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Recent Studies on the Jewish Catacombs of Monteverde in Rome: A Review Article*

In respectful tribute to the late Fr. Antonio Ferrua, S.J.
“someone I wished I had met.”¹

A little over a century ago, the southern slope of Monteverde or the “Green Mountain” district of Rome was just that: a hulking ridge of trees and undergrowth above the Tiber, partially terraced for a villa or two and a coating of local crops, but jagged at its foot and increasingly hollow at its core.² These shifting contours were largely due to the extraction of a lithoid tuff from the area’s lower banks, an enterprise dating well back into Roman times and which continued in a sporadic fashion throughout much of the modern period until the urban sprawl of Italy’s new capital city after 1871 finally reached these semi-rustic terrains and integrated their fine views and secure position above the

* On D. Rossi, M. Di Mento (eds.), *La catacomba ebraica di Monteverde: vecchi dati e nuove scoperte*, Rotoform, Roma 2013.

¹ I quote T. Mueller’s contemplations on Fr. Ferrua’s passing on May 25th, 2003 in “Inside Job”, *The Atlantic Monthly* 292.3 (October 2003) 138. Ferrua’s piercing honesty and rigorous autonomy in the field of Christian Archaeology remain fundamental guides to the craft. He would critique works on Late Antique Jewish epigraphy and material culture upon numerous occasions during his long career, and was the principal investigator of another tomb of a Jew in Rome – that of Simon Peter *in Vaticanum*. I am also indebted to Prof. Steven Fine of Yeshiva University for good conversation about the Monteverde Jewish catacomb’s artifacts and architecture, and to the Christian *genius loci* Sister Maria Francesca Antongiovanni, OSB, for helpful clarifications on the Ponziano site.

² For the appearance of the Monteverde in this time, see Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, xx, n. 2 and n. 116. The toponym Monteverde is generally thought to refer to the color of the lithoid tuff – “tufo lionato” – extracted in large quantities from this zone (G. Tomassetti, *La campagna romana antica, medioevale e moderna*, VI, ed. by L. Chiumenti and F. Bilancia, Olschki, Firenze 1979, 331).

Tiber into a new residential quarter for Rome.³ The popular designation of the neighborhood as the “Monteverde Vecchio”, as the means by which to distinguish it from the other parts of the great Janiculum spur thus became a play on words, with quite literal meaning, not only to indicate the area first layered in 20th century buildings, but also the site of many important archaeological discoveries, a great number of which are no longer visible today.

One of the most sensational discoveries ever made on these slopes was also one of the earliest to widely circulate in print, thanks to the singular nature of the find and its emergence at a time of intense scholarly interest in the ancient remains of its particular form and function. This was the exploration in the year 1602 of an underground cemetery – of the type known as a “catacomb” – that had been used by Jews in Imperial Rome. The site’s revelation as “the cemetery of the Ancient Hebrews” in a massive review of the textual and material evidence to date of subterranean cemeteries in Rome – Antonio Bosio’s *Roma sotterranea* of 1634 – suggested that, in a fundamental manner, the ways that the Jews and Christians had buried their dead did not differ greatly.⁴ Structurally speaking, this would mean that Bosio saw the networks of ancient galleries beneath Rome’s vast *suburbium* as one and the same in design. Only the overall quality of its excavation seemed to set apart the Jewish site, for unlike the cemeteries distinguished by carved and painted chambers and sculpted tombs of stone, this catacomb appeared plain and crude, lacking the monumental qualities that had brought a frenzy of excitement to the Romans some thirty years before in 1578, when another underground funerary site had unexpectedly come to light near the via Salaria, revealing artifacts with Biblical themes. Here, on Monteverde, only the repeated motif of the seven-branched candelabrum, the Hebrew *menorah*, seemed to characterize the cemetery’s clientele (pl. I.1).

