it argues for the suspension of this-worldly social structures and material restrictions, and in favor of a vision of meals in a remade world—the Christian eschaton. It illustrates the world as it should be—a heterotopia of compensation. And in the space where the images appear, the images create an expectation of the immanence of their vision—a world where the order of *this* space will become the order of the world, overcoming the other spaces and structures to which *this* one is opposed.

Art and Heterotopia

When Dionysios and others like him descended the stairs to the Cubicula of the Sacraments and began to paint images onto the walls, their act was not a neutral one, or simply an act of pious decoration. It was a fashioning of space—a space of resistance, self-definition, mirroring of the broader world, and critique of that mirror—a heterotopian space. Through images like scenes from the travails of Jonah, Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, the Raising of Lazarus, the shepherd, the fisherman, the orant and the banquet, the artist exegetes of the Cubicula of the Sacraments argued consistently and

³⁷⁸ Galatians 3:28, inter alia.

forcefully for a Christian self-definition—a definition against and above the world in which they found themselves. They made the spaces into “other spaces,” heterotopias, spaces of rhetorical and symbolic counter-definition and resistance.

Here, Saindon’s doubled heterotopias reminds us of the power of art to define a space. In his account of the Jewish Museum Berlin, Saindon describes the way the already-heterotopian space was re-framed and redoubled by the addition of an art installation. As we saw in the previous chapter, the catacombs and the Cubicula of the Sacraments were already heterotopian, already defined as spaces of powerful otherness. With the work of Dionysios and others, this otherness was re-framed, intensified, and rearticulated, so that the five rooms were the community’s clear articulation of itself, its construal of its faith and the universe, and its subversion and critique of the world at the top of the stairs.

CHAPTER 5: TEXTS IN THE CUBICULA

“He said to me, ‘You know that you, the servants of God, live in a foreign land, for your city is far away from this city. So if you are aware of your own city in which you are about to live, why do you arrange for fields, costly arrays, buildings, and silly housing arrangements? The one who sets up these things in this city does not expect to return to one’s own city...So instead of fields, buy suffering souls, as each one can, and take charge of widows and orphans and do not neglect them, but spend your wealth and all possessions that you have received from God for such fields and houses. This is why the Master has made you wealthy....”

The Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude 1:1-2, 8³⁷⁹

The art of the Cubicula of the Sacraments does more than speak for itself. It also points beyond itself to the texts it represents and references, bringing into the rooms the literary worlds created by Christians and Jews and inhabited by the community that made the Callistus Catacomb. In this way, the images found in the Cubicula transcend the particular vignettes which they depict, and link to entire, substantial literary spaces, which are themselves a kind of space, with their own self-definitions and construals of the world.

In this chapter and the preceding one I assume that images can carry meanings both as images and as representations of texts, which are brought fully into view by their reference in art. Chapter 4 concerned art found in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, which I argue contributes to the heterotopian nature of the spaces. *This* chapter concerns the texts from which that art is derived, or by which it is inspired. The relationship between

³⁷⁹ Translation from Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

art and text is a close one, and in many cases I discuss the same image both for its artistic contributions to the heterotopia in Chapter 4, and also for its textual (or narrative) contributions in Chapter 5. I distinguish between text and art as a kind of *text* and *hypertext*, or to use two more specific terms from Gerard Genette's, *hypotext* and *paratext*. Genette, in his study of intertextuality, uses hypotext to refer to "an earlier text...onto which [further commentary] is grafted..." Paratext, by contrast, consists of expositions of the text that exist alongside of it—of which, among many examples cited by Genette, "epigraphs; illustrations...many kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic" are characteristic.³⁸⁰ I consider the art of the Cubicula and the texts that lie behind that art hypotext and paratext, respectively, and discuss them as distinct realms of semiotic import, though they remain inextricably connected to one another.³⁸¹

In thinking about collections of texts, scholars of religion are used to using the word "canon." Debate rages over early Christianity's relationship with its texts, and over when its usage of texts became the usage of a canon. Indeed, the notion of canon can cause difficulty in this early period, since it lures us into thinking anachronistically about early Christianity and its relationship with texts. We assume, even unconsciously, that the early Christian usage of texts must have been something like modern Christians' usage of

³⁸⁰ Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

³⁸¹ Genette's notion of *metatext* might also be a useful way to describe the art of the catacombs. Metatext, Graham Allen writes, is "when a text takes up a relation of commentary to another text." Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, The New Critical Idiom (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 102.

texts, and we interpret what we find in early Christian sites like the Cubicula of the Sacraments based on what we know of later canon lists.³⁸²

When taken on their own terms, though, the Cubicula of the Sacraments offer us a different view into the early Christian use of texts. This is a fragmentary and provisional view, to be sure—it is based only on one site, in one city, and it depends on “citations” of texts in art.³⁸³ But the collection of texts referenced on the walls of the Cubicula nevertheless has the potential to inform our understanding of the community that created the spaces, illuminating which texts those early Christians knew, what concerns led to their selection and depiction of texts, and—perhaps most importantly—how they read and interpreted and re-interpreted those texts. Thinking about texts in this way—as visual citations, in space, and as mutually-interpreting works—adds significantly to our understanding of how early Roman Christianity saw itself, and how it saw its world. This chapter will begin with a description of space as list, using the work of Umberto Eco, and will then proceed to a description of the various texts found cited in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, and an analysis of these citations. The chapter will then conclude with three case studies on the way the texts were being read and interpreted, and re-interpreted, as illuminated in the selection and depiction of literary works in the Cubicula.

³⁸² Gregory A. Robbins, "Eusebius's Lexicon of 'Canonicity'," *Studia Patristica* 25 (1993). Also related to this discussion: Gregory A. Robbins, "'Number Determinate is Kept Concealed' (Dante, *Paradiso* XXIX.135): Eusebius and the Transformation of the List (Hist. eccl. III.25)," *Studia Patristica* 54 (2012).

³⁸³ It is no less fragmentary, provisional, or arbitrary, though, than relying on patristic literary citations of texts to gauge canonicity.

Space as List

In *Of Other Spaces*, Foucault describes the way heterotopias juxtapose diverse things into a single space, creating microcosms representing “the totality of the world.”³⁸⁴ The garden, declares Foucault, or the carpet, patterned on the garden, is the archetype of this function of heterotopias.³⁸⁵ The theater or cinema screen, as discussed in Chapter 4, is also exemplary of this function of heterotopias, enacting or projecting things-out-of-place into or onto a single, confined space, erected for that purpose. Foucault describes heterotopias as places imbued with strong powers of collecting and juxtaposing, and in so doing creating meaningful spaces capable of representing the totality of being. He points to the Ancient Near Eastern notion of *axis mundi* or *umbilicus*, the understanding that this kind of space is capable of shrinking the world to a kind of icon of distilled power.

Inherent in this ambitious result is a modest beginning: the reduction of space to a set of four boundaries containing a relatively small space.³⁸⁶ The screen, stage, carpet, and garden are bounded *physical* space, in which the *heterotopian* space becomes nearly limitless, subject only to the limits to which the artist is willing to push them. What matters is not physical dimension of the space, but the fact that it is bounded—that it is limited, with the dimensions of its symbolic space well-defined. Then, having been properly staked out, the creative work can begin.

³⁸⁴ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 25.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

³⁸⁶ For the carpet and cinema screen, the space has four sides; for the garden and the stage, the shape may vary, but in any case it is bounded.

A kindred sort of bounded space—in this case primarily mental space, but also sometimes physical—is the list. In his *The Infinity of Lists*, Eco draws on two images from Homer to illustrate the possibilities of lists, which themselves take on the accumulating, encompassing qualities of heterotopia. The first image is of the ships arrayed against the city of Troy in the *Iliad*. “The hardy warriors whom Boeotia bred,” Homer incants, “Penelios, Leitus, Protheonor, led: With these Arcesilaus and Clonius stand, Equal in arms, and equal in command.”³⁸⁷ He continues, naming one by one the ships of the invasion fleet, evoking with each ship the myriad sailors, captains, homelands, and alliances that attend to it.³⁸⁸ While the list goes on at length, the effect is



Figure 3: Shield of Achilles, Angelo Monticelli, 1820. Image copyright in the public domain.

to suggest an infinity, reduced to a point in space and time; by declining to place limits on his list, Homer draws the reader’s eye and imagination onward to a limitless reverie of martial resources, all contained in the bounded space of a list.

The other Homeric passage reproduced by Eco illustrates a very different kind of list. This list is found

in the shield of Achilles [Figure 3], recounted in Book 18 of the *Iliad*, which the god

³⁸⁷ Eco, *The Infinity of Lists*, 26.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-35.

Hephaestus made for the hero. Bounded on its edges by “the mighty stream of the river Oceanus,” the shield was the cosmos in miniature, depicting the great features of the universe like the heavens and the cities of humanity, but not deigning to neglect “the garlands and daggers” of the young men and women who danced in “a green, like that which Daedalus once made in Cnossus for lovely Ariadne.”³⁸⁹ Like the infinity suggested by the litany of ships arrayed against Troy, there is an infinity to this list as well, despite the bounds of Oceanus. The world is contained in it, even the world of the gods, and like the gardens and rugs described by Foucault, it is its own icon of existence.

These two Homeric lists are, for Eco, prototypical for lists as a genre. It is clear, as one reviewer notes, that Eco prefers the unbounded list typified by the catalog of ships.³⁹⁰ Even so, for the study of religion, it is often the second kind of list—the bounded one—that is more commonly encountered, and it is this second kind that is more useful when thinking about the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other spaces like them. Like the shield, the Cubicula are bounded spaces, but like the shield, having been bounded, they open up inwardly to a symbolic cosmos, both detailed and grand in its outlines.

When read as spatial lists of texts, the Cubicula of the Sacraments reveal something of the interior infinity suggested by Achilles’ shield. Read this way, these lists of texts are in conversation with themselves, with other texts, with the images through which they are represented, with the practices undertaken in the spaces, and with the spaces themselves. They function like the *axes mundi* of Foucault’s third principle:

³⁸⁹ Alexander Pope, *Homer's Iliad* (New York: John Wurtele Lovell, 1880).

³⁹⁰ Mary Beard, "The Infinity of Lists by Umberto Eco," *The Guardian*, Friday 11 December 2009.

heterotopias that gather and juxtapose, representing the world (or, like the shield, a particular construal of it) in a thumbnail sketch.

The Texts

In the previous chapter, when images were identified with texts, there was an attempt to pinpoint the precise portions of the text being depicted, and the exegetical import of the particular moment being interpreted.³⁹¹ Here there is not so much concern for specificity; we are mainly concerned with whether a particular text is being depicted or not—a binary question of inclusion or exclusion—and what that inclusion means. Likewise, the potential for polysemy is here greatly *enhanced*; it is not necessary, for example, to discern whether the Jonah imagery is primarily attributable to the book of Jonah or the “Sign of Jonah” discourses found in Matthew (and, as we shall see at the end of the chapter, the latter are already an interpretation of the former).³⁹² We can assume that the image would have been read to allude to all three texts, and perhaps others besides. Read spatially, images are both polysemous and poly-referential, linking to more than one text simultaneously. I have therefore been expansive in my identifications, allowing for the possibility of multiple referents and sources, and assuming a liberal cross-pollination of text and image. Even still, the list of texts definitively found in the Cubicula of the Sacraments is a short one: Genesis, Numbers, Jonah, John, Matthew, and

³⁹¹ Recall, for example, the importance of the question of whether it was Jesus or the Samaritan woman who stood at the well.

³⁹² The discourse is also present in Luke, but for expediency I will here focus on Matthew.

the *The Shepherd of Hermas*.³⁹³ Cases could be made for the Psalms (shepherd imagery), Exodus (conflation with or confusion with the story of Moses striking the rock), and one of the various passing references to Jonah in Jewish scriptures.³⁹⁴ These references are too tangential or thinly-based to count as textual references for the sake of the following analysis, but it is important to remember that they still *might* have participated in the space—they still might have been evoked in for some viewers in the room.

We have, then, four groups of texts to consider: texts from the Jewish law, or Pentateuch; the book of Jonah; gospel texts, particularly John; and the *Shepherd of Hermas*.³⁹⁵ Notably, this list, short though it may be, corresponds to but is not coterminous with the modern Christian canon. Both testaments of contemporary Christian scripture are represented, but not all of the parts of those canons.³⁹⁶ And one text, the *The Shepherd of Hermas*, falls outside of modern Christian canon, but as we will see was an exceedingly popular text in the time and place under consideration, and was likely a major referent for the community of the Cubicula of the Sacraments.

³⁹³ At the conclusion of this chapter, I will also suggest connections to 1 Corinthians 10 and to Hebrews, both of which serve as a model and as potential source material for the texts referenced in images in the Cubicula of the Sacraments.

³⁹⁴ Scripture, like art, holds what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls an “excess of meaning.” It is nearly infinitely self-referential, particularly when inflected with the theologies that inevitably attend to sacred texts. Therefore, potential textual citations might be multiplied nearly *ad infinitum*, without exhausting the supply. I concentrate only on the most likely here. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. David E. Linge (London: University of California Press, 1976), 102.

³⁹⁵ I use “Pentateuch” rather than “Torah,” since the early Roman Christians almost certainly knew the texts as part of the Greek LXX, and not the Hebrew Bible.

³⁹⁶ Unless Psalms is included, there is no text represented from the *kethuvim*, or “writings,” of Jewish scripture, nor is there any from the so-called “major prophets.” There is little from Paul, aside from 1 Corinthians, and nothing of the life of the early church from the Acts of the Apostles, or from any other New Testament epistles or Revelation.

Texts from the Pentateuch

Two texts from the Jewish law, or Pentateuch, are cited visually in the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The Sacrifice of Isaac, sometimes called the *adekah*, (Genesis 22:1-18) appears once, in Cubiculum A3, and Moses Striking the Rock (Numbers 20:1-13) appears three times, once each in A2, A3, and A6.³⁹⁷ This frequency is roughly in keeping with other catacomb spaces, where depictions from the Pentateuch are common but not plentiful.³⁹⁸ This suggests that the early Roman Christians knew and used the Pentateuch, drawing on its narratives as part of their symbolic world.³⁹⁹ Two stories—Moses striking the rock and the sacrifice of Isaac—illuminate the way early Roman Christianity read and used Jewish texts.

Overwhelmingly, scholars view the early Christian use of Jewish texts as typological, theological, sacramental, or sepulchral.⁴⁰⁰ These latter two are primarily attitudes toward art: they argue that an image stands in for some other reality, or evokes something. In this view, the trials of Jonah might stand in for baptism, or they might

³⁹⁷ The story of Moses striking the rock is probably polysemous, pointing to this text from Numbers, and also other texts, as we will see at the conclusion of this chapter.

³⁹⁸ In a survey of all the images of both the Callistus and Priscilla catacombs, the only other images from Torah that I found were Noah in the ark and Moses removing his shoes.

³⁹⁹ In contrast to other early Christian contexts and Jewish contexts, the Pentateuch was not, *as a collection*, an important part of their symbolic world. While texts from the Pentateuch were known and used by Christians in Rome, and in fact cited in the art of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the Pentateuch as a group was not totemic for them, or subject to fetishization. Nowhere is the Pentateuch depicted, even in a scene of Moses receiving the tablets from God, and citation of Pentateuchal texts is rare, compared to contemporary sites like the synagogue at Dura Europos. By contrast, the synagogue at Dura depicts Moses receiving the law, and the space included a bema, likely made of wood and now lost, and a Torah niche. Obviously a synagogue is a very different sort of space than a catacomb, but the comparison simply serves to contrast the Christian community's usage of Torah with a Jewish community of roughly the same time. I was unable to determine whether the Torah was ever depicted in a Jewish catacomb in Rome. Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 162-63, 79-81.

⁴⁰⁰ Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 82-84., inter alia.

stand in for the experience of death and resurrection. In either case, the image is pivotal, and it is the hinge upon which interpretation turns.

Typological and theological readings are primarily attitudes toward texts; they argue for a connection between the story of Jesus and some earlier type in Jewish scripture, or for a connection between an image and a theological precept, usually drawn from and grounded in texts. This is perhaps because both typology and theology have their origins as scriptural practices, being initially employed by New Testament authors to outline connections between the Jewish scriptures and the life and work of Jesus.⁴⁰¹

The image of the sacrifice of Isaac has a clear typological interpretation, here as it does in textual sites: the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac at the request of God prefigures God's own willingness to sacrifice Jesus.⁴⁰² To my knowledge, this is how the scene has been interpreted in every instance: as a way of evoking God's own sacrifice of Jesus. Here, interpreters use a narrative from the Pentateuch as a type for an event of Jesus' life: his sacrificial death.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 83-84.

⁴⁰² This image is found in Cubiculum A3, in the middle register (between the upper and lower grave loculi) on the right side of the room when viewed from the door. From left to right, the image shows the boy Isaac as an orant, Abraham as an orant, a ram, a tree, and a bundle of wood sitting on the ground. The image is the typical height for Cubicula images (approximately a foot tall), but is wider than usual due to its many parts. It is about as wide as its neighboring image to the left, a banquet scene. To see this image in context, see Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 81.

⁴⁰³ On the history of this connection, see "The Atonement—An Adequate Reward for the Adekah?" in Dahl, Nils Alstrup Dahl, *The Crucified Messiah and Other Essays* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 146-60. Reprinted from *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, Studies in Honor of Matthew Black, ed. Ellis and Wilcox (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, Ltd., 1969).

The image of Moses striking the rock is more complicated, and is often interpreted theologically and sacramentally, not typologically.⁴⁰⁴ It is seen first of all as a scene of deliverance, as Moses and the people of Israel were delivered from thirst in the wilderness. Of course, this retelling alone does not quite solve the question of why this image should have been so popular; there were many instances in Israelite history where deliverance was provided, many more important and dramatic than this story from Numbers, and more given to artistic portrayal. Snyder points to an intriguing later development that may help us to understand the meaning of the image. In later periods of Christian art, after Constantine, the image persisted, but with the iconography of Peter instead of Moses.⁴⁰⁵ This later image, usually called Peter Striking the Rock, depicts a similar narrative, one of Peter striking a rock and causing water to flow out of it. Of course, close readers of the New Testament will note that there is no such story of Peter found in Christian scriptures; the narrative is a fabricated one! This is an extraordinary case of narrative following art, and not the other way around, and it is instructive for the meaning of both men's striking of rocks. Snyder notes that the protagonist of this scene was almost unimportant, and was in any case flexible, suggesting that it was not the persons of Moses or Peter that were important—it was not important to narrate a particular text. Rather, this text stood in for the idea of baptism. With the addition of

⁴⁰⁴ This image is degraded much as the image of Lazarus is. It is found in Cubiculum A2 on the west wall, and is a simple composition, with a figure on the right stretching out his arm, which holds a staff, toward an amorphous mass on the left. For a reproduction of this image, see Finney, *The Invisible God*, 217.

⁴⁰⁵ That is, the way the figure is painted is characteristically Petrine, though the context of the narrative remains the striking of the rock. This is the sort of cross-pollination that can be expected in resisting art and spaces.

“Peter, the prototype of baptizers,” the image’s meaning became clearer, but it had always been an aquatic image evoking the practice and importance of baptism.⁴⁰⁶

The interpretation of these images as typological and theological is very common, if not universal. There is much to commend these interpretations, and my aim here is not to overturn them. I would, however, like to note and describe something about these texts that has not heretofore been noted or described, and that will intimate something of the conclusions of this chapter. That is that both of these stories, that of Moses striking the rock and the sacrifice of Isaac, carry spatial themes: of displacement and placelessness.

The sacrifice of Isaac is less spatially marked than the narrative of Moses striking the rock, but is nevertheless a spatial text in its own right. The narrative context of this story is the movement of Abraham from Ur to Canaan, a foreign and initially unknown land. This immigration from one place to another was bound up with Abraham’s promise from God—a promise dramatically at stake in the episode with Isaac.

In this narrative, it is not any one spatial feature that predominates, but it is rather the accumulation of spatial references that give it the character of a story with deep spatial concerns. In the LXX, the narrative is saturated with prepositions and spatial terms, but a few primary spatial foci stand out.⁴⁰⁷ In verse 2, the verbs λαβὲ and πορεύθητι denote movement from one location to another, and the phrase εἰς τὴν γῆν τὴν ὕψηλὴν, “into the high land,” bears the marks of both specificity and verticality. Here, the LXX adds very specific spatial markings over the Masoretic text, which reads “to the land of

⁴⁰⁶ Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 101-02.

⁴⁰⁷ Citations from Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta*, (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt/Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).

Moriah,” making the LXX version of the story, the one informing diaspora Jews and early Christians, still more characterized by spatiality than the Hebrew version.⁴⁰⁸ In verse 3, Abraham journeys “to the place” which God had shown him: ἦλθεν ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον ὃν εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ θεός. Here, foreignness is clearly evoked; the destination is outside of Abraham’s realm, and known to him only through the revelation of God. Verse 4 has Abraham arriving in the vicinity of the high land, and ἀναβλέψας Ἀβρααμ τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς εἶδεν τὸν τόπον μακρόθεν—“Abraham *looked up* and saw the *place far away*,” two more spatial markers. Verse 9 is perhaps the most highly spatially marked verse of the entire pericope: they ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον, “went to the place” God had shown them, and ἐπέθηκεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον—“laid him on the altar.” Finally, in verse 13, Abraham sacrifices the ram ἀντὶ Ἰσαακ—instead of Isaac, a final spatial separation.⁴⁰⁹

This is a story embedded in the experiences of foreignness and displacement, and characterized by the functioning of spaces in a narrative of peril and deliverance. It is highly marked by verbs and prepositions delineating and dichotomizing space: here and there, up and down, instead of and upon. While the narrative lacks an overarching spatial feature like the story of Moses striking the rock, the *adekah* is a deeply spatial text, characterized by foreignness, sojourn, and things-out-of-place.

The story of Moses striking the rock is still more highly marked by spatial concerns, in two main ways. The first is at the scale of the narrative context and setting:

⁴⁰⁸ Josephus, perhaps influenced by 2 Chronicles 3:1 or by rabbinic identification of the Temple Mount with the mountain in view in Genesis 22:2, has Abraham go εἰς τὸ Μώριον ὄρος. Ant.i.13.1.

⁴⁰⁹ ἀντὶ can also mean “in place of,” a still more spatially-marked phrase. Liddell, Scott, “ἀντὶ” Greek-English Lexicon, 77.

the wilderness experience of Israel. This story is embedded in an overarching narrative of placelessness and out-of-place-ness, the story of Israel's wandering in the desert. This is the defining story of Israel's history, and it is profoundly characterized by the experience of being in no-place—"ou-topia," as Foucault would remind us—and in space defined both by its nothingness and its relationship to other spaces.⁴¹⁰ The narratives of Israel's experiences in the wilderness are literary heterotopias *par excellence*, evoking a space of nothingness, where Israel goes to work out its relationship with its God.

The second marking of space on the story of Moses striking the rock is at a narrower and more symbolic level—the spatial relationship of water and the rock. In this case, the water springing forth from the rock is being liberated from its enclosure, signifying resurrection. Though resurrection may certainly be in view here, it is a *spatial* view of resurrection, alluded to and mediated through the spatial metaphor of enclosure and liberation.⁴¹¹

While typological, theological, and sacramental interpretations traditionally have been assigned to these images from the Pentateuch, little attention has been paid to the role of space in these narratives. They are both stories embedded in spatial crisis, with themes of placelessness, out-of-place-ness, and emplacement undergirding their narratives—stories with heterotopia as a prominent narrative feature. Attention to these

⁴¹⁰ The spatial rhetoric of the wilderness is that it is not Egypt ("were there no graves in Egypt?"), and it is not Canaan. It is a between space, but characterized by what other spaces are not.

⁴¹¹ For this somewhat common line of interpretation, see Snyder, McGowan, Stander, and Negus, *inter alia*. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 101-02. Felicity Harley McGowan, "Death is Swallowed Up in Victory: Scenes of Death in Early Christian Art and the Emergence of Crucifixion Iconography," *Cultural Studies Review* 17, no. 1 (2011). Hennie Stander, "Jesus' Death and Resurrection in Early Christian Art," *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 89 (2007). Tina Negus, "Daniel in the Den of Lions: Early Medieval Carvings and their Origins," *Folk Life - Journal of Ethnological Studies* 44 (2005-2006).

aspects of the narratives, as we will see, helps us understand the inclusion of these narratives in the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacomb spaces, and helps us interpret them as reflections of the spatial concerns of the community behind the Cubicula.

Book of Jonah

Depictions of Jonah are the most common images in the Cubicula of the Sacraments and in most catacomb spaces, making the story of Jonah the central narrative in the textual list in the Cubicula of the Sacraments.⁴¹² Eight separate images of Jonah populate the Cubicula, more than images from any other narrative, and more than twice as many as images as those of Moses striking the rock. In the catacombs, the narrative of Jonah is unique in several ways. As noted in Chapter 4, it is the only narrative that is depicted in serialized form, rather than in a single image. Jonah images appear in groups of three or four, with key narrative moments being singled out for depiction. As was also noted in Chapter 4, this scene selection leaves out Jonah's call to Nineveh and his flight from that call, and also his eventual successful preaching there. The Jonah narrative is also unique in that it is the only depiction from any book of prophecy in the Cubicula—perhaps a testament to the easily depicted nature of narrative, as contrasted with other literary forms like prophetic oracles.⁴¹³

⁴¹² Jonah also appears in the famous Cleveland Marbles, small figurines dating to the late third century. These marble pieces depict Jonah swallowed by the *ketos*, vomited up by the *ketos*, in repose under the vine, and praying in the orant pose. Robin M. Jensen, "Art," in *The Early Christian World*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁴¹³ Images from Daniel and possibly Isaiah (in the context of Jesus' birth) are found in other early Christian catacombs.

All of Jonah’s story—the parts told here and the parts of the story left untold for the viewer to fill in—is highly spatial and highly heterotopian. Jensen identifies seven parts to the structure of the narrative as it is found in the book of Jonah.⁴¹⁴ Of these, God’s call of Jonah and his preaching to the Ninevites and their repentance escape depiction, as seen in the chart below:

God’s Call to Jonah	Not depicted
Jonah’s Flight from God	Depicted (with storm)
The Storm	Depicted (with flight)
Jonah Swallowed and Spit Out ⁴¹⁵	Depicted
Preaching to the Ninevites	Not depicted
Repentance of the Ninevites	Not depicted
Sulking under the vine	Depicted

Perhaps more than any other images depicted in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the narrative content of Jonah is on display. This is because of the images’ serialization, which gives a much better sense of the unfolding of the story than is available from other narratives, which rely on a single depiction. Though depiction was selective, for viewers,

⁴¹⁴ Jensen’s episodes are God’s call, Jonah’s flight from God, the storm, Jonah being swallowed and then spit out by the *ketos*, Jonah’s preaching to the Ninevites, their repentance, and finally Jonah’s “sulking,” in her words, under the gourd vine. The episodes with the *ketos* might be split into two, making a total of eight. It is curious that the modern iconography of Jonah, set in the belly of a whale, is not depicted in ancient art, and does not merit a mention by Jensen as a narrative segment. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community*, 30.

⁴¹⁵ The central image, of Jonah in the mouth of the *ketos*, could be interpreted as either Jonah being swallowed or Jonah being vomited out. I think it is likely that he is being vomited out, given that the *ketos* is turned toward his place of repose, and not the ship from which he came.

the entire story of Jonah must have been called to mind. As a whole, it is a story characterized by displacement, things out of place, and places and spaces defined over and against one another.

Notwithstanding Snyder's curious comments to the contrary, the Cubicula of the Sacraments seek to convey the narrative breadth of Jonah's story, and not to simply depict Jonah as a symbol.⁴¹⁶ The image in Cubiculum A3, reproduced below, unfolds as a highly-marked spatial tale, inflected with references to both intimate spaces (belly of the *ketos*, under the gourd vine) and large-scale spaces (Tarshish, Nineveh).

Although three episodes are *depicted*, once evoked in art and called to mind, the whole story of Jonah would play out in the mind of the viewer. The various episodes of the tale—those painted and those elided alike—would have been part of the narrative world evoked by the selected images. Attention to some of the episodes of the story, then, will provide insight into the heterotopian implications of the story.

The first highly spatial episode in the story, and the first in narrative order to be *depicted*, is Jonah's flight away from God's call and away from Nineveh, illustrated in his journey on the boat. Here the central spatial dichotomy of the story is introduced, and the spatial stakes of the tale are defined. Jonah is asked to go to a foreign land, the land of

⁴¹⁶ Snyder writes that "the artistic Jonah cycle, though somewhat coherent in itself, has little in common with the narrative found in the Hebrew Scriptures... There is little in these three scenes to indicate that the biblical story of Jonah is being told. To be sure, if one knows the biblical story, one recognizes the boat, the *ketos*, and the vine. But there is no call of God, no refusal, no Nineveh, no preaching, and no pouting Jonah...It has been generally accepted now that the Jonah cycle, or for that matter any other pictorial representation of pre-Constantinian Christianity, does not narrate the biblical story to which it is related." While some of Snyder's meaning may hinge on his use of the word "narrate," it is a mistake to claim that images of Jonah and other biblical stories were not meant to evoke the biblical narratives behind them. It is hardly the case that there is a scholarly consensus against images telling or evoking biblical stories; they are often called "narrative images." More than any other illustration of early Christian art, the Jonah images were meant to convey a tale, involving multiple plot points and twists. Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 91-92.

his enemies, and facilitate their repentance. He is unwilling, though, and instead flees in the opposite direction, to Tarshish, by ship. Here a placeless place is evoked; Tarshish, while some place it in Carthage, Spain, or India, likely refers to a generic far-away location, much in the way Timbuktu is used today. Jonah is sailing to a far-away nowhere, an ou-topia, to escape being sent to the land and space of his enemies.⁴¹⁷ This definition of Nineveh as a space of opposition, defined against Jonah's own homeland and inferior even to a non-place like Tarshish, defines the entire story. So strong is the conflict between Jonah and Nineveh that even after he finishes his mission, and the Ninevites are repentant, he still resents them for it.

The second highly spatial aspect of the story of Jonah comes with his encounter with the *ketos*, and especially in its belly. Although his time in the belly is not narrated, a long prayerful poem is placed onto Jonah's lips from this time.⁴¹⁸ In it, Jonah draws connections between the belly of the *ketos* and Sheol, the place of the dead. The *ketos* and its belly then serve two functions in the narrative, and act as two places. The first is as a transportation vehicle; ship-like, they transport Jonah to Nineveh, where he does not want to be.⁴¹⁹ The second is as a place of nothingness, of oblivion—like Sheol, the belly of the *ketos* is a place for people who no longer are. This explicit identification of the belly with the place of the dead heightens the spatial alterity of the narrative, already charged with two competing spaces.

⁴¹⁷ "Tarshish," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1987).

⁴¹⁸ Jonah 2:2-9

⁴¹⁹ The ship, Foucault claims, is the most heterotopian space of them all—a claim relevant both to this section and to Jonah's embarkation in the first place. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27.

The third spatial episode of Jonah's story is related to the first. It comes with Jonah's arrival in the city, his preaching there, and his dismay at the effectiveness of his words. Here we have something of Scott's competing transcripts; the words Jonah wants to say to the Ninevites, he does not say, but the words he says, he does not want to say.⁴²⁰ In the presence of his enemies, in their space, Jonah would prefer to speak his own words—words, no doubt, of condemnation and destruction. Instead, he finds himself speaking the words suggested to him by God, and is angry because of it. Here is the paradigmatic foreigner in the land of his enemies, unable to enact the kind of speech the situation would normally call for. Jonah's frustration is palpable, even as the narration of the story makes it clear that we should be glad, as God is glad, for the Ninevites' repentance.

These three spatial episodes of the story—Jonah's flight from God's call, his time in the belly of the *ketos*, and his time in Nineveh—mark this narrative as deeply spatial and heterotopian. The narrative is constructed in terms of spatial dichotomies between Nineveh and Jonah's native land, and between the land of the living and Sheol, the land of the dead. Jonah's experiences are universally marked by either foreignness or placelessness, and sometimes both. His self-understanding is challenged, but remains intact to the end; he is not happy, but he is “angry enough to die.”⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ For an account of Scott's transcripts, see Chapter 4.

⁴²¹ Jonah 4:9

Gospel Texts

Matthew, John, and perhaps Luke are all referenced in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, although the references to John are far more significant than those to Matthew.⁴²² John is cited in the stories of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman, the Healing of the Paralytic, the Raising of Lazarus, the Good Shepherd saying, and probably in the banquet scenes, which may refer to the feeding of the five thousand or to the story of Peter's conversation with Jesus in John 21. Matthew is probably referenced in the parable of the lost sheep, and in the sign of Jonah discourse, as noted above. It is possible that Mark is referenced in the banquet scenes, which may refer to the feeding of the five thousand, though in the absence of any other Markan narratives it is more likely that the reference is to one of the other gospels, probably John.

Having already discussed the sign of Jonah discourse in the section above, and with the connections to narratives in Matthew less secure than those in John, I focus here on John. I assume, however, that the community behind the Cubicula of the Sacraments likely knew the other canonical gospels, and probably some non-canonical ones as well. John, then, stands in for the way the community likely knew and used a variety of gospel texts.

As was the case with the Pentateuch, the gospels do not seem to have been privileged, conceptualized, or totemized as a group.⁴²³ There is no gospel cabinet, as we find in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, and there is no depiction of books or

⁴²² References in Luke are not significantly different from those in Matthew, and so I will here elide the two into a discussion of Matthew.

⁴²³ While gospel collections circulated by this point, the catacombs do not seem to reference "the gospels" as a collection, but rather only discrete pericopes within individual gospels.

scrolls.⁴²⁴ What we do find is careful attention to a few gospel stories, which are, like the stories from the Pentateuch, imbued with spatial concerns and the trappings of heterotopian thinking.

Among the Johannine narratives found in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the story of the raising of Lazarus is the most commonly portrayed in the catacombs generally. This is not surprising, given the story's obvious funerary connotations, but it bears mentioning, since the similar story of the raising of Jairus' daughter is not depicted in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, and is only rarely depicted in the catacombs generally. Unlike the story of Jonah, but like every other narrative told in the Cubicula, the raising of Lazarus is depicted in a single image, and is not serialized. This single image comes at the climax of the pericope, at about John 11:44, when the dead man emerges from the tomb, dressed in strips of cloth. In the image from Cubiculum A2, which is badly degraded, the rough contours of the tomb, Lazarus, and Jesus are all visible, but details that are visible elsewhere are lost.

Nevertheless, the image is unmistakably Lazarus, and shares in the iconographic tradition of Lazarus scenes that is found across early Christian art.⁴²⁵ These scenes universally depict this moment in the tale, when Lazarus emerges from the tomb and back into the world of the living. This is a profoundly spatial moment; if Jonah's journey into the belly of the *ketos* and out again was a simile for the journey to Sheol and back, then Lazarus had made the journey in reality. Depicted here at the moment of

⁴²⁴ The Mausoleum of Galla Placidia features a cabinet holding four books, titled Marcus, Lucas, Matteus, and Ioannes.

⁴²⁵ The image is found in most catacombs that contain images, as well on many sarcophagi, including the famous sarcophagus of Junius Bassus.

resurrection, Lazarus is on the cusp of two kinds of space, profoundly differentiated from one another. The cemetery, Foucault wrote, is the archetypal heterotopia because it marks the absolute separation between the living and the dead, and because of the way it accumulates time: the dead of one generation are joined by the dead of the next, and the one after that, and all of time is collapsed into a single space.⁴²⁶ In this scene, both of those boundaries are ruptured; the space of the dead violates the space of the living, and the inexorable accumulation of what Foucault calls “slices of time” is halted.

The community that made the Cubicula of the Sacraments understood this movement from the world of the dead to that of the living as a good thing. This transgression of spaces, so carefully set apart from one another, was one of the chief hopes and expectations of their faith, and particularly in this context, certainly the most vivid of their longings. In terms of the resources outlined in Chapter 4, especially the work of Jas Elsner, this scene represents an attack on the hegemony of the space of death—an instance of counter-speech by the land of the living against the domain of death. It articulates a self-understanding by way of a theological and metaphysical claim, in the face of all evidence, in which the Christians, as human beings, overcame the most significant disadvantage faced by human beings—death. The Christians declared, and thereby defined themselves: death would not be victorious.⁴²⁷ Here, for the first time, the hegemony was not Rome, or normative Roman society, or the strange land in which they

⁴²⁶ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces."

⁴²⁷ On the diversity of beliefs about death and the afterlife in early Christianity, those beliefs' change over time, and their relationship to other belief systems current in the Roman Empire, and especially in the Levant, see Riley. Gregory J. Riley, *Resurrection Reconsidered : Thomas and John in Controversy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

found themselves. The hegemony against which this image argues is the world itself, the cosmos—the way of things—and their argument against it consisted of this microcosm—micro-cosmos—in which the normal way of things did not hold, but was overcome.