Recent scholarship has contrasted the chance discoveries of the two catacombs, one Jewish and the other Christian, to highlight the

³ The Monteverde Vecchio was designated one of Rome’s “historical districts” in 2002. Recently integrated into the city’s 12th Municipal District (2012), it is delineated by the via di Porta San Pancrazio, via Vitellia, via di Donna Olimpia, the Circonvallazione Gianicolense, viale Trastevere, and the via delle Mura Gianicolensi.

⁴ This approach of Bosio is emphasized in G. Marchi, *Monumenti delle arti cristiane primitive nella metropoli del Cristianesimo*, Puccinelli, Roma 1844-47, 20.

apologetic qualities of their exposition in the literature of the time.⁵ Bosio himself creates a pointed allegory out of the dark, unadorned caverns below Monteverde, in which the image of the menorah in abundance nonetheless fails to illuminate a people who had rejected the Christian Messiah, Jesus Christ. Not even leaving it at that, Bosio describes how one of his comrades on the expedition, the antiquarian Giovanni Zaratino Castellini, had defaced a Jewish grave with similar sentiments in Latin verse.⁶ Strange to say, in the same volume later on, the seven-branched candelabrum is also described in Christian sites, suggesting that not all the catacombs in which this image had been found appeared quite so crude and dismal (pl. I.2).⁷

⁵ For references, see Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 1 *et seq.*, to which should be added M. Ghilardi, “Quasi che mescoliamo le cose profane con le sacre’. La riscoperta delle catacombe ebraiche di Monteverde nella prima età moderna”, in M. Caffiero, A. Esposito (eds.), *Judei de Urbe. Roma e i suoi ebrei: una storia secolare*, Atti del Convegno, Archivio di Stato di Roma, 7-9 novembre 2005, Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali - Direzione Generale degli Archivi, Roma 2011, 23-52. Ironically enough, what also connects the two catacombs is that neither is mentioned in the ancient catalogues and medieval itineraries of Christian pilgrimage sites in Rome. The Salaria cemetery, for all its Christian-themed ornamentation, has no venerated tombs, and is now known as the «anonymous cemetery of via Anapo,» after the modern street below which it was re-discovered in 1921. Likewise, the Jewish catacomb is variously called that of “Monteverde” or “Via Portuense”, because it is assumed that the ancient and medieval texts that name catacombs would not have included those used by Jews.

⁶ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 8, n. 48.

⁷ J. Dello Russo, “The Monteverde Jewish Catacomb on the Via Portuense in Rome”, *Roma Subterranea Judaica* 4 (2010) 3-4. A seven-branched candelabrum is also represented in a marble epitaph to three individuals in A. Bosio, *Roma sotterranea*, Roma 1634, 333 (A. Ferrua, *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, n.s., VI, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Città del Vaticano 1975, n. 15780). This object was found in a site along the via Latina, and dates to the 5th century CE. The lampstand that it depicts does not resemble the illustrations of “candelabra” in a Jewish context in Bosio’s manuscript and published text (reproduced in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 7, figs. 10 a-b. and 376, fig. 151), and is also pictured somewhat differently in Paolo Aringhi’s *Roma subterranea novissima*, Romae 1651, 360. On that note, the 19th century archaeologist Giovanni Battista de Rossi was of the opinion that earlier catacomb explorers, Bosio included, had mistaken examples of the palm branch motif for *menoroth*. Yet the depictions of seven-branched candelabra in Bosio’s text are quite distinct from the many images of the palm that Bosio also reproduces (a critical distinction to make, for the

The brief description of a Jewish catacomb at the end of Book Two of the *Roma sotteranea* communicates that it is heavily damaged and virtually impossible to access. Nearly all of its artifacts are fractured or corroded beyond recognition. Nothing in the site even comes close to the glorious paintings in the Ponziano catacomb described and illustrated in the chapters before. Even so, like the many pages of commentary that accompany Bosio's visit, the Jewish catacomb comes to represent far more than the sum of its parts. It emphasizes the separate and deeply unequal situation of the Jews in Rome, already restricted to a designated ghetto quarter in Bosio's time. It perpetuates the idea of a rigidly Jewish subculture within Roman society. And a veritable avalanche of citations anchors the catacomb's location and use to the literary record of Jews in Ancient Rome – one largely created by non-Jews – a claim that would not be disputed for centuries until the discovery of a second Jewish cemetery on the Appian Way in 1859. Not that a number of other catacombs used by Jews or individual Jewish graves did not surface in the meantime in rounds of “pious sacking”: they did.⁸ But they did not quite fit the Counter-Reformation's picture of Judaism as a marginalized and intractable faith.