The healing of the paralytic is a relatively common image in early Christian art, appearing on sarcophagi and in paintings at both Dura Europos and the Roman catacombs.⁴²⁸ There is some dispute over whether the image represents the synoptic gospels' account of the man lowered through the roof by his friends, as typified by Mark 2, or whether it is based on the Johannine account, found in John 5:2-18.⁴²⁹ A connection to John seems more likely, given the image's location in the baptistery at Dura Europos and adjacent to the baptism imagery in Cubiculum A3 of the Callistus Catacomb. This may very well be an example of a poly-referential image, though, since the image as depicted could easily fit either the Johannine or synoptic narratives.

The image itself is simple, and is portrayed in Cubiculum A3 much in the same way as it is portrayed elsewhere. The narrative is depicted at the moment the man takes up his mat and walks at John 5:9, having been healed by Jesus' words. In the course of the narrative, this comes just before the man is questioned by a group concerned about Sabbath observance.

The spatial elements of the story of the paralytic are twofold, both important for understanding the narrative, its place in the gospel of John, and the reasons for its

⁴²⁸ For an overview of the places the image is found, see Kurt Weitzmann, ed. *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century, Catalog of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Nov. 19 1977 - Feb 12, 1978* (New York: 1979), 396, 404, 31, 42-43, 45-46, 500, 40.

⁴²⁹ Weitzmann chooses the Mark 2 account on the strength of the image's location in the baptistery of Dura Europos, despite the more plausible baptism connections of the John account. *Ibid.*, 396-97. Baruffa identifies the image with John 5, but mistakenly locates it in Cubiculum A5. It is in fact in Cubiculum A3. Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callistus*, 81-83.

depiction in the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The first spatial element has to do with the setting of the story. John 5 narrates a scene at the pool of Beth-zatha, a somewhat complicated space that earns an aside from the author of John, who notes that it had five porticoes. The author relies on the paralyzed man for the exposition of the scene; the man, we are told, had been ill for 38 years, but had been unable to enter the pool at the times it is “stirred up” without someone to assist him. Jesus asks the man if he would like to be made well, and the man is made well, leading to the moment at which the scene is portrayed, taking up his mat and walking away. The pericope concludes with a conversation with a group interested in the way the healing and the man’s carrying of the mat might have violated Sabbath observance, to which we will return in a moment.

The obvious spatial reference here is to the pool, its surroundings, and the inside/outside function of it for healing. The reference to the five porticoes is curious, and signals that the space itself is important in the telling of the story. This in fact turns out to be the case, since the pool functions like a kind of heterotopia of healing, which springs up in a particular set-apart space at particular, unpredictable times. This is rather like Foucault’s description of the functioning of festivals and fairgrounds, which exist as normal space but for “slices in time,” during which they become profoundly othered spaces where the normal functionings of society are suspended. A key part of Foucault’s fourth principle of heterotopia, this temporary flourishing of festivals points to a temporal function of heterotopias, which may arise out of the matrix of normative space, blossom,

and then recede back into normative space and time.⁴³⁰ This is precisely the way the pool of Beth-zatha is described in John 5.

The other heterotopian marker has to do with the paralytic's interlocutors following his healing, who raised questions to him about the propriety of Jesus' healing and the man's carrying of his mat on the Sabbath. In usual Johannine fashion, this group is termed "the Jews," with no distinction among competing Jewish schools or groups.⁴³¹ Here, it is worth noting that some read in the gospel of John and its broad-stroke painting of "the Jews" a social conflict, and perhaps even a spatial or territorial one, between Jesus-followers and more normative Jewish groups in the middle and late first century.⁴³² Such a dichotomy heightens spatial considerations, makes statements of self-definition and critique of other groups more likely, and makes even seemingly mundane acts, like taking up one's mat after being healed, the subject of theological disputes. This dynamic is operative here, and also in the raising of Lazarus, where Jesus' actions precipitate an ominous turn in Jesus' relationship with other Jewish groups in the remaining narrative. This stark delineation of groups, arrayed against each other and competing in the realm of religious and cultural definition and the world of ideas, is a crucial part of the functioning of Foucault's heterotopias. Though their dispute is not manifestly about space, it nevertheless evokes a kind of social and cultural dispute, in which space and its definition

⁴³⁰ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 26.

⁴³¹ Greek: Ἰουδαῖοι.

⁴³² See especially the work of Brown and Martyn: Raymond Edward Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979). J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979).

and control figure prominently. This dynamic pervades this pericope, and pervades the gospel of John.

It also, therefore, finds its way into the Cubicula of the Sacraments, where the image probably has a primary significance of baptism and deliverance. But it also carries the heterotopian connotations of the text it cites, including the social divisions and conflicts inherent in the text. This narration of conflict would not have been lost on the Christians of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, who of course were engaged in their own struggle for ideas, control of space, and self-definition.

The third major depiction of a gospel text in the Cubicula of the Sacraments is the image of the Samaritan woman at the well. The image, described in detail in Chapter 4, is of the woman standing over the well, drawing water, at the moment Jesus, who is sitting in the background, asks her for a drink. The conversation that ensues, cited in the image in Cubiculum A3, is one characterized by space and spatial concerns, and by the attendant concerns of rival social group and their claims to truth.

Three pairs of spaces are in view in the conversation between Jesus and the woman: two wells (one literal and one figurative), Samaria and Judea, and two temples, one in Jerusalem (on the unnamed Mt. Zion) and one on Mt. Gerazim. The most basic of these is also the setting of the scene: Jacob's well in Sychar, where the woman went to draw water and met Jesus. The well, marked by its verticality, is of course a font of water, but it comes to possess more symbolic meaning, through contrast to the well of "living water" Jesus claims to possess. The well serves as the opening salvo in a very spatial conversation.

The second pair of spaces referenced in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman consists of the two geographic and cultural regions claimed by the two characters, Judea and Samaria. The historical and cultural reasons for the distrust and distaste between Jews and Samaritans has been rehearsed well by Biblical scholars, who frequently note the highly-charged dynamics between these two groups as part of their commentary on this pericope.⁴³³ Jesus and the woman discuss the competing spaces frankly, noting from the beginning of their interaction that their conversation was somehow inappropriate, given the cultural distance between them. This perspective, reinforced by the narrator in 4:9b, gives the conversation the tenor of an ambassadorial mission, or a cultural exchange program. It is clear that the literal and figurative distance between Judea and Samaria is meant to be the spatial context for the teaching that Jesus will enact in this conversation.

The third pair of spaces in view in this conversation is really a kind of focused proxy for the second. In 4:19-24, the woman opens a line of conversation around worship spaces, noting that while Samaritans worship on “this mountain” (Mt. Gerezim), Jews worship in Jerusalem. This is a kind of focusing of the spatial tension of the entire passage, between Judea and Samaria: each region has its own sacred worship space, its own *axis mundi*, its own mountain—a fact that the woman volunteers in the course of their conversation. These serve to emphasize the subtext of the entire conversation: that the woman and Jesus come from different, competing factions, and that they ought to be in conflict with each other, or at least not speaking.

⁴³³ See, for example, Haenchen, *John 1*.

Thus arranged, the theological point of the pericope is clear: Jesus transcends such boundaries. For the author of the gospel of John, this might have been an etiology for the inclusion of the Samaritans in the Jesus movement in his own day.⁴³⁴ For viewers in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, it was a claim that the power and truth of their own perspective both superseded and included the “territory” of others—that their faith was both inclusive of difference and also correct. In their context in Rome, in their heterotopian space, such a perspective took view of the sometimes-oppositional relationship that they must have felt with regard to the remainder of the world. This way of seeing the world, encapsulated in the image of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, simultaneously claimed superiority over the world outside the walls of the catacombs (with Jesus, as he claimed the superiority of the Jews), and also expanded to encompass that outside world (as Jesus did with his acceptance of the woman). This dual move of claiming authority and embracing the outside gave the community of the catacombs a simultaneous claim to the particular and the universal—the rightness of their own position, and its place over the other gods and religions of the city and the Empire.

The Shepherd of Hermas

The shepherd is one of the most common images in the Roman catacombs, and it is also one of the most difficult to analyze as a symbol. This is due in part to its long history in Greco-Roman art, where it had been used for centuries as a generic decoration, as a way of depicting the god Hermes, or as a way of city-dwellers showing their longing for the bucolic scenes of the countryside. The high frequency with which the shepherd is depicted in the Christian catacombs has challenged interpreters, who seek explanations

⁴³⁴ Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, 10-16.

for its popularity. Because of this long history and mixed usage in Christian contexts, the shepherd provokes from many scholars what Paul Corby Finney calls a “minimalist” perspective. This perspective holds that since the iconography termed the *kriophoros* had a long usage in Greco-Roman art, when it appears in Christian art there is little to suggest that it holds much unique Christian meaning. Minimalists claim that the image is not anything specifically Christian, and that it is simply another one of those standard Greco-Roman images used for pretty decoration and evoking nostalgia for rural life.⁴³⁵ The gist of the minimalist position is that the shepherds just don’t mean very much.

I find these minimalist readings unsatisfying. In spaces like the Cubicula of the Sacraments, spaces dedicated to the sole Christian purpose of burial and memorialization, so richly decorated with what seem to be meaningful symbols and images, like scenes of baptisms, Lazarus rising from the dead, and the praying figure called the Orant, it seems more likely to me that the images of the shepherd meant *something*. I think they meant something, and I think they meant something important. But what did they mean? Some who look for a specifically Christian meaning in the image point to John 10 and the discourse of the Good Shepherd, and indeed the most common name given to this image by scholars is the Good Shepherd. Others look to shepherd- and sheep-related parables in Matthew and Luke, or even to stories of David or the Psalms as the source of the images. I think these are all good ideas; one of my assumptions about early Christian art is that much of it was polysemous, possessed of multiple meanings, and so I imagine that the shepherd could have evoked all these texts and perhaps more besides, but my goal in this paper is to suggest another possibility—one that I think fits the evidence as well as or

⁴³⁵ This position Finney especially ascribes to Dölger and Klauser. Finney, *The Invisible God*, 268 n.56.

better than any of the alternatives.⁴³⁶ And so I turn to the words of Carolyn Osiek in the introduction to her Hermeneia volume on *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

“Few have raised a question worth raising,” she writes.

“Could some of the earlier shepherd depictions in Christian contexts be Hermas’ shepherd, and in fact, could Hermas’ shepherd have helped to mediate the transition from the Greco-Roman pastoral figure to Christ?”⁴³⁷

I see just such a connection between the *kriophoros* and the shepherd of Christian iconography. Seeing the shepherd imagery as connected to *The Shepherd of Hermas* can help to make sense of the transition from the *kriophoros* of Greco-Roman art to the Good Shepherd of Christian iconography. The historical synchronicities are striking: *The Shepherd of Hermas* is widely agreed to have been written in Rome, where several figures named Hermas appear among the early Christians in various sources.⁴³⁸ Opinion on the dating of the work is split between two main options: the first is somewhere between the end of the first century or beginning of the second, and the second is somewhere in the middle of the second century.⁴³⁹ Either option places the composition of *The Shepherd of Hermas* firmly in Rome in the decades, or at most, century before the construction and decoration of the first Christian catacombs, which happened in about the year 180. The text was very popular in Rome in the second and third centuries, as it was elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, finding its way onto lists like the Muratorian fragment, receiving positive citation by people like Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria,

⁴³⁶ Recall from an earlier note the intriguing possibility of polysemy presented in Genesis 22.

⁴³⁷ Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 8.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-20.

⁴³⁹ Osiek provides a good summary of the options, and concludes that a date in the early second century is most plausible. *Ibid.*, 18-19.

Origen, Hippolytus, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, among others, and being referenced as late as the late Middle Ages by authors such as Hildegard, Prosper of Aquitaine, and Bede.⁴⁴⁰

The Shepherd of Hermas is a difficult work to assign to a genre, though it probably rests most easily as a kind of apocalypse.⁴⁴¹ It has many of the classic features of apocalyptic literature, including a heavenly guide, visions and dreams, a dualizing view of the world, and extensive use of vivid imagery and allegory. It is this first characteristic—the heavenly guide—that gives the work its name, and which I suggest forms the link to the shepherd image of the catacombs. Hermas, the book’s narrator, is

⁴⁴⁰ The work was cited approvingly in antiquity, notes Osiek, by Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hippolytus, Pseudo-Cyprian, Commodian, Pseudo-Pius, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Cassian. It earned a place in the Muratorian Fragment, being approved for private use but not public reading in church. Osiek notes continued citations into the Middle Ages by authors such as Prosper of Aquitaine and Bede, and it was included in the apocryphal sections of some bibles as late as 1513. She also notes possible references to *Shepherd of Hermas* in the works of Hildegard of Bingen and Francis Quarles, and in *Piers Plowman*, the work of Dante, and the work of Boethius. *Ibid.*, 1, 4-7. According to the Muratorian Fragment, “Hermas composed *The Shepherd* quite recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while his brother, Pius, occupied the episcopal seat of the city of Rome” (= Pius I, Bishop of Rome from c. 140 [d. c. 154], tr. Harry Y. Gamble, *The New Testament Canon: Its Making and Meaning*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, 93-95). The Muratorian Fragment has been regarded as the earliest witness to the New Testament “canon,” thought to have been promulgated in Rome at the end of the 2nd century. Geoffrey M. Hahneman’s attempt (*The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), following Albert C. Sundberg (“Canon Muratori: A Fourth Century List,” *HTR* 66 [1973]: 1-41), to sustain the case for a fourth-century date and an eastern provenance for the list (one that depends, in no small part, on how the phrase “quite recently, in our times” [*nuperrime temporibus nostris*] is to be understood), has met with considerable criticism. See Everett Ferguson, “Review of Geoffrey Mark Hahneman,” *The Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon*, *JTS* 44 (1993): 696; P. Henne, “La datation du Canon de Muratori,” *RB* 100 (1993): 54-75; J.-D. Kaestli, “La place du Fragment de Muratori dans l’histoire du canon. À propos de la these de Sundberg et Hahneman,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 15 (1994): 609-34; C. E. Hill, “The Debate Over the Muratorian Fragment and the Development of the Canon,” *WTJ* 57:2 (Fall, 1995): 437-52; Joseph Verheyden, “The Canon Muratori: A Matter of Dispute,” in *The Biblical Canons*, Jean-Marie Auwers and Henk Jan de Jonge, eds. (Leuven, 2003), 487-556; and, though not without its share of speculative elements, in the subsequent proposal by Jonathan J. Armstrong that the Muratorian Fragment is not a defective, fourth-century “canon” list, but rather a remnant of Victorinus of Pettau’s third-century prologue to his *Commentarius in Matthaëum*. See J.J. Armstrong, “Victorinus of Pettau as the Author of the Canon Muratori,” *VC* 62 (2008): 1-34.

⁴⁴¹ “Is Hermas an Apocalypse?,” Osiek asks in the introduction to her commentary on the book. “Most who attempt an answer to this question end in some way by saying both yes and no.” *Ibid.*, 10.

visited by a figure dressed as a shepherd beginning in Vision 5, and most of the rest of the book consists of Hermas' interaction with the shepherd and the shepherd's teachings. The shepherd is not Christ, and is best understood as a kind of angel whose work it is to instruct and guide Hermas.⁴⁴² As the angel is to the Apocalypse of John, the shepherd is to this book, with similar but more moderate connotations of revelation and mystery.⁴⁴³

The Shepherd of Hermas is a varied tableau of moral instruction, practical advice, and social and political critique. Most germane to this dissertation, where space and spatial concerns are in view, are two sections. The first is a revelation from Vision 3, early in the work before the introduction of the shepherd, with some interesting spatial features on the scale of architecture. The second is from Similitude 1, a vision in which the shepherd instructs Hermas, with some spatial features on the scale of the cosmos, and particularly Christians' place in it.

First, Vision 3, which features a conversation between Hermas and a woman, who also reveals herself to be the church, and to also be the tower about which they speak. The tower, explains the woman, is being built by angels, who construct it out of stones, stones which represent various kinds of leaders in the church: apostles, bishops, teachers, and deacons.⁴⁴⁴ Other stones were rejected, though not necessarily permanently; these

⁴⁴² Osiek provides a good analysis of Hermas' initial encounter with the shepherd. *Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁴⁴³ Osiek cites the work of Jean de Savignac in particular. The reference to de Savignac's work can be found at *ibid.*, 9 n. 82.

⁴⁴⁴ Osiek notes the omission of prophets. *Ibid.*, 71.

include people who are “doubleminded,” a condition frequently warned against *in the Shepherd of Hermas*.⁴⁴⁵

Here is a spatial vision of the church—a soaring and beautiful tower—that is yet under construction and incomplete. This is a remarkable metaphor of space for the church in a time when it possessed no church buildings.⁴⁴⁶ The tower could not and does not represent any real building, as the church was still a century or more away from building or inhabiting its own dedicated structures. Rather, it was a symbolic representation of the church as an incomplete but ongoing edifice, being built by angels with the stones of the saints.

Returning to Lefebvre’s notion of the functioning of spaces, outlined in Chapter 3, we recall that one important marker of heterotopia is the verticality of a structure. Monumentality, Lefebvre argues, is as much a function of verticality as it is of horizontality. “Verticality,” writes Lefebvre,

“a height erected anywhere on a horizontal plane, can become the dimension of elsewhere, a place characterized by the presence- absence: of the divine, of power, of the half-fictional half-real, of sublime thought.”⁴⁴⁷

This is surely what is meant by the tower in Vision 3; the church is envisioned as a gleaming tower that rises above all else, reaching to the sky, away from the everywhere,

⁴⁴⁵ This is also a reference to Psalm 118:22-23, which was already the subject of exegetical work by early Christian writers, who saw it as a reference to and rationalization for Jesus’ rejection by the Jews. Matthew 21:42, 1 Peter 2:4 and 7, and Acts 4:11 are also within this tradition. For the metaphorical uses of Psalm 118:22 in the New Testament, see Jones and Juel. Judith Anne Jones, “Building on the Rejected Stone: The Metaphorical Construals of Psalm 118:22 in the New Testament” (Emory University, 1999). Donald Juel, *Messianic exegesis: christological interpretation of the Old Testament in early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988).

⁴⁴⁶ For a discussion of the lack of permanent dedicated buildings in early Christianity, and especially early Christian Rome, see Chapters 1 and 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 38.

to “elsewhereness.” Here is a spatial statement of the church’s set-apart nature, constructed of the very persons entombed in the catacomb, and, ancient readers could not have failed to notice, constructed also of those who continue to live, and visit and maintain the graves found there.⁴⁴⁸

The second section relevant to our discussion of spatial concerns in *The Shepherd of Hermas* comes in Similitude 1, which features a teaching of the shepherd himself. “You know that you, the servants of God, live in a foreign land,” extolls the shepherd, “for your city is far away.”⁴⁴⁹ This Similitude, which Osiek cheekily calls “A Tale of Two Cities,” argues that the city in which Hermas lives, does business, and owns property, is a foreign land. This city, this foreign land, by scholarly consensus, is Rome; Hermas lives in the capitol city.⁴⁵⁰ The other city—the one in which Hermas is a native, according to Hermas—is contrasted to Rome, and the shepherd calls Hermas’ allegiance toward the Godly city and away from the earthly city.⁴⁵¹

The primary thrust of the shepherd’s critique of Hermas’ life in Rome is his wealth, which he seems to possess to some moderate-to-great degree. “Then you who have fields and houses and many other possessions,” says the shepherd in Similitude 1:4, “when [the lord of the city] throws you out, what will you do with field and house and all

⁴⁴⁸ “Now listen about the stones that go into the building,” says the woman in 5:1. “Those that are the square and white and fit into their joints are the apostles and overseers and teachers and deacons who proceed mindful of the dignity of God, who have governed and taught and served the elect of God in holiness and dignity, *some of whom have fallen asleep and some of whom are still alive.*” Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 66. (emphasis mine)

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴⁵⁰ The *Shepherd of Hermas* opens with a declaration by Hermas that he is a former slave. In the course of the book, not least in this section, Hermas makes it clear that he has acquired some measure of wealth and property ownership—a common if not typical course for freedmen.

⁴⁵¹ Hebrews 13:10-16

the rest that you have prepared for yourself.”⁴⁵² Later, in 1:8, he continues, “So instead of fields, buy suffering souls, as each one can, and take charge of widows and orphans and do not neglect them, but spend your wealth and all possessions that you have received from God for such fields and houses.” Here is an economic critique of Hermas’ life and perhaps the lives of certain other Christians. Life in the city, says the shepherd, with its trappings of property and possessions, does not matter, but what matters is life in the other city, and so it is souls in which Hermas ought to invest his wealth.

The contrast between an earthly and heavenly city is certainly not without precedent in Christian thought, as Osiek is careful to point out.⁴⁵³ Nor does the tradition end with Hermas; Augustine’s *The City of God* is probably the best-known employment of the idea.⁴⁵⁴ Here, though, we have a clear expression of the idea in the period just prior to the creation of the Callistus Catacomb, in a work composed and set in the city of Rome, among the very community that a generation or two later would decorate the walls of the Callistus Catacomb and the ceilings of the Cubicula of the Sacraments with shepherd images. Osiek’s suggestion is correct: the popularity of *The Shepherd of Hermas* in Rome, and its composition and setting there, is likely the primary source of the ubiquitous shepherd images in the catacombs.⁴⁵⁵ Read this way, the shepherd is an icon of revelation, and of guidance on moral and social issues. But he also stands in for a critique of Rome and the society for which it stood, and the book couches that critique in

⁴⁵² Translation Osiek. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 158 n.5. Of particular note is Hebrews 13:10-16, as noted above.

⁴⁵⁴ Osiek notes that Augustine was an avid reader of *The Shepherd of Hermas*. Ibid., 7 n.66.

⁴⁵⁵ It need not be seen as the only source, though. The image is likely polysemous.

spatial terms, with the church as a tower rising above all else, and the city of Rome itself a temporary and foreign land, destined to be abandoned by Hermas and others like him when they are called to the other, Godly city.

Texts and Heterotopia in the Cubicula of the Sacraments

The “list” of texts cited in the Cubicula of the Sacraments is not a long one. Genesis, Numbers, Exodus, Jonah, Matthew, Luke, John, and *The Shepherd of Hermas* appear as visual citations of texts in the spaces, and constitute the basics of the textual universe conjured there. Despite the limited length of the list, the texts cited in the Cubicula of the Sacraments still reveal two valuable insights about the community behind the Cubicula: first, a predilection for selecting texts with highly spatial and/or heterotopian markings, and second a sophisticated use of scripture and a vigorous practice of interpreting and exegeting texts from both the Jewish and Christian repertoires. These two insights are the subject of the concluding sections of this chapter.

Selecting Heterotopian Texts

Interpreters noticed early on that this “list” found on the walls of the catacombs ought to be read as such, and that the texts cited in the Cubicula of the Sacraments could be interpreted together, as a group. That the Cubicula of the Sacraments are called “the Cubicula of the Sacraments” assumes a coherency among the rooms—a common thematic content to what is contained inside. This common thematic content was set very early in the history of the interpretation of the Cubicula by early interpreters following the Callistus Catacomb’s rediscovery by de Rossi, when the spaces were given the

prepositional modifier, “of the Sacraments.”⁴⁵⁶ In considering the rooms and the art they contained, visitors and scholars noted the frequent appearance of images making reference to the sacraments of their own Roman Catholic faith, and named the rooms accordingly.⁴⁵⁷ The sacraments depicted—chiefly, in those early interpreters’ eyes, baptism and eucharist—were seen as the organizing principle of the rooms.

Two assumptions underlie this nomenclature. The first is that the five rooms display a coherency of semiotic purpose, strong enough that they can and should be viewed as a whole, interpreted together, and understood as participating in a single symbolic language. The second is that that single symbolic language is the language of sacramental theology—an early but fully-formed and intact version of the sacramental theology that came to define the Roman church in the medieval and modern periods.⁴⁵⁸ The first assumption, I believe, is correct; the Cubicula *do* display an internal cohesion that allows for their interpretation as a unit. The second assumption, that the cohesion is the result of a prototype of later Roman Catholic theology, I believe is misguided and anachronistic—a relic of the counter-reformation context in which the spaces were rediscovered and described.

⁴⁵⁶ Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 198.

⁴⁵⁷ As Rutgers notes, most, but not all of the early interpreters of the catacombs, were Roman Catholic. Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, 9-41.

⁴⁵⁸ Alister McGrath notes that “the early church had been somewhat imprecise in its discussion of the sacraments,” while also noting that baptism and eucharist, the two sacraments featured prominently in the Cubicula, were two of the early to be agreed upon. A full-fledged sacramental theology only arrived in the Middle Ages, with substantial agreement on “the definition of a sacrament, the number of the sacraments, and the precise identity of these sacraments.” Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 95.

The “sacraments” of the early interpreters is far from the only attempt to account for what appears to be thematic unity among the art of both these rooms and the catacombs generally. In attempts to proffer convincing accounts for the unity of these spaces and the catacombs generally, some have pointed to themes of deliverance, and others to motifs of salvation.⁴⁵⁹ Still others see in the constant return to release from enclosures a metaphor for deliverance and even resurrection—release from the grave.⁴⁶⁰ Perhaps most convincing of all, many have argued that the iconographic program of these and other works of early Christian art suggest an early form of the *Commendatio Animae*, a medieval prayer for the dead that mentions many of the characters on the Cubicula walls.⁴⁶¹ These accounts of the spaces’ unity, helpful as they can be, lack what Nicola Denzey has called the “elegant logic” of sacred spaces.⁴⁶² While they are undoubtedly substantially correct—the images *do* carry themes of deliverance and resurrection, and they *are* connected to rituals and texts—a spatial analysis of the images and the texts behind those images has revealed other ways in which the “elegant logic” of the spaces informs our understanding of the community that built them.

⁴⁵⁹ Rutgers, *Subterranean Rome*, 105-17. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art*, 27. Green, *Christianity in Ancient Rome*, 198-99.

⁴⁶⁰ This position began with de Rossi, and has continued to have a strong following. de Rossi, *La Roma Sotterranea Cristiana Tom. II*, 112; Andre Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins*, vol. XXXV, Bollingen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 137.

⁴⁶¹ This is indeed a convincing argument. Although Grabar notes that there are no extant versions of this ritual before the ninth century, he is convinced that it extended back to the third century. The question, probably unanswerable, is whether an early version of the *commendatio animae* guided the production of early Christian art, or whether the realities of early Christian art, guided the composition of the *commendatio animae*. We will return to this question in the following chapter, on ritual. Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, XXXV, 10.

⁴⁶² Denzey, *The Bone Gatherers*, 105.

In the course of this chapter, we have seen that the “list” of texts depicted in the Cubicula of the Sacraments coheres in a way that has not been described to this point: they all share a concern for space, either through their narrative use of physical space or through the social function of space as a site or fulcrum of conflict between groups. They all suggest and convey, in one way or another, literary heterotopias—alternate spaces built not out of bricks but out of words, but still functioning to critique other spaces, define identities, and negotiate conflicts with other groups and spaces.

I am not suggesting that this rose to the level of a conscious hermeneutical principle—that the artist-exegetes of the Cubicula of the Sacraments sought out and depicted texts that described heterotopia, as a kind of art installation, as was the case in the Jewish Museum Berlin with the exhibit Shachalet. Rather, I am suggesting that the spatial experiences of the community behind the Cubicula, and the nature of the Cubicula as spaces themselves, facilitated the selection of texts that emphasized heterotopias and heterotopian themes. This subconscious spatial hermeneutic guided the use of texts in the community and in the Cubicula, nudging readers and hearers towards texts that were more attentive to the kind of spatial speech they were attempting, and the kind of spatial conflict they were undergoing. Even when other, less spatially-charged textual options were available, the exegetes of the Cubicula consistently chose the spatial ones.

Interpretation and Mirroring

Throughout this chapter we have been attentive to the presence of certain texts (or textual “citations”) in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, and to the various heterotopian readings of those texts. In the immediately preceding section, those citations were

collectively analyzed for insights into the textual preferences of the community behind the Cubicula of the Sacraments, noting that literary heterotopias figured prominently in the texts selected for depiction on the walls. I have argued that space and spatiality approached the status of a hermeneutical principle, consciously or unconsciously guiding the selection of texts to be painted in art. This is a unity born of a common, overriding, overpowering concern for space and place, and out of an experience of marginalization and alienation. It is a unity from experience.

But Foucault's vision of heterotopia and Eco's vision of lists also suggests a further kind of unity, and heterotopia (and space as list) both demands and manufactures this unity. This is the unity of meaning-making; in this kind of accord, the things collected together function in unison to produce a vision of the world as it ought to be. This is the import of Foucault's carpets and gardens, and of the stage and the cinema screen: what is contained and collected there finds common purpose in the set-apart space, and out of the juxtaposition of all that is contained, comes a new unity. This process is more conscious than the one described in the last section, since it involves the spinning of webs of relations and connections. The work here is the work of *constructing worlds*—or, in the borrowed language of Chesterton and Kelsey, *construing worlds*.

Three of the texts referenced above—Jonah, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and the Numbers account of Moses striking the rock—function as good examples of this kind of meaning-making. In each case, the attribution of an image to a single textual reference seems simple and straightforward to begin with—and in each case, the analysis could certainly be left there and still be useful. But in each case, further examination of the

other texts, ideas, theologies, and influences connected to a text and its image(s) reveals a world of interpretation behind—in some cases quite intricate and interconnected. These worlds behind the texts and images reveal much about the practices of reading, interpreting, and citing texts among the early Christians at Rome, and they reveal much about the way they constructed their spaces in concert with their theologies textual practices.

I describe these practices as a form of heterotopian mirroring. Foucault, as will be recalled, says, writing about the mirror:

Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror functions as heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to be pass through this virtual point which is over there.⁴⁶³

The process of arranging and rearranging the texts, stories, theologies, and experiences of the community into coherent construals of the world and of Christianity is the process of looking into a “mirror,” and seeing reflected back the world as it ought to be. It reflects the not-yet-real or not-really-real into the real. This mirror reflects one experience in another. It builds upon the work begun in earlier texts and world-construals, transforming stories, texts, and symbols into new stories, texts, and meanings. It is, perhaps, like a funhouse mirror, reflecting things back slightly changed, transposed, and squeezed together—still the same, but also profoundly different. It is a trace and a

⁴⁶³ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

cipher of Christian reading and interpretation of text, revealing of their understanding of their place in the world.

Jonah

The images of Jonah, and the episodes from the life of Jonah told in the book that bears his name, merited more analysis above than any other image. This is because of the unique serialization of the images, because the story of Jonah contains so much spatially marked narrative, and because images connected to Jonah are so common in the Cubicula and elsewhere in the catacombs. But there is still more understanding to be wrung from the images. Of the three texts and images analyzed in *this* section, the ones from Jonah have the simplest and most obvious corollary textual references, but even these are instructive. The Jonah images are not a pristine interpretation of the book of Jonah. They are not derived anew from fresh readings of the text. They are, rather, mediated by and through other texts and ideas, and they arrive on the walls of the Cubicula of the Sacraments having been already shaped by a Christian discourse. This discourse has its origins, so far as we can trace them, to the “sign of Jonah” sayings in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Found in Matthew 12:38-42 and Luke 11:29-32, these brief pericopes form the basis of a Christian way of understanding and interpreting the story of Jonah. The interpretation, from the mouth of Jesus in both gospels, is twofold: a message of coming judgment, and an analogy between the three days and nights in the belly of the ketos and

the three days and three nights during which “the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth.”⁴⁶⁴

Already by the time of Matthew and Luke, in the 70’s or 80’s of the Common Era, there was a tradition of understanding Jonah as a way of expressing two integral parts of Christian self-understanding: the condemnation of the world as it stood, and the affirmation of Jesus’ resurrection. It is likely that this Christian way of reading Jonah begins even earlier, at the time of the Q source which they share and from which they both appear to take this saying. By the time of the creation of the Cubicula of the Sacraments, then, there was at least a century-long tradition of reading Jonah as a Christian way of defining the world and the Christians’ place in it. This definition was that on the one hand the world, like Nineveh, was corrupt and in need of delivery from its imminent destruction, and on the other hand Jesus, like Jonah, would emerge alive again from his imprisonment in darkness. The former was critical for the Roman Christians’ situation on the periphery of the city and on the periphery of the social sphere; the latter was the crucial understanding of the cosmos as it related to the more immediate context of death and resurrection.

An image of Jonah, then, mirrored the story of Jonah, reflecting back the story but also the Christian tradition of interpreting Jonah as a type for Jesus, and reflecting Jonah’s message to Nineveh as a type of the message brought by one “greater than Jonah” to the perishing people of Rome. The image mediated between the two realms, of

⁴⁶⁴ Matthew is more explicit about the connection between Jonah’s time in the belly of the *ketos* and Jesus’ time in the tomb; Luke focuses on the judgment, and leaves out the analogy to Jesus’ death.

past and present, of Jonah and Jonah's new meaning, holding the two in concert and tension, and allowing for the reflection of meaning back and forth between the two.

Moses Striking the Rock

The above reading of Jonah is a standard one among biblical scholars and art historians seeking to understand the meaning of the Jonah images. Less scrutable, however, are the scenes of Moses striking the rock. Above I have argued for a spatial reading of the image, with some references to resurrection inherent in the flowing out of water from the rock. As with the Jonah images, this interpretation is fine on its own—but there is still more to be seen and understood through a look toward the Christian practice of reading and interpreting texts, and revealing those interpretations in art.

The interpretation of Israel's wilderness experience is, of course, an early and rich part of Christian thought. Early on, Christians (many of whom were Jewish Christians) appropriated and interpreted Jewish texts and stories in light of Jesus, gleaning textual support and understanding for developing Christian theology. Together with these narratives, the burgeoning literature of early Christianity (not yet a canon) added to the resources of constructing a Christian world-view. It was in the midst of this creative period that the Cubicula of the Sacraments were made, and it was from this matrix that their image of Moses striking the rock arose. In this one image, glimpses and hints of a much broader Christian textual practice emerge, revealing readings of John 4:3-30 (Samaritan woman at the well and discourse on living water), Matthew 16:13-19 (Jesus calls Peter the rock), 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 (Paul recounts Israel's wanderings in the

desert), the book of Exodus, and of course the story of Moses striking the rock in Numbers 20:1-13.

1 Corinthians 10:1-5 is a roadmap for this kind of reading. In it, Paul offers an interpretation of Israel's wilderness experience in order to warn his mostly-Gentile audience away from idolatry, which he understands as the fatal mistake of those who wandered in the desert. In doing so, though, Paul obliquely connects the work of God in the wilderness—the provision of food and water, via the rock—to the food and drink provided at the eucharist, or at the community's common meals. The connection is cemented in Paul's almost-offhand remark that "the rock was Christ" in verse 4; here, a structural equivalency is established between the rock (which was Christ) and the bread of verse 16 (which is Christ's body). Paul is linking God's provision in the desert, through the rock which was Christ, to God's provision in Christ, present in the eucharist or common meals.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶⁵ Many recent commentaries make this connection, while warning against conflating Christian practices with Jewish ones. Typical is the analysis of Hans Conzelmann, who understands Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 10 as typological and allusive. Paul is attempting to read contemporary Christian practice back into Jewish texts, with an eye to establishing continuity between the two. Conzelmann writes of verse 2, which concerns baptism, "It should be noted that his thought moves back to the Old Testament from the present datum, baptism, and certainly does not vice versa derive and interpret baptism from the Old Testament." And later, with regard to verses 3 and 4, which concern the celebration of the Lord's Supper (capitals in Conzelmann), "Here, too, Paul is thinking not of a real, Old Testament sacrament, but of a prefiguration." In a note, Conzelmann remarks that "The combining of baptism and the Lord's Supper shows that Paul has a comprehensive concept of "sacraments," even if he has not yet a word for it." Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 166, 66n21. Joseph Fitzmyer is more cautious about the use of the word "sacrament," offering a gentle rebuke to Conzelmann. He uses the word "premonitions" to describe the relationship of Israel's desert wanderings to the Christian practice of Paul's day. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008), 376-80. Richard Hays warns that "the interpreter should not make the mistake of supposing that the Old Testament itself interprets these events as sacramental symbols or that Jewish tradition before Paul had conceived of these events as figurative foreshadowing of future realities." He repeatedly refers to Paul's language here as "metaphors." Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 160-61.

Paul's roadmap leads us to consider another image found in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the Samaritan woman at the well discussed above, which also resonates with this image of Moses striking the rock in Numbers.⁴⁶⁶ In it, Jesus refers to himself as "living water," a description that fits well with Paul's interpretation of the story of water from the rock in 1 Corinthians. The juxtaposition of these two images, even across two different rooms, is significant.⁴⁶⁷

Finally, Jesus' description of Peter as a rock in Matthew 16:13-19 must have resonated in the image of the rock in Cubiculum A2, both in the period of its creation and in the centuries that followed. The Cubicula of the Sacraments are just a short distance from the area now called the Crypt of the Popes, in which a number of early bishops of Rome are buried. The appellation of "rock" to Peter (which is, of course, already a pun on Peter's name) was part of the prime proof-text for the papacy, in which power was transferred from Jesus (the rock, in 1 Corinthians) to Peter (the rock, in Matthew), and onward to the bishops of Rome in perpetuity. The provision of resources both physical and spiritual by God through the medium of a rock would have been a potent metaphor during this period of Christian history.

In the single image of Moses striking the rock, then, we see something of the textual traditions and practices of the exegetes and artists of the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The image is polysemous and polyreferential, carrying multiple meanings

⁴⁶⁶ The Samaritan woman at the well is found in Cubiculum A3; Moses striking the rock is found next door in A2.

⁴⁶⁷ Also present in both Cubicula in question, A2 and A3, are scenes of the imposition of hands on bread (sometimes called a eucharist or *fractio panis*), and/or banquets. The distinction between eucharist and banquets, and the evidence for those practices in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, will be the subject of Chapter 6.

and deriving those meanings from multiple sources. In it, readings of Numbers, Exodus, Matthew, 1 Corinthians, and John collide, along with developing theological traditions, practices, and self-understandings. What emerges is an image that reflects the experiences of Israel in the desert, but mirrors it back in a modified and critiqued form, standing not only for God's provision in that time, but also for God's continued provision in the present. It asserts an ongoing sacramental quality to the religious life of those in the community, with Christ the mediator and source of God's generosity and presence. This heterotopian image is the collector of all these things, and the assimilator of the various practices and traditions of those who painted it, making it both a reflection of a particular experience and also a not-yet-real (or becoming-real) depiction of new experiences. Here the mirror is appropriating and recontextualizing, retelling old stories, and juxtaposing them with new stories and new symbols. Much in the way Paul reinterprets Numbers in 1 Corinthians, the image of Moses striking the rock reinterprets Numbers, and Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, and the imagery of Matthew 16 and John 4, reflecting back a whole made up of all the parts—a whole in which those who made the Cubicula of the Sacraments saw their unique purpose and place in the world.

The Shepherd

It is well established in this dissertation and elsewhere that the shepherd is exceedingly common in the catacombs, and well represented in the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The image of the shepherd, I argued above, is connected to the popularity of *The Shepherd of Hermas*, a well-loved and highly spatial text that includes an extended

section concerning a tower being built to heaven, and a section discussing the place of Christians with regard to the world and to the rest of the city, which is probably Rome.⁴⁶⁸

It is this second section that concerns us most here. In Similitude 1, *The Shepherd of Hermas* describes Christians' situation as one of being foreigners in a strange land—aliens in their own homes.

You know that you, the servants of God, live in a foreign land, for your city is far away from this city. So if you are aware of your own city in which you are about to live, why do you arrange for fields, costly arrays, buildings, and silly housing arrangements? The one who sets up these things in this city does not expect to return to one's own city. You stupid, double-minded, unfortunate person, do you not see that all these things are alien and under the control of someone else? The lord of this city will say: 'I do not want you to live in my city, so leave this city, because you do not use my laws.' So you, watch out: as one living in a foreign place, arrange no more for yourself than what is necessary and be ready, so that when the master of this city wants to expel you for resistance to his law, you will leave his city and go out to your own city and use your own law gladly and without harm."⁴⁶⁹

This is a powerful critique of Rome, and of earthly life generally. It is a forceful reminder to Christians—and it is Christians in the plural, not just Hermas, as the Similitude is given in hortatory style, mostly in the second person plural—that they are aliens in the world, not permanent residents, and certainly not citizens.⁴⁷⁰ But there is another edge to the passage—one of implicit and even explicit support for the right of earthly authority. Here I detect something like the hidden transcripts Neil Elliot reads in Paul's letter to the Romans, in which he sees coded messages designed to be read-able

⁴⁶⁸ Following the majority opinion, I hold that *The Shepherd of Hermas* was composed in Rome, and that the city in view is the same city of Rome outside of which the Cubicula of the Sacraments would be constructed.

⁴⁶⁹ Similitude 1:1-3, 6. Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas*, 157.

⁴⁷⁰ The exception is in verse 3, which is in the singular ("do you not see that all these things are alien?").

and hear-able by the Roman Christians but not anyone else.⁴⁷¹ The Shepherd (through whom the Similitude is being mediated) describes “the lord of this city” as within his rights to enforce his laws within it. This dual message—that Christians are not of this world, but since they are in this world (in Rome) they ought to abide by its laws and respect its leaders—is given by the Shepherd, the heavenly mediator of the Similitude.

The Shepherd of Hermas is forceful in this message, and I think that the popularity of the text and its shepherd imagery was sufficient to elevate the symbol of the Shepherd to the level of inclusion on the walls of the catacombs. It is a powerful spatial vision of the church as a tower rising above the wicked, earthly land of Rome, a tower built with stones that are the saints, and it suggests on a different spatial plane that Christians do not even belong to this world anyway. But I want to argue for something more complex and still more powerful: that the image of the Shepherd, and *The Shepherd of Hermas*, already stood in a line of interpretation and thought, and perhaps a *distinctively Roman Christian* line of interpretation and thought, by the time it began to be painted in the catacombs. Here we turn to two other texts—both of which ultimately found their way into Christian canon, and both associated indirectly with Rome—that contain strikingly similar themes and images, and that will place *The Shepherd of Hermas* within a tradition of Christian textual interpretation in Rome, and make sense of the image of the shepherd, as an icon of that tradition, a short-hand way of citing a particularly Roman Christian way of seeing the world.

⁴⁷¹ Neil Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations : Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire*, Paul in Critical Contexts (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008).

The first of these texts is Hebrews 13:10-21. The dominant theme of the early part of the passage, verses 10-16, is of inclusion and exclusion. Verses 10-11 concern the sacrificial work of the tabernacle, and where animals can be sacrificed, burned, and eaten, and by whom. Verses 12-13 move to a discussion of Jesus' death "outside the city gate," and call on the hearers to go "outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured." Verse 14 claims that "we have no lasting city, but are looking for the city that is to come," and verses 17-18 contain an admonition to obey leaders and submit to their authority.⁴⁷² Finally, in verses 20 and 21, there is a reference to the "Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep." The parallels to Similitude 1 of *The Shepherd of Hermas* are striking. Here we have the same three basic elements: a declaration that Christians are not of the earthly city, an injunction to follow the authority of leaders nevertheless, and the presence of a shepherd reference.

Hebrews is often supposed by modern scholars to have been written (or delivered, if it was a homily) to a Christian community in Rome.⁴⁷³ If this is true, then there *The Shepherd of Hermas* might be picking up a theological tradition—and a construal of Christianity's place in the world—that is both distinctively Roman and distinctively spatial. The close parallels between the two passages certainly suggests a common origin in tradition, or a textual relationship between the two. The added spatial inflection of

⁴⁷² The Greek is the participle form of ἀγῶ, and carries no specific connotations of office.

⁴⁷³ Ancient commenters assumed a location in Palestine, perhaps Jerusalem. Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 9-10.

exhorting people to go “outside the camp” as Jesus suffered “outside the city gate” in intriguing in light of the thesis of this dissertation as it relates to the city of Rome.⁴⁷⁴

A third text, also associated with Rome, also contains the same three features as *The Shepherd of Hermas* and Hebrews. 1 Peter, attributed in antiquity to Peter, who was associated with the Roman church as its first bishop and one of its early martyrs, holds very similar language to the other two. 1 Peter 2:11-17 describes Christians as “aliens and exiles” living “among the Gentiles,” and admonishes them to “accept the authority of every human institution,” including the emperor and governors, who are mentioned explicitly. In verse 25, after a short section containing exhortation to be Christ-like, the text describes Jesus as “the shepherd and guardian of your souls.”⁴⁷⁵ Here too are the tripartite signs of this tradition: affirmation that Christians are not of this world, exhortation to follow the earthly authorities nonetheless, and a reference to a shepherd.

We have, then, three texts, all associated loosely with Rome, all following the same pattern with regard to Christians’ place in the city and the cosmos, and all giving the same instruction with regard to following authority. In every case there is a shepherd; in one text the shepherd is a mediator of God’s message, and two cases the shepherd is Jesus. This might be a particularly Roman tradition of navigating authority and worldliness—by appealing to Christians’ inherent *otherworldliness*, requiring their earthly obedience to authority, and invoking the role of a shepherd, who, it is understood, is over all earthly authority anyway.

⁴⁷⁴ Like Similitude 1, this passage from Hebrews is largely in the second person plural.

⁴⁷⁵ Again, like Similitude 1 and Hebrews 13, this passage from 1 Peter is in the second person plural.

Here is the mirror *par excellence*. Here, collapsed into the figure of the Shepherd, is a way of seeing both inwardly and outwardly, into this world and into the next, and seeing one's role in both worlds simultaneously. The Shepherd acts as a mirror; it is, like the plane of a mirror, the point at which the view from the world met the vision of the world as it ought to be, or as the community of the Cubicula wished it would be, or thought it could be. It was the point at which viewers could "reconstitute" themselves in heterotopic mirrored space, in Foucault's words, and negotiate the difference between the "absolutely real" and the "absolutely unreal," moving through and across the Shepherd as through and across the plane of a mirror.⁴⁷⁶ In this way the Shepherd, while existing in the "absolutely real," also provided a portal to another, mirrored, constructed world.

Achilles' shield contained the cosmos, bounded only by the river Oceanus and the creativity of the god Hephaestus. So too the Cubicula of the Sacraments conjured a world, inscribed on the walls and invoked in symbols, as Christians understood it and wished it would be. As much as the place itself and the symbolism of the art on the walls, the texts referenced by that art evoked worlds set apart, spaces delineated, critiques leveled and worlds construed— as Foucault said of another microcosm, "a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia."⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 26.

CHAPTER 6: HETEROTOPIA AS LIVED SPACE

“... The carrying of the corpses of the dead through a great assembly of people, in the midst of dense crowds, staining the eyesight of all with ill-omened sights of the dead. What day so touched with death could be lucky? How, after being present at such ceremonies, could anyone approach the gods and their temples?”

--Julian the Apostate⁴⁷⁸

Much of this project has been about the symbolic nature of space—the ways its construction and location signal its other-ness, and the ways the art found in the space and the texts referenced in the space work to construct a symbolic world critical of and opposed to other, more hegemonic spaces. But space is more than symbolic, and socially constructed space is also necessarily functional space. The early Christians of Rome did not create the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacomb spaces as symbols, or totems, or as art installations. They created the spaces as venues for activities—as places with functions. They were meant for use, and they were indeed used heavily, from the time of their creation in the late second century until the time of their abandonment in the 6th century.⁴⁷⁹

Scholars have long recognized that the catacomb spaces’ purposes are an important part of understanding them. Much reference is made to the “funerary context” in art-historical and iconographic analyses, and the interpretation of certain images

⁴⁷⁸ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: UP of Chicago, 1982), 7.

⁴⁷⁹ Recall that the catacombs’ use varied significantly over time. See Chapter 1 for a more detailed account of the periods of the catacombs’ use and subsequent abandonment.

sometimes hinges on their possible meanings as grave art. But the rubric of heterotopia calls out for a more holistic analysis, and it gives still more weight to the ways the spaces were used. If heterotopia posits, at its core, a contested relationship between one space and another, then the lived-ness or functionality of those spaces becomes of paramount importance.⁴⁸⁰ The activities associated with a space are an essential part of understanding the space's function, and the functions of heterotopias are always central to their identity.⁴⁸¹

Two kinds of social practices are important for understanding the Cubicula of the Sacraments: practices which occurred within the Cubicula themselves, and practices which are referenced in the Cubicula, but which likely did not take place there.⁴⁸² To the first category, those activities taking place inside the Cubicula, belong burial and pilgrimage. To the second category, activities referenced in the Cubicula but not normally occurring there, belong baptism and communal meals.⁴⁸³ Activities from both categories help to illuminate the nature of the community that created the Cubicula, and both are important portals into the meaning and use of the spaces. The former category speaks to

⁴⁸⁰ Lefebvre, perhaps more than Foucault, understands and emphasizes the social function of space, both in its production and its usage.

⁴⁸¹ A glance at Foucault's most prominent examples of heterotopia—cemeteries, brothels, boarding schools, guest rooms—demonstrates that the spaces are included precisely because of what is done within them—because of the activities the spaces host.

⁴⁸² As we will see, the division between these two categories is not absolute, and it is possible that activities that I assign to one category sometimes functioned as if they were in the other category, and vice versa. For instance, it is possible that baptism occurred inside the Cubicula, although there is no evidence that it did. These divisions are simply based on the most likely venues for activities, given the space.

⁴⁸³ It is possible and even probable that other activities besides these took place in the Cubicula and in other catacomb spaces. These other activities, however, are either unattested, as in the case of the persistent but unfounded belief that the catacombs were venues for secret meetings or hiding places from persecutions, or they are not directly relevant to the function of the space, such as maintenance, excavation of new tunnels, generic religious services (also unattested), and personal mourning.

the direct usage of the spaces—the ways the Cubicula of the Sacraments were being used, and the ways those uses signified and reinforced heterotopia. Burial and pilgrimage both set the community in opposition to normative behaviors and stances, asserting community identity against hegemonic Rome. And the latter practices, baptism and communal meals, while likely not regularly taking place inside the Cubicula of the Sacraments, were nonetheless richly referenced in them, and they represent practices of the community that were being brought into the Cubicula through citation and reference in text and art. These practices too reflected a community self-definition in the face of more normative Roman behaviors, and they too speak to the heterotopia found in the Cubicula of the Sacraments. I begin with one of those practices taking place inside the space itself, burial, and then move to practices of the community referenced in the spaces, baptism and communal meals. I will conclude with an analysis of the other practice taking place within the catacombs, the one coming latest in time, pilgrimage and the cult of the saints.

Burial

Burial is the most obvious practice associated with the Cubicula of the Sacraments. At the same time, however, this crucial function of the catacombs has sometimes been glossed over by scholars, who tend to be more interested in the art and the history of the spaces than in their uses as cemeteries.⁴⁸⁴ De Rossi estimated that the Roman catacombs contained four million distinct graves, a reminder that above all the

⁴⁸⁴ This is especially true of scholars of the catacombs particularly; catacomb scholars tend to focus on the archaeological and art-historical, and not the social. Scholars of Roman death and funerary practices frequently reference the catacombs for grave data, but are less concerned with funerary liturgies and practices.

Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacomb spaces were places for burying the dead.⁴⁸⁵ In earlier chapters, I discussed the significant attention that Foucault paid to cemeteries as paragons of heterotopia. Foucault emphasizes both cemeteries' set-apartness from everyday spaces and their function of accumulating time into a single space as evidence for their intensely heterotopian nature. Here, however, a slightly different emphasis is in order: the Roman Christians' distinctive care for the dead, including their comfort with contact with corpses, their use of burial as the preferred method of disposing of the dead, and the way the practice of burial arose from and reinforced their belief in a resurrection of the body.

Surprisingly little is known of early Christian funerary practices and rites. Jon Davies provides a helpful but dispiriting summary of what little we know. Drawing from the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, likely a 3rd century Greek text based on the *Didache* and extant in Syriac, Latin, and Greek fragments, Davies compiles a list of features of early Christian burial.⁴⁸⁶ Colored by his self-professed sociological approach (informed by

⁴⁸⁵ W.H. Withrow, *The Catacombs of Rome and their Testimony Relative to Primitive Christianity* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1901), 21. Tour guides at the Callistus Catacomb give informal estimates of about 700,000 graves in that complex alone.

⁴⁸⁶ The *Didascalia Apostolorum* was likely composed in Greek by a Christian convert in Syria, probably in the 3rd century. Its accuracy for practices current in Rome at the time could not have been very good. It does provide a helpful look into one Christian burial practice, which likely would have been similar to that in Rome, but we must be careful in using it too freely. Davies mixes information from the *Didascalia* with archaeology evidence from the catacombs to make his reconstruction, making it a plausible vision of early Christian burial in Rome, but not a strictly historical one. A good modern English translation of the *Didascalia* has been made by Alistair Stewart-Sykes; the relevant section of the *Didascalia* for Davies comes in chapter 26, which argues against traditional Jewish purity regulations, and for a more libertine purity practice. Amongst other purity concerns, such as emissions of semen and women's menstruation, the *Didascalia* suggests that while "in the secondary legislation anyone who touches a tomb or somebody who is dead is to be baptized, but you, in accordance with the Gospel and in accordance with the power of the Holy Spirit, gather in the cemeteries to read the Holy Scriptures and to offer your prayers and your rites to God without observance and offer an acceptable eucharist, the likeness of the royal body of Christ, both in your congregations and in your cemeteries and on the departure of those who sleep." Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Didascalia Apostolorum: An English Version with Introduction and Annotation*, Studia

Weber), Davies focuses on a key point of Christian difference—that they did not understand corpses as pollutants, as most if not all of their Roman pagan and Jewish neighbors did. “Quintessentially and distinctively,” writes Davies, “Christians insisted always that the dead were not polluting, and that their deaths and funerals were occasions for displays of hope, not resignation or fear.”⁴⁸⁷ Perhaps because of their firm belief in bodily resurrection, Christians were far more comfortable in the presence of corpses than either their Jewish or pagan Roman neighbors. From this special feature of Christianity arose some of the other distinguishing marks of early Christian funeral practice: an extended period between death and burial (as long as three or four days), and inhumation rather than cremation.⁴⁸⁸ Other practices, such as singing, praying for the dead, revisiting the grave at prescribed intervals, and facing the body up and to the east, were less distinctively Christian, though still infused with Christian meaning and purpose.⁴⁸⁹

Scholars of death and dying in late antique Rome invariably point to the contrarian nature of Christian attitudes toward death. Christians inverted and changed

Traditionis Theologiae: Explorations in Early and Medieval Theology (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 255-56. “Without observance” is Stewart-Sykes’ attempt to connect cemetery practice back to the observance of the law; R. Hugh Connolly renders the line “without demur.” R. Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), <http://www.bombaxo.com/didascalia.html>. *Did. apost.* XXVI.vi.22.

⁴⁸⁷ Jon Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Antiquity*, Religion in the First Christian Centuries (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 198.

⁴⁸⁸ Inhumation became increasingly fashionable in Rome beginning with the advent of the Empire, and by the fourth century it was the usual method. Cremation was at its most popular during the late Republic, and its popularity waned in relation to the rise of inhumation. Further discussion of this dynamic will occur below. Jews in Rome buried their dead, of course, as well as other ethnic and religious groups, many hailing from the Near East, where Davies and others place the local origins of inhumation. The vacillations of fashion between inhumation and cremation in Rome will be the subject of a section below. *Ibid.*, 198-99. Arthur Darby Nock, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 277-307.

⁴⁸⁹ Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 199. See also Frederick S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 19-27., and Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 1-8.

pagan practices and norms at every point: in dying and care for the dying, in care for corpses, in funerary practices (including the disposal of the body), and in grave practices in the days, weeks, months, and years following death. Each of these stages of dying and death were integral to Christian experiences of death, and each of them are evident in the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacomb spaces, the venue for all the stages but the dying itself.⁴⁹⁰ Before considering how the accumulations of these acts and practices into the Cubicula contributed to the heterotopia there, we will briefly review each aspect of Christian death, and the ways Christian experiences and practices of death inverted and changed more normative practices.

Christian death began with Christian dying. Rodney Stark's analysis of early Christian growth rates argues a significant difference between the practices of Christians and their pagan neighbors in caring for the sick and dying. Drawing from primary sources such as letters of Cyprian and Dionysius, Stark argues that Christian ethical proscriptions and theological commitments meant that they were far more likely to provide nursing care to people in the midst of epidemics, resulting in greater survival rates and increased conversion rates by people convinced by the "miracle" of Christian survival.⁴⁹¹

Furthermore, upon death, Christians were more likely than their non-Christian neighbors

⁴⁹⁰ Somewhat elliptically, the act of dying was brought into the burial spaces at the end of the process and not the beginning, in the veneration of martyrs. This phenomenon will be the subject of a later section. The exception is the rare tale of martyrdom within the catacombs, of which the death of Sixtus II is indicative. Tradition has it that Sixtus was beheaded in the Callistus Catacomb after being discovered there leading a Christian service. A letter of Cyprian notes that four deacons were also executed there with him. Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 61.

⁴⁹¹ Stark is a sociologist by training, and so some of his assumptions and arguments suffer from his thin training in religious studies and history, and many of his sources are outdated. Nevertheless, Stark provides a novel look into the social world of the early Christians, particularly in urban environments like Rome. In any case, I am not interested here in Stark's conclusions, which have to do with how Christian practices influenced growth rates, but rather with the social world he reconstructs, which is instructive on the subject of Christian care for the sick and dying. Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 73-90.

to provide funeral services even in the midst of an epidemic.⁴⁹² The various theological commitments and ethical obligations that led to this result are not the purview of this dissertation; what matters here is that the Christian response to dying and death were markedly different than other contemporary responses—different enough to register measurably on the scale of sociology.

Attention to two of the primary sources Stark references will underscore the point. Writing in the midst of the widespread plague during the reign of Gallus and Volucianus (251-253), Cyprian of Carthage penned his treatise *Mortality* to Christians who had been demoralized by the pestilence and recent persecutions.⁴⁹³ In it, he lionized both the suffering undergone by Christians and the care they showed to each other, while criticizing the behavior of others during the crisis. For Cyprian, the plague was a kind of winnowing, during which the just are separated from the just—and in his estimation, the godly from the ungodly. “What significance,” he writes, “all this has!” He continues,

How suitable, how necessary it is that this plague and pestilence, which seems horrible and deadly, searches out the justice of each and every one and examines the minds of the human race; whether the well care for the sick, whether relatives dutifully love their kinsmen as they should, whether masters show compassion to their ailing slaves, whether physicians do not desert the afflicted begging their help, whether the violent repress their violence, whether the greedy, even through the fear of death, quench the ever insatiable fire of their raging avarice, whether the proud bend their necks, whether the shameless soften their effrontery, whether the rich, even when their dear ones are perishing and they are about to die without heirs, bestow and give something! Although this mortality has contributed nothing else, it has especially accomplished this for Christians and servants of God in that

⁴⁹² Ibid., 82-83.

⁴⁹³ In his brief introduction to this treatise, translator Roy J. Deferrari notes that many Christians were fearful of dying of the plague, thereby depriving them of their opportunity for martyrdom. Generally speaking, writes Deferrari, conditions at the time were such that nearly everyone was despondent. Cyprian of Carthage, *St. Cyprian: Treatises*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, vol. 36, The Fathers of the Church (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc, 1958), 195-97.

we have begun gladly to seek martyrdom while we are learning not to fear death.⁴⁹⁴

Here Cyprian sees a redeeming quality of the plague: that it highlights the virtues of Christians, and underscores the depravity of everyone else. In the previous chapter, Cyprian had specified that “this mortality is a bane to the Jews and pagans and enemies of Christ,” but a boon to his coreligionists. We see then the features of Christianity that Stark describes as useful for increasing survival rates—among them care for the dying in the face of the fear of death—as integrated into the theology of at least one Christian of the period.

Eusebius records a similar tale from the pen of Dionysius of Alexandria. In the midst of an epidemic there, Dionysius describes a horrific scene—“vile exhalations wafted from land, sea, rivers, and the harbor mists that it is the discharges from corpses rotting down to their component elements that form the dew.”⁴⁹⁵ Given this landscape of terrible disease, Dionysius too draws distinctions between the behavior of Christians and the behavior of “heathen.” He describes the care for the sick and dying, including a note that “many who nursed others to health died themselves, thus transferring their death to themselves,” which Dionysius considers “a form of death in every way equal to martyrdom.”⁴⁹⁶ This valorization of care for the dying, emphasizing the bonds of community and an ethic of selfless care, fits well with Stark’s model of Christian growth.

⁴⁹⁴ *Mort.* 16.

⁴⁹⁵ Maier, *Eusebius*, 267.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 269.

It *does* seem that Christians understood their own attitudes towards death and behavior around it to differ from those of other people.

Following death, the Christian care for bodies was also different from pagan responses in similar situations. Dionysius, at the end of the letter cited above, relays with a note of pride that

“they would also take up the bodies of the saints, close their eyes, shut their mouths, and carry them on their shoulders. They would embrace them, wash and dress them in burial clothes, and soon receive the same services themselves.”⁴⁹⁷

This, along with evidence from the *Didascalia Apostolorum* and other ancient sources, suggests that Christians abandoned the common idea that corpses were polluting. “And so you are to have contact with those who rest,” reads the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, “without regard for observances, and not to consider them unclean.”⁴⁹⁸ In other words, the *Didascalia* assumes widespread prohibitions against contact with corpses, and argues that the Christian theological stance that those who have died are merely “sleeping” requires a different response.⁴⁹⁹ Christians also maintained a longer period between death

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ “Observances” here refers to the theme of the section, which has in view purity regulations that would be violated by the actions suggested by the text. Stewart-Sykes, *The Didascalia Apostolorum*, 256. *Did. apost.* XXVI.vi.22.

⁴⁹⁹ Care must be taken here with regard to the context of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*. The document probably has in view the widespread near eastern purity prohibitions, and not the sorts of taboos that would have been in effect in Rome. Non-Jews did not have purity concerns about contact with corpses in the same way that Jews did. However, non-Jewish responses such as the one from Julian at the beginning of this chapter, as well as the contrast drawn by Dionysius between Christian and non-Christian care for the dead, demonstrate that Christian tolerance of corpses was far greater than non-Christian tolerance, and that the Christian comfort with corpses, and later with relics, was a source of bafflement and disgust for non-Christians.

and the funeral than did their pagan neighbors, suggesting a greater comfort with the presence of corpses.⁵⁰⁰

Christians practiced inhumation from the beginning of their existence in Rome. Nock attributes this bias to the “following of Jewish custom, hallowed by the burial of Jesus,” and the evidence of suggests that in Rome the Christian use of catacombs is likely dependent on prior Jewish usage.⁵⁰¹ The appearance of Christian burial in Rome came in the midst of, and perhaps contributed to, a dramatic change in the burial habits of the broader Roman populace. Prior to the first century BCE, burial had predominated in the Republic. In the first centuries BCE and CE, however, disposal of the dead in Rome began to be accomplished overwhelmingly through cremation. Pliny the Elder attributed this change thusly:

Cremation is not actually an old custom at Rome: formerly bodies were buried. However, cremation was adopted after it became known that the bodies of those fallen in foreign wars were sometimes dug up again. Many families, however, still observed the old rites; for example, it is recorded that no one in the Cornelian family was cremated before Sulla the dictator who requested this because, having disinterred the body of Gaius Marius, he was afraid that others might do the same to him.⁵⁰²

In the second and third centuries CE, Roman funeral practices underwent another change, this time from cremation back to burial. By the end of the fourth century, notes Nock, a certain Macrobius understands cremation as “something of the distant past:”

⁵⁰⁰ Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth*, 198-99.

⁵⁰¹ Nock, *Essays on Religion*, 288. For the precedence of Jewish catacombs, see Rutgers et al., "Jewish Inspiration."

⁵⁰² Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome*, 110.

Although there is in our age no practice of burning the bodies of the dead, we know from reading that at the time at which it was reckoned an honor to the dead that they should be given to the flames, if it ever happened that many bodies were burnt together, the attendants usually added one woman's body to ten men's.⁵⁰³

By the end of the fourth century, then, custom had returned to burial as the preferred method of disposing of the body. Nock notes that references to cremation persist through the late second and early third centuries, but it seems clear that by the time the Callistus Catacomb and other Christian catacombs were being built in earnest, most of the Christians' pagan neighbors had also begun burying their dead.

This chronology—that the pagan return to burial came just as Christians began to dig underground cemeteries—has been understood to preclude the possibility that the change was due to the influence of Christianity. Nock, in particular, understands the chronology to be “fatal to that supposition” that Christianity provoked a return to inhumation.⁵⁰⁴ He sees the change as originating from a change in “fashion,” and perhaps through the influence of various mystery religions in Rome at the time.⁵⁰⁵

Nock is undoubtedly correct that Christianity likely did not *cause* the shift from cremation to burial in the second and third centuries. It seems likely, however, that at the very least Christians were early adopters of the trend that became, in Nock's words, “fashionable.” Christianity was present in Rome at least as early as the middle of the first century, as Paul's letter to “God's beloved in Rome” demonstrates, written around the

⁵⁰³ Nock, *Essays on Religion*, 280.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁵⁰⁵ Hope, *Death in Ancient Rome*, 110. Nock, *Essays on Religion*, 307-07.

year 57.⁵⁰⁶ Furthermore, if the Acts of the Apostles is to be taken historically, upon Paul's disembarkation at Puteoli, a major port in the present-day Bay of Naples, he encountered other Christians and stayed with them for a week—suggesting that Christianity was a well-established presence in Italy by about the year 60, even in smaller towns and cities.⁵⁰⁷ Christianity, then, appears to have been established very early on in Rome and its surrounding environs—well within the period in which cremation was still the dominant method of disposing of the dead, and inhumation was still relatively rare. While there were no Christian catacombs in this period, Christian burials certainly took place there in family plots and sarcophagi, and all evidence suggests a Christian preference for burial from the beginning of the faith's presence in Rome.⁵⁰⁸

The chronology must be more complicated than Nock and others assert. Christian burial practices must have originated along with Christianity's presence in Rome, by the middle of the first century, and those practices had roots in Jewish burial practices, which had held in Rome for much longer. These origins are squarely within the heyday of cremation. While the Christian *catacombs* appear relatively late in this chronology, Christian *burial* was already a long-established practice by then. It was a practice

⁵⁰⁶ Romans 1:7.

⁵⁰⁷ Acts 28:13-15.

⁵⁰⁸ Given the especially close and enduring relationship between what are now known as Christianity and Judaism in Rome, I consider it very likely that the Jewish catacombs, such as that on the Via Torlonia, were the final resting place of Christ-believing Jews and non-Christ-believing Jews alike. I hypothesize that the origins of the Christian catacombs coincides with the period in which the “parting of the ways” between Judaism and Christianity took place in Rome—the middle and second half of the second century. It may be that a reconsideration of Roman Christianity is in order, given the particularly non-Pauline nature of the churches there, and given the recent work of scholars like Daniel Boyarin. It is my hope that the catacombs—including the Jewishness of their art and texts, and the close relationship between Jewish and Christian catacombs historically—might provide some of the evidence for this reconsideration when it comes.

established against the grain of fashion and popularity, and it was a distinguishing practice, as the Christian Minucius Felix has his pagan respondent suggest: “That of course is why they abominate pyres and condemn the disposal of the dead by fire, just as though everybody, though saved from the flames, did not with years and generations pass into the earth.”⁵⁰⁹ Minucius has his protagonist respond on behalf of the Christian position: “We do not, as you believe, fear any loss arising from the way of disposing of the body, but we practice the old and better customs of burial.”⁵¹⁰ This interchange depends on both the uniqueness of the Christian position (attributed by the interlocutor to Christian belief in the resurrection) and on the understanding that the Christian position is an older practice.⁵¹¹ So while burial of the dead was becoming a mainstream Roman practice by the time of the first Christian catacombs, its origins were nevertheless as a practice counter to prevailing habit, and represent a significant departure from normative Roman behavior. These against-the-grain aspects of Christian burial, like care for the dying and care for corpses, were brought into the funeral spaces—into the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other spaces like them—through the rituals and practices that took place there.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁹ Minucius Felix lived approximately between the mid-second and mid-to-late-third centuries—suggesting a vivid distinction between Christian and non-Christian attitudes toward inhumation well into the third century.

⁵¹⁰ Nock, *Essays on Religion*, 287-88.

⁵¹¹ Nock notes that a similar understanding of Christian beliefs about resurrection is operative in Lyons, where the bodies of martyrs were thrown into the Rhine, perhaps in an attempt to offend Christian hope of bodily resurrection. *Ibid.*, 288 n. 63.

⁵¹² While calling for further investigation and expressing skepticism that the matter will ever be settled, Ian Morris broadly agrees with the perspective above. “And for all the weaknesses of theories which make Christianity the prime mover,” Morris writes, agreeing with Nock to a degree, “it can hardly be denied that this ritual unity and its fortuitous overlap with the Jewish customs which the Christians favoured must have

The final aspect of Christian burial—the continued presence at the grave of family members following burial, including meals—was in strong continuity with normative Roman pagan practice. Pagans in Rome (and elsewhere) had a rich tradition of visiting the grave site or funerary altar of the deceased, which Christians maintained; the funerary meal with the dead “was one of the most powerful forces in the early Church,” writes Graydon Snyder—indeed, “a powerful force in the Greco-Roman world, considered with or without Christianity.”⁵¹³ Ramsay MacMullen summarizes the various observances expected of mourners:

a set of three days of remembrance post-inhumation, and then a fourth day on the seventh or ninth day, and then a fifth day on the thirtieth or fortieth, and then annually thereafter on the birthday of the deceased, or on January 1, on a universal week in February ending on the 22nd, and on a later day or days (March, May, June) celebrated with flowers and a more elaborate liturgy—which is not to say that every family observed every one of these occasions....At each occasion, however, there would have been a picnic in the old style, a *refrigerium*.⁵¹⁴

These remembrances were not specifically Christian, but were shared by Christians, pagans, and others alike. That Christians partook in them is attested: tubes for the provision of food and drink to the deceased adorn Christian tombs and sarcophagi just as they do pagan ones. Graffiti in various catacombs attests to specific meals shared with

aided the spread of the new faith.” Christianity might not have instigated the shift from cremation to inhumation, but its strong preference for the practice must, in its earliest days, have been unfashionable, and then avant-garde, and finally mainstream. That the greatest (and for a long time, only) structures of the faith were dedicated primarily to inhumation makes this a very consequential sequence of positions vis a vis the rest of Roman society. Ian Morris, *Death-Ritual and Social Structure in Classical Antiquity*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 68.

⁵¹³ Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 125-26.

⁵¹⁴ Emphasis original. MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 77.

the dead, even noting the date and participants.⁵¹⁵ The Christian *refrigerium*, or funerary meal, would have been taken above-ground, in a style indistinguishable from similar pagan meals.⁵¹⁶ The practice was pervasive enough, and powerful enough, that it drew the ire of bishops in North Africa, who felt that the universal day for visiting with the dead, February 22nd, provided too much opportunity to mingle with pagan neighbors and be led astray.⁵¹⁷ MacMullen, in fact, hypothesizes that such funerary events formed the primary location of popular Christianity in the period of 200-400, which accounts for the hostility of church administrators toward them. This “second church,” MacMullen suggests, represented for the bishops a challenge to the emerging basilica-based model of church.⁵¹⁸

MacMullen hypothesizes that these family-level remembrances and celebrations gave rise to the cult of martyrdom.⁵¹⁹ This must have happened very early, since by the

⁵¹⁵ Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, 135-36. Image for Figure 1 taken from Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 177.

⁵¹⁶ The common image of a meal, discussed above in Chapters 4 and 5, will be treated later in this chapter as evidence of communal meal practice. I do not, however, hold that these images depict funerary meals, as some do.

⁵¹⁷ Aurelius, in particular, condemned the excesses of funerary meals and the opportunities they presented for the dilution of Christian practices. Aurelius was bishop of Carthage in the late fourth century. None other than Augustine supported him in his criticism. MacMullen, *The Second Church*, 60-61, 79-80.

⁵¹⁸ MacMullen’s book is premised on a problem: that the church spaces available in his somewhat-odd period of study (200-400) were insufficient to accommodate the actual population of Christians. To solve this problem, MacMullen posits the existence of a “second church,” an altogether more popular and less hierarchical entity than the “official” church. Away from the eyes of bishops, this second church flourished, MacMullen notes, around the popular practice of graveside remembrance. Though I accept and find useful much of the evidence MacMullen provides in the service of making his argument, I’m unsure whether the period 200-400 is a useful one, and I’m also uncertain whether the spatial limitations of a church building are *necessarily* evidence that Christianity must have been flourishing elsewhere. Nevertheless, his reconstruction of graveside practice is useful, and his characterization of it as primarily a popular phenomenon, and not a sanctioned one, rings true. *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

middle of the third century—just decades into the existence of the Christian catacombs—elements were in place that would mark the rise of the cult of the saints.⁵²⁰ The emergence of this feature of early Christianity, centered so strongly in the catacombs, is the subject of the next section of this chapter. Here, though, it should be noted that while Christianity largely mirrored pagan practice with respect to the *refrigerium* and visits to the grave at prescribed periods, that practice quickly morphed into something altogether different, and something that gave a markedly heterotopian quality to the space.

For the most central practice that took place in the catacombs, then, we have distinctive Christian practices at nearly every stage. In the care of the dying, Christians distinguished themselves from pagans in their attentiveness, so much that the effect was noticed by contemporaries and is measurable statistically. For care of bodies, Christians were far more comfortable with corpses than either Jews or pagan Romans, thus extending the period between death and inhumation (and laying the groundwork for the cult of the saints which was to come). In the matter of disposing of the dead, Christians practiced inhumation, in accordance with the fashion at the time of the catacombs, but in contradiction with the broader culture in the period in which Christian burial practices emerged. And the ongoing grave practices of Christians, while in harmony with those of pagans, ultimately gave rise to the cult of the saints, to which we turn in a moment. Christian death, then, was distinct from Roman death broadly construed. Christian beliefs and practices about death were unique enough to draw the comments of many a pagan, and their ire as well. All of these differences, distinctions, and against-the-grain beliefs

⁵²⁰ Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 50. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, dated to the middle of the second century, gives early evidence for the collection of relics. *The Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18.2.

and practices funneled into one space: the catacombs—spaces like the Cubicula of the Sacraments. Although the specifics of a funeral liturgy are absent before the early Middle Ages, we can be certain that the funerals that took place in the catacombs were the repositories—the final resting place, as it were—of the constellation of Christian beliefs about dying and death, most significantly the pervasive (and bizarre, to pagan Romans) belief in a bodily resurrection.⁵²¹ As such, the catacombs were home to the distilled symbolic power of the Christian world-view, so much at odds with that of pagan Romans. The catacombs, in their function as burial sites, were in constant critique of normative Roman world-views.

Baptism

In Chapters 4 and 5, we saw that scenes of baptism appear in Cubicula A2 and A3, as well as in other catacomb spaces outside of the Cubicula of the Sacraments. Furthermore, other images—like the Jonah cycle and the fisherman—may also carry baptismal import. In these ways, baptism is both explicit and implicit in the Cubicula; it was the common occurrence of this motif that led Counter-Reformation interpreters to consider it a reference to the sacrament, which in turn led to the prepositional nomenclature “of the Sacraments.” Along with meal imagery (the sacrament of eucharist, by the reckoning of early interpreters, to be treated in the next section), baptism was one of the characteristic ideas of the Cubicula. For the catacombs’ sixteenth and seventeenth century interpreters, these allusions to baptism and eucharist were what defined the character and purpose of the rooms: they were an expression of faith and sacramental

⁵²¹ Cyrille Vogel provides a brief overview of the Ordo XLIX, a death rite. She dates its origins to Rome in first half of the eighth century. Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, trans. William G. and Niels Krogh Rasmussen Storey, O.P. (Washington D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1986), 187.

activity that, in the counter-Reformation context, pointed to a continuity and antiquity to the Catholic tradition.

My purpose here is not to demonstrate continuity with the present, but to sketch the contours of early Roman Christianity's relationship with more normative Roman pagan society, as evidenced in the spaces of the Cubicula. In this regard, the references to baptism are valuable evidence of a central practice of the community, brimming with meaning and symbolism for the sect's relationship with the world, and evidence of how the makers of the catacombs understood the spaces' stance toward the rest of their world. Although there is no evidence that baptisms took place in the catacombs, the evocation of the practice there is strongly suggestive of community self-identity and self-definition, and the rite nevertheless maintains a kind of presence both on the walls of the catacombs and in the construction of their space.

“For most of the Christians of the earliest centuries,” writes David Bentley Hart in his response to Everett Ferguson's monumental book on baptism, “baptism was understood as nothing less than a personal rebellion against the cosmic, political, and spiritual order of ancient paganism.” The rite was, he continued, a “renunciation of evil gods and demons,” designed to signify a stark turning point, a *μετάνοια* in a person's life.⁵²² He continues, later in his essay, to note that “long ago...one's baptism was not only one of the most momentous events of one's life—and even perhaps the most dramatic, terrifying, and joyous—but also a genuine transformation of everything one

⁵²² David Bentley Hart, "Baptism and Cosmic Allegiance: A Brief Observation," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20, no. 3 (2012): 457.

was.⁵²³ Here, Hart notes, we fall into a trap if we assume that baptism was for early Christians what it is for Christians today; while today it is a rite of passage for Christians, often a perfunctory one, marked more by inevitability than genuine endeavor. For ancient Christians, though, baptism was a statement in which Christians rejected their prior lives, and with them nearly the entirety of the institutions, values, beliefs, and practices of normative Roman society.

The study of early Christian baptism has been greatly aided in recent years by the publication of several excellent and comprehensive reviews of early evidence and its interpretation. Maxwell Johnson's well-known book was revised and expanded in a second edition in 2007.⁵²⁴ Ferguson, mentioned above, published his volume in 2009.⁵²⁵ And in 2011, de Gruyter published an exhaustive edited work in three volumes, spanning two thousand pages.⁵²⁶ These three works all take a similar approach, which is to divide the history of baptism by period and location, and to mine primary texts in hopes of shedding light on the earliest practices and meanings associated with Christian baptism. In each case, the familiar debates about immersion versus pouring, infant baptism, and the particulars of the liturgies of various places and times are adjudicated, but those do not concern us here. What we are interested in here is the particular the meaning of the rite in Rome in the second and third centuries, in the time at which baptism was central

⁵²³ Ibid., 458.

⁵²⁴ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007).

⁵²⁵ Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁵²⁶ David Hellholm, Tor Vegge, Øyvind Norderval, and Christer Hellholm, ed. *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism: Late Antiquity, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, 3 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011).

enough to the life of the community that images of it and allusions to it were painted in the catacombs.⁵²⁷

“It is extremely frustrating,” writes Johnson, “that the evidence for the evolution and interpretation of the rites of Christian initiation within the highly important and influential Church of Rome during the first three centuries is so limited,” particularly in contrast to other locations of the same period, such as North Africa.⁵²⁸ This paucity of information from Rome means that reconstructions of early Roman baptism are reliant on a few problematic textual references—in Justin Martyr, Hippolytus’ *Commentary on Daniel*, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, and a large portion of the *Apostolic Tradition*—as well as comparisons to other locations.⁵²⁹ The best evidence comes from the *Shepherd* and its account, which Ferguson holds in high esteem, and from the *Apostolic Tradition*, which some suggest might preserve the outlines of a liturgy which is very similar to those attested elsewhere.

Johnson is skeptical about the *Apostolic Tradition*, drawing attention to problems with early attestations, which lack the critical sections on initiation and baptism. It is not clear, Johnson suggests, that the text is either Roman or very ancient; it is more likely that it is a late composite of materials from across Christian community, and that it has very

⁵²⁷ For a look to the function of baptism in a slightly earlier but no less important period, see the work of Wayne Meeks. Meeks identifies baptism as *the* initiation rite in the Pauline period, and sketches some of the outlines of baptismal practice in Pauline Christianity. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians : The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 150-57.

⁵²⁸ Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, 96.

⁵²⁹ Justin Martyr is held to be problematic by Johnson because, in his estimation, it “is probably structurally and theologically more Syrian than Roman.” The references in the *Commentary on Daniel* might describe a paschal baptismal time, and an anointing with oil following baptism, as seemed to be custom in North Africa. The work is possibly that of Hippolytus, a bishop in Rome opposed to Callistus. The same author is suggested for the *Apostolic Tradition*. *Ibid.*, 96-110.

little to do with Christianity in Rome—or, that if it does, that it is only a “core” that is from Rome, and not the entirety of the document.⁵³⁰ Johnson is dismissive of using the *Apostolic Tradition* as evidence for baptismal beliefs and practices in early Roman Christianity, a position I adopt here.

That leaves comparisons with baptismal practices from other locations in Christianity (of which the *Apostolic Tradition* might be a record, if Johnson is correct), and the material found in the *Shepherd of Hermas*. The *Shepherd* is absent from Johnson’s analysis; he seems unaware of its baptismal imagery or its likely provenance in Rome, ideally suited to inform readers about Christianity in that city. It does not escape the notice of either Ferguson or the authors and editors of the de Gruyter volumes, however; the former devotes a section to the work in his section on the Apostolic Fathers in the second century, and the latter includes an essay by Vemund Blomkvist on the work. In both cases the *Shepherd of Hermas* is found to be useful for reconstructing the meaning and import of baptism in early Roman Christianity; Ferguson ultimately finds a stronger case for using the work, though Blomkvist too finds it full of useful allusions.

Ferguson and Blomkvist both understand themselves as joining a consensus view, which holds that while the *Shepherd of Hermas* is never explicit about baptism, the ritual and its symbolism undergirds several parts of the work. Indeed, Blomkvist notes, *μετάνοια* and the notion of a second *μετάνοια* are central to the purpose and meaning of the book.⁵³¹ The *Shepherd of Hermas*, says Blomkvist, is not so much about baptism and the initiation attendant with it, as it is about the living of the Christian life and the

⁵³⁰ Ibid.

⁵³¹ Hellholm, *Ablution, Initiation, and Baptism*, 853.

possibilities of negating one's baptism and requiring a second μετάνοια.⁵³² This turns out to be critical to our understanding of the social function of baptism in early Christian contexts like Hermas' native Rome, however: baptism is understood to be a final, absolute turning away from the past and the world, a μετάνοια from all the accommodations to society and its idolatries that Christians understood to be false and evil.⁵³³ Even if there is to be a second turning, as the *Shepherd* suggests there is, that mercy is available only once in a lifetime. The work of baptism is utterly efficacious; it cannot be performed again, and if impugned, it will damn the sinning Christian more surely than if he had never been baptized in the first place.

These readings of the *Shepherd of Hermas* suggest as much about the social function of baptism in Rome in the second and third centuries as the *Apostolic Tradition* would if it were found to be genuinely from that time and place. In its strong argument for a definitive μετάνοια in the moment of baptism, and the consequences of going back on that repentance, the *Shepherd of Hermas* is illuminating the social function of the ritual for early Roman Christian community like those of the Cubicula of the Sacraments. This function was to set Christians apart from all other persons—to set them in opposition—and to set the church and its beliefs and ideologies in opposition to those of other institutions and associations. The *Shepherd of Hermas* joins this argument *in media res*, focusing on the aftermath and consequences of the ritual, but it is nevertheless centrally concerned with its ramifications across that divide. Put into spatial terms, for the *Shepherd of Hermas* and for early Christianity baptism is like a door. It allows for exiting

⁵³² Ibid., 854.

⁵³³ See, for example, Hebrews 6.

one space and entering another, but one may not occupy both spaces at the same time. In a more fanciful analogy (but not unfitting for the *Shepherd's* fantastical visions), baptism is like a one-way portal in a work of science fiction. It transports you in one direction, but the move will have been so fundamental that to attempt travel in the other direction would be to risk destruction.

To evoke baptism in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, then, was to evoke a powerful and irrevocable signifier of discontinuity with pagan culture. It was to inscribe in art, for those who understood what the image depicted, the absolute rupture between Christian living and all other kinds of living. This was, as Hart notes, what vexed Celsus so—that Christians should eschew the accumulated wisdom of the world, its traditions, and its ethics. It abandoned them all in the baptismal font in favor of a new creed. And “no creed could have been more subversive of the ancient wisdom of the world,” writes Hart, “and no movement more worthy of the hatred of those for whom that wisdom was the truth of the ages.”⁵³⁴

Meals

In Chapter 4, the banqueting images of the Cubicula of the Sacraments were discussed as representations of hope and expectation—as visions of the world as it could and would be. Radically asserting egalitarian values and plentitude at the eschaton, these banqueting scenes were, it was argued, a way for the community to give voice to its competing vision of social order and economic justice.

⁵³⁴ Hart, "Baptism and Cosmic Allegiance," 464.

As noted in that section, however, the banquet images in the Cubicula of the Sacraments are not simply proleptic. They are also based on and representative of actual meals current in the community—meals which formed the core of common life for the Christians of the catacombs and elsewhere. These meals, called the ἀγάπη or “love” meal or feast, are attested from the letters of Paul (in the middle of the first century) through the fourth century, at which time the Eucharist and the common meal seem to have differentiated, and the common meal lost much of its importance.⁵³⁵ For “a broad stream” of early Christianity, as Jewett puts it, the common meal or ἀγάπη was a central and critical part of the life of the community. Held in the homes of hosts, the meals were an expression of communal identity, compassion and charity toward the poor, and the extension of “communion” to those belonging to other house-gatherings.⁵³⁶

Dennis Smith, however, points out that it should hardly surprise us that many early Christians celebrated a communal meal. “Early Christians met at a meal because that is what groups in the ancient world did,” writes Smith; “Christians were simply following a pattern found through their world.”⁵³⁷ This finding, while at odds with those who would put the origins of Christian table fellowship in the Jewish Passover or, more specifically, at the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples, is handily supported by the

⁵³⁵ Christian communal dining is referenced most famously in 1 Corinthians 11, but also in Jude 12, Acts 2, in Ignatius’ *Smyrn.* 8.2, and perhaps in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 (as Robert Jewett has argued). The history of the phenomenon is briefly traced by Robert Jewett, who follows Bo Reicke. Jewett, *Romans*, 66. Jewett’s argument about 2 Thessalonians can be found at Robert Jewett, “Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church: the Implications of a Form-Critical Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10,” *Biblical Research* 38 (1993).

⁵³⁶ The semantic range of οἶκος, notes Jewett, includes both the villa-style private home and the much more common apartment or tenement homes, called “insulae.” Jewett, *Romans*, 64.

⁵³⁷ Dennis Edwin Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003), 279.

evidence.⁵³⁸ Greeks, Romans, and Jews all had rich banqueting traditions, along with many other cultures and religions, all evidenced in literature and art. The practice was so ubiquitous in the Mediterranean basin that the only surprising result would have been if Christianity had *not* developed a common meal practice. The fact of a shared meal does not set Christians in Rome apart from their neighbors in any way.

What sets Christians apart, argues Smith, are the specifics of their meal, and the kinds of social boundaries the meal constructed and reinforced. Beginning with the form of the usual Greco-Roman symposium or banquet meal, early Christians augmented and substituted song and words to make a meal all their own. Christians likely maintained the various courses of the meal, Smith suggests, but added prayers before each.⁵³⁹ Certain ethical and ideological restrictions governed who could dine at the table. In place of the philosophical discussions of Greek symposia, Christians inserted discussions of the gospels or the law.⁵⁴⁰ Taken together, Smith notes, is nothing less than “the foundation for early Christian worship,” and the meal and its liturgy “was a significant factor in the development of early Christian theology.”⁵⁴¹

This is a lofty claim, but it is one with which I agree.⁵⁴² Beginning with the gospels and the letters of Paul, and extending throughout the pre-Constantinian period,

⁵³⁸ Smith is self-avowedly needling those who posit a special origin for eucharist and agape; his study, he suggests, demonstrates that none is necessary.

⁵³⁹ Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 282.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 281, 82.

⁵⁴² This is not to diminish the role of synagogue worship in the formation of Christian worship. It is simply to locate the most common and potent worship experiences of early Christians within the contexts of meals.

table fellowship was *a* or *the* primary location of Christian theology and meaning. As long as there were Christians, their communal meals significantly defined who they were.⁵⁴³ For early Christians, Smith notes, this gave rise to an egalitarian ethic, for which Christians became known (and for which they were sometimes reviled).⁵⁴⁴ This in turn helped form the social ethics of the new group, giving it a decidedly communitarian flavor, centered around the notion ἀγάπη, or commonly shared love and concern.

Peter Lampe, a keen observer of early Christian social practices in the city of Rome, asks whether a putative neighbor of a person hosting a Christian communal meal could tell the difference between it and an act of Christian worship, or between it and a meal typical of some other group in Rome. His answer is no; Christian meal practice likely would have been indistinguishable from other meal practices, and Christian meals would have been indistinguishable from Christian worship—at least to the hypothetical neighbor.⁵⁴⁵ In this regard the outside view of Christian meal practice is rather like the outside view of Christian art as discussed in Chapter 4: to outsiders, Christian practices and expressions of belief would have looked nearly normative and innocuous. But to insiders, they were potent markers of community identity and self-understanding, useful for setting the group apart from surrounding groups and ideas.

⁵⁴³ This is still the case for Christians today, of course; being “in communion” or being “excommunicated” has largely to do with sharing the Eucharist, a stylized meal and descendant of early Christian meal practices.

⁵⁴⁴ Smith is careful to point out that there was a long concern for egalitarianism in banqueting “dating from at least the time of Homer.” Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 283.

⁵⁴⁵ One might wonder if a particularly mixed socio-economic crowd, drawn from a wider slice of the social strata, might have alerted the neighbor that something unusual was afoot. Nevertheless, from a distance, Christian gatherings were of the same species as others in the city and the Empire. Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 275-76.

To the insider, then, the Christian communal meal practice, or the *ἀγάπη*, was a powerful expression of the community's essential coherence. It was an expression of hope and expectation, as was noted in Chapter 4, but it was also an important marker of the community's boundaries in the present. Table fellowship introduces a binary spatiality: people are either at the table, or they are not. Christianity developed mechanisms by which participation at the table could be regulated, but in most cases they strove for egalitarian inclusion and inclusion of the poor.⁵⁴⁶ And, as Lampe notes, even those who were not physically at the table, because of illness or other obligations, were routinely included in the meal fellowship through the sending out of leftovers following the meal.⁵⁴⁷

The communal meal, then, was a kind of space. It included at the table, usually physically but sometimes not, all those who were part of the "com-union," who were set apart from the rest of the city's inhabitants. And this space functioned as a heterotopia, defining itself in opposition to more normative spaces, and positioning the ideologies and theologies of its group in opposition to the ideologies and theologies of other groups. By depicting these meals on the walls of the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacomb spaces, the Christians of the catacombs were evoking the powerful signs and markers of communion and community identity inherent in them. To those with eyes to see, the banquet scenes were potent reminders of the set-apart nature of the community there, positioned as they were against the norms and practices of more normative and typical groups in Rome.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 407.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 386.

Pilgrimage, Martyrdom, and *Depositio Ad Sanctos*

This dissertation has not been organized chronologically; indeed, the force of its argument is that most of the spaces, images, texts, and practices it describes were operative at the same time, mutually reinforcing themselves and intensifying the heterotopian nature of the spaces they inhabited. There is one exception to this riot of synchronicity, and it is only by chance that it should come near the end of the argument. Following the primary age that I seek to describe—the initial creation and use of the catacombs in the late 2nd through the 5th centuries—came a second period, briefly described in Chapter 1, flourishing in the 5th and 6th centuries. This was a period of marked change in the usage of the catacombs, when new burials largely ceased and the spaces were given over to a frenzy of pilgrimage and veneration, precipitated by a recognition of the power of the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other spaces like them.⁵⁴⁸

Even during the initial period with which this dissertation has been concerned, however, there was already a keen sense among those who used the catacombs that the space was mapped with potency. In the third century, after perhaps just a generation or two of use, the catacombs became the site of intense competition and debate over the question of *depositio ad sanctos*, or the burial of bodies near other privileged graves, usually those of saints and martyrs. Families struggled to inter their loved ones as closely as possible to these “special dead,” out of a sense that doing so would improve their

⁵⁴⁸ The recent work of Candida Moss has nicely gathered the discussion around the persecution of Christianity before Constantine, which has been increasingly problematized by scholars in recent years. Christianity was not persecuted on an empire-wide scale as frequently or severely as has sometimes been imagined, and local persecutions, while sometimes severe, were sporadic. Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2013).

chances of salvation.⁵⁴⁹ Already in the still-early years of the catacombs, a generation or two into their use, there was a sense that the earliest period of their use was characterized by especially potent group identity and purpose, created by the space and what it held, and expressed for these second and third-generation catacomb users as sanctity and holiness in the bodies of saints and martyrs. This impulse to associate with martyrs and saints in death had an influence on the development of the catacombs, driving the development of richer tombs closer to the graves of the special dead, and shifting the common graves to the periphery or lower levels. And in the late fourth century, Damasus I attempted to unify Christianity in the city of Rome, factionalized following his controversial ascendancy, by restoring the graves of martyrs and saints, and composing inscriptions in verse for each of their graves, recounting their deeds and exploits.⁵⁵⁰

This action, whether motivated by piety, political expediency, or both, demonstrated that there was already a sense in the fourth century that the catacombs were

⁵⁴⁹ Augustine felt that the practice raised fundamental questions about Christian burial, and when queried on the matter by his friend Paulinus, bishop of Nola in southern Italy, composed a response in *De Cura Gerenda Pro Mortuis*. In the rather lengthy response, Augustine expresses skepticism that physical proximity itself could be beneficial to the deceased, but rather suggests that the practice is useful insofar as it calls to mind for the family of the departed its obligation to continue in prayer for him. Augustine, *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, vol. 27, *The Fathers of the Church* (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1955), 349-84.

⁵⁵⁰ Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 50-51. The inscription is translated:

*“If you are searching for them, here lies united an army of Saints,
these venerable tombs enclose their bodies,
while the Kingdom of Heaven has already welcomed their souls.
Here lie the companions of Sixtus who bear the trophies won from the enemy.
Here lie the brotherhood of popes who guard the altar of Christ.
Here the bishop who lived through a long peace.
Here the holy confessors sent to us from Greece.
Here young men and children, the elderly and their chaste offspring,
who desired to conserve their virginity.
Here too I, Damasus, confess I would like to be buried
were it not for the fear of disturbing the ashes of those holy persons.”*

Translation and all capitalization from Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus*, 64.

powerful spaces, having been imbued with meaning by the presence of those buried there.⁵⁵¹ Before, during, and after Damasus' restoration of the catacombs, Christians in Rome and throughout the Empire increasingly recognized that the catacombs were spatially powerful, and that proximity to them might bring about some blessing or confer some benefit. Here lie the origins of the so-called "cult of the saints" or "cult of the martyrs," which came to characterize the church from the third and sixth centuries, and which provides us with a looking-glass through which to view the Cubicula of the Sacraments and other catacomb spaces as they were seen by those who lived in their heyday.⁵⁵²

What we see through this glass largely confirms the arguments of this dissertation. The ancient Christians who jostled to be buried *ad sanctos*, and the late antique and early medieval Christians who made pilgrimage to the catacombs to be in contact with and in proximity to the saints and martyrs, had no word for "heterotopia." They did not argue that the spaces were constructed in critique and opposition to hegemonic Roman pagan customs, culture, and religion. They likely did not reflect on *why* the Cubicula of the Sacraments and all of the catacombs should be such places and

⁵⁵¹ A section from Peter Brown's book *Through the Eye of a Needle* serves to reflect the power of the idea of martyrdom working within the kind of spatial counter-construction argued I argue for in this dissertation. "In entering the churches, the rich might well have found a countercultural niche, a little to one side of the abrasive realities of the late Roman social system. One should not underestimate the attractions of such a situation. A Christian church, like a burial complex, could act as 'a sort of oblique expression of an ideal social order divorced from the compromising realities of life.' A place where hierarchy could be muted without being abandoned had considerable appeal in a competitive and ceremonious age. Nor should we underestimate the dangerous thrill—one that was continuous with former Roman philosophical countercultures—associated with the opportunity for symbolic dissidence provided by the cult of the martyrs. [...] Though the imperial system was never directly resisted, it could be relativized. It was treated as a mere "power of this world." It was robbed of its overbearing mystique by a comforting sense of the superior power of the God for whom the martyrs had died." Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 48.

⁵⁵² The range of dates, the third through the sixth centuries, is taken from Peter Brown. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 1.

spaces of powerful self-understanding and concentrated meaning. They simply recognized that *they were so*, and did all in their power to enter those spaces in life and in death. They understood that the images found in the spaces, the texts referenced by those images, the practices that were referenced and practiced there, and the spaces themselves all made a distinct and clear articulation of “the Christian thing,” and they were drawn to experience that articulation.

Pilgrimage characterized the catacombs in the 5th and 6th centuries. Burials persisted, mostly of the *ad sanctos* variety, but the catacombs were by this time a pilgrimage destination. Debra Birch notes that while the first extant pilgrim guides for Rome hail from the 7th century, these are simply codifications of what was already the common practice of the throngs of pilgrims visiting the city.⁵⁵³ These guides were sometimes organized as clockwise or counter-clockwise tours of the city, circling around the old Servian walls to visit the various catacombs, cemeteries, and martyr churches that were stationed there. Pilgrims from across the Mediterranean and beyond journeyed to Rome, sometimes leaving marks of their presence inscribed into the walls as graffiti.⁵⁵⁴ Drawn by the desire to have a powerful personal connection with the saints and martyrs

⁵⁵³ Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome*, 12.

⁵⁵⁴ Although it comes from another era, the case of a 1467 inscription by some anonymous Scottish pilgrims, found in the Callistus Catacomb, underscores the draw of the sites, and also softens the impact of the “discovery” of the catacombs after 1578 by Bosio. For more information on the Scottish inscription, see McEwan, “A Scottish Inscription.” A relatively full list of early Christian inscriptions in Rome, including graffiti in the catacombs, can be found at G.B. de Rossi, *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae: Septimo Saeculo Antiquiores* (Romae: Ex Officina Libraria Pontificia, 1861-1888).

of the church, pilgrims made the catacombs of Rome one of the great destinations of Europe.⁵⁵⁵

Christians of later eras, then, recognized that the catacombs were not like other spaces. They were profoundly othered spaces, set apart and distinguished from the spaces of the city (even basilicas and churches, flourishing by that time), uniquely imbued with the power of the early faith. Marked by images, inscribed by texts, worn by practice, and set apart from the city by the construction of their spaces, the catacombs and the graves they held stood by late antiquity as the preeminent expression of Christian identity and meaning.⁵⁵⁶

Conclusion

“The spatial practice of a society,” writes Lefebvre near the beginning of his *The Production of Space*, “secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it alters and appropriates it. From an analytic standpoint,” he continues, “the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.”⁵⁵⁷ Social practice, for Lefebvre, “secretes” the society’s space; the way people *use* space, in other words, shapes the contours of the

⁵⁵⁵ The earliest narration of a visit to the catacombs comes from Jerome, who in the middle of the fourth century used to visit them while a student in Rome. In his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, Jerome recounts the experience: “Dum essem Romae puer et liberalibus studiis erudirer, solebam cum ceteris eiusdem aetatis et propositi, diebus Dominicis supulcra apostolorum et martyrum circumire, crebroque cryptas ingredi quae, in terrarum profunda defossae, ex utraque parte ingrediuntium per parietes habent corpora sepulcorum, et quia obscura sunt omnia, ut propemodum illud et propheticum compleatur: descendant ad infernum uiuentes, et raro desuper lumen admissum, horrorem temperet tenebrarum, ut non tam fenestram quam foramen dimissi luminis putes, rursumque pedetemptim inceditur et caeca nocte circumdatis illud vergilianum proponitur: ‘horror ubique animo, simul ipsa silentia terrent.’” *Comm. In Hiezech. 40:5-13*.

⁵⁵⁶ For another reading of pilgrimage and the Christian martyr cult through a spatial lens, see Yasin. Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces*, 151-209.

⁵⁵⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38.

space they use. The community behind the Cubicula of the Sacraments undoubtedly had a great many activities and “spatial practices,” undertaken both in and out of the catacomb, which helped to shape the spaces they produced. Most immediately, the space was one of burial and mourning, and in those practices they differentiated themselves from others, helping to shape their funerary spaces as uniquely theirs, in clear contrast to other such spaces. Outside of the Cubicula and the catacomb itself, the community engaged in baptism and communal meals, the former a dramatic break with the surrounding culture and a renunciation of all it meant, and the latter a potent symbol of community identity and self-definition, over and against other similar communities. And in time, other practices arose, simultaneously recognizing and re-enforcing the particularity of the spaces previously produced, with *depositio ad sanctos* and pilgrimage to the graves of martyrs and saints providing us a valuable insight into how these spaces were understood in the decades and centuries after they were created.

These were not the community’s only practices, but they are the ones that can be reconstructed based on the evidence from the Cubicula of the Sacraments and the surrounding Callistus Catacomb. Through these practices, the community defined itself against the broader Roman culture, critiquing it, subverting it, and opposing it in their use of space and evocation of uses of space within the Cubicula. They were, as Lefebvre puts it, “secreting” space, constructing through their ways and actions a space in which the world was as it ought to be.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

“The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction to the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass, I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there were I am. The mirror functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.”

--Michel Foucault⁵⁵⁸

Having journeyed to the Callistus Catacomb and the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the visitor Callistus would have gathered up the implements of his purpose—mourning, or digging, or overseeing, or painting—and gingerly taken up an oil lamp, and begun the journey back to the surface. Through labyrinthine galleries and narrow passages, for instance, one like Callistus would have made his way back to the base of the long staircase, already worn down slightly in the middle by thousands of footfalls before his, and taking care not to extinguish the flame of the lamp. Already, though, the light from the surface would be glinting in the distance at the top of the stairs, and as the visitor

⁵⁵⁸ Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 24.

made his ascent, he would have squinted more and more until his eyes were nearly shut—even on a cloudy day—from the absurd abundance of light at the surface.

Even today, with the benefit of flashlights and a system of electrical lighting maintained by the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology, the return to the outside produces an almost unavoidable euphoria. So much darkness and confinement can scarcely be tolerated, and the fresh air and light at the surface almost inevitably brings a smile to the faces of tourists and pilgrims as they breach the surface. How much more for the visitor of antiquity, for whom lamplight had to suffice, and for whom the signs and smells of death would have been that much more recent.

At the top of the stairs, the visitor would have exited back onto that green hill that soars gently over the southern walls of the great capital of the Empire. To the north, beyond the towering Stone Pine trees, the clamor and rumble of the city signaled the continuance of everyday life; to the east, travelers made their ways along the Via Appia into and out of the city. The mass of humanity that was Rome was mostly unaware of the underground worlds constructed just outside the walls—and if they were aware of them, they likely deemed them inconsequential to the work of most people's lives, the task of surviving until the next day.

But for the Christians who dug, decorated, and used the Cubicula of the Sacraments, the Callistus Catacomb, and other catacomb spaces like them, the catacombs were far from inconsequential. They were the reservoirs of communal meaning and self-identity, created as construals of themselves, their world, and their place in that world. The catacombs were the indispensable spaces of early Roman Christianity.

I have argued in these pages that the Cubicula of the Sacraments are heterotopias. Foucault's term, as he puts it, describes a space that has "the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect."⁵⁵⁹ It is a space of contestation, and also a space of identity formation and expression—a construal in space, as Foucault put it, of a world "as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled."⁵⁶⁰ This was the work of the Christian community of the Cubicula of the Sacraments.

I have argued for four distinct bodies of evidence pointing to the Cubicula of the Sacraments as heterotopia. The first, found in Chapter 3, has to do with the physicality of the Cubicula themselves, which I argued is inextricably embedded in Roman space but nevertheless also distinctively Other than Rome. By their position outside the city walls, along a major road that serviced the city through the liminal space of a gate, and their monumentality-signaling position under the ground, the Cubicula of the Sacraments were already heterotopia by virtue of their construction and location—already poised in critique of all other spaces of the city.

The second body of evidence, argued in Chapter 4, comes from the art of the Cubicula of the Sacraments. The images adorning the rooms' walls were not simply decoration, but were instruments in the fashioning of space, construals of the Christian community's self-definitions and self-understandings, which underscored and doubled

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., 27.

the already-heterotopian space. The art of the Cubicula constructed the world as it ought to be, mirroring and critiquing the world as it really was.

The third body of evidence, closely linked to the second, comes in the texts referenced in the Cubicula of the Sacraments, and was argued in Chapter 5. Drawn from Jewish and Christian writings, the texts referenced in the Cubicula employ a hermeneutic of space, consciously or not, that selected texts in which the spatial conflicts and challenges of the Christian community was mirrored in writing. In tales of journeying, transgressing, entering, leaving, and building, the experiences of the community was inscribed into their spaces, and they were bolstered in their critique of hegemonic Roman space and its rhetoric.

The final body of evidence, that of practices of the community of the Cubicula of the Sacraments both inside and outside of the Cubicula of the Sacraments and the Callistus Catacomb, points to a people defining themselves and their space in contrast to the other spaces of their world. In their burials, their meals, and their baptismal rites of initiation, the people of the Cubicula made their case against the normative, the normal, the usual, and the worldly ways of pagan Rome, and they brought those too into their spaces. And in the traditions and powerful tales that developed around those spaces, they laid the foundation for generations to come to recognize and seek to participate in those spaces, through burial *ad sanctos* and pilgrimage.

In short, this dissertation has argued that the Cubicula of the Sacraments, and indeed the Callistus Catacomb and all catacombs of this period, were a particular kind of space. It has argued that they were heterotopias, conceived and fashioned in relation to

other spaces, serving for their community as a meticulously constructed microcosm of the world as it should be. It envisions a subtle kind of resistance, the sort meant for those resisting, that ultimately seeks not change but self-assurance and self-understanding.

In method, approach, and the kinds of evidence considered, this project moves beyond those that have preceded it. Although the notion of heterotopia has been deployed in many diverse settings across disciplines and discourses, it has not been used to describe catacombs, or any other early Christian space. By using heterotopia this way, this dissertation has contributed to the study of the catacombs in two ways, and it has contributed to the study of early Christianity in Rome in one further way.

First, this dissertation has introduced into the study of the catacombs a new theoretical tool. The field of catacomb studies generally has been undertheorized, with traditional disciplines like art history and archaeology dominating to the exclusion of other interpretive techniques and rubrics. Spatial theory, while it has made inroads in other areas of scholarship, has been mostly absent in the study of the catacombs. Heterotopia, in particular, has not been put to any use at all, making this dissertation useful on its own merits, but also as a suggestion for further possibilities for study.

Second, this dissertation has contributed a holistic view of the catacombs as critical spaces of early Roman Christianity, arguing that they were important centers of meaning and activity for the community that built them. Holistic accounts of the catacombs have mostly been of the variety first expounded by de Rossi and his contemporaries, who saw (and reconstructed) the catacombs as prototypes of the Catholic tradition, and used them and their evidence in the polemics of the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries. Beyond these religious reconstructions, which continue until today, there have been startlingly few attempts to account for the entirety of the evidence found in the catacombs, particularly as it relates to the social dynamics and history of the Roman Christian community that made them.

Finally, this dissertation has contributed to the study of early Roman Christianity. In the spirit of studies like that of Lampe, this work has attempted to account for what kinds of beliefs and practices prevailed in Rome in the time before Constantine, and particularly the ways those beliefs and practices informed and constructed Christianity's relationship with the rest of the city. In this sense this project is in the same vein as the many works in the fields of Empire Studies and Postcolonial discourse that have flourished in recent years—it accounts for the ebbs and flows of power, culture, and rhetoric between the nascent Christians and everyone else in the great capital of the Empire.⁵⁶¹

The field of catacomb studies is ripe for growth and expansion. At present it is parochial and balkanized, divvied up between disciplines that do not very often speak with one another, and lack a common theoretical language to do so. It is my hope that this project will point the way forward to further projects of this kind, that seek to synthesize the insights of the various disciplines, and that it will inspire and provoke the work of

⁵⁶¹ As noted in Chapter 6 and suggested throughout this dissertation, the evidence from these catacomb spaces (and, indeed, many others) points to a surprisingly Jewish character of early Christianity in Rome. Given the recent contributions of Daniel Boyarin to our understanding of “the parting of the ways” of Christianity and Judaism, it may be that Rome, with its multiple attestations of theological and exegetical controversies and its ample material remains, is the ideal place to conduct a renewed investigation into the complicated divergence of Judaism and Christianity.

others who will broaden and deepen our knowledge of these monuments of ancient Christianity.

EPILOGUE

In the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, a series of popes initiated a great transfer of remains and relics from the catacombs to the basilicas and churches of the city. The move was prompted in part by the increasingly effective invasions by the Longobards and Saracens, which left the catacombs vulnerable outside the city walls, and saw them looted and defiled by use as stables for animals.⁵⁶² It was also prompted, undoubtedly, by a desire to sanctify the Christian architecture of the city, now firmly in the grasp of the papacy, with the relics of saints and martyrs.⁵⁶³ But perhaps most of all, after the creation of the Papal States in 756 at the order of Pepin the Short, the movement of bodies and relics from the catacombs to within the city walls signaled that the original meaning and purpose of the catacombs had at last reached its end. No longer did Christianity find value in spaces constructed in critique and resistance; no more did the catacombs and their environs hold any power. In the consummated marriage of church and state, the last vestiges of the heterotopias that were the catacombs were spirited into the city, interred and installed into churches, to lend their power in new ways to new spaces and new construals of new worlds. Outside the walls, the catacombs languished,

⁵⁶² Nicolai, Bisconti, and Mazzoleni, *The Christian Catacombs of Rome*, 65. I use the now-troublesome term “Saracens,” because that is what they called themselves.

⁵⁶³ For a comprehensive history of this period and analysis of the various removals, see Geary. Geary, *Furta Sacra*.

all but passing from memory until 1578, when near the old Via Salaria workers would break through into a chamber under the earth, into darkness and wonder below.

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