Thus in centuries of enlightenment, reason and reform, we find the long-time Custodian of the Holy Relics and Cemeteries, Marcantonio Boldetti (1663-1749), emphatically stating that no Jews were buried in the catacombs presumed to be Christian, for in these settings no inscriptions in Hebrew or Greek with Jewish terminology had been found (in all probability, some indeed had been found, but were not per-

palm branch was considered a secure sign of Christian martyrdom at this time). De Rossi also claims that he is unaware of examples of clay lamps with the menorah motif in the Christian catacombs, with the exception of one in the Catacomb of Commodilla mentioned in a seventeenth-century manuscript at Montpellier, in France (G.B. de Rossi, *Roma sotteranea cristiana*, III, Salvucci, Roma 1877, 616). More recently, Antonio Ferrua has found likely that «a carelessness in popular attitude» accounts for Jewish artifacts, especially lamps, in the Christian sites (and vice versa): discussion in E.R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, II, Pantheon, New York 1955, 15.

⁸ The boundaries of the cemeteries were not yet known, and, as H.J. Leon points out in “The Jewish Catacombs and Inscriptions of Rome: An Account of their Discovery and Subsequent History”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 5 (1928) 301-302, «scholars not infrequently failed to recognize the Jewish character of (Jewish) inscriptions and classified them as pagan or Christian.» Well into the twentieth century, incidental discoveries of catacombs continued to go unreported, as exemplified by the last-minute recovery of the via Dino Compagni catacomb in 1955.

ceived or reported as “Jewish” at the time).⁹ Boldetti’s junior colleague, Canon Giovanni Marangoni, though cognizant at a deeper level of the interplay between the sacred and profane in Christian Rome, nonetheless leaves scant record of the Jewish epitaphs he is believed to have copied on Monteverde.¹⁰ His mid-19th century successor, Fr. Giuseppe Marchi, just as enamored of Bosio’s topographical approach, still defines a menorah image in an undisclosed site on the via Latina as his “Achilles’ heel” before making several vain attempts to enter the Monteverde catacomb in the winter of 1843 to collect solid proof that Roman catacomb excavation was in fact a Christian practice derived not from the pagans, but rather from Biblical-era Jews.¹¹ And Protestant scholars from other lands, accessing Bosio’s eyewitness data most often through Paolo Aringhi’s heavily contextualized Latin edition of 1651, seem to have viewed the Jewish site as further proof that the Roman catacombs were far from serving a uniquely (and saintly) Christian clientele.¹²

⁹ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 14-15, n. 84. Although a Counter-Reformation “cover-up” for a lack of information about Jewish catacombs from the sixteenth through mid-nineteenth centuries is an attractive theory, it should be noted that Boldetti and his associates often arrived at a newly discovered catacomb well after its looters, as M.A. Boldetti himself acknowledges in *Osservazioni sopra i cimiteri de’ santi martiri ed antichi cristiani di Roma*, Roma 1720, 567. Landowners – and the urban developers of a later date – could be very reluctant to report the presence of catacombs below their properties, for restrictions were in place as early as the sixteenth century as to what could be dug up or altered in such sites (Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 2-3).

¹⁰ Boldetti’s associate, Giovanni Marangoni, took the practical approach that the Christians, out of sheer necessity, «were in the habit of using the marble tablets of the pagans» (G. Marangoni, *Delle cose gentilesche, e profane ad uso ed adornamento delle chiese*, Roma 1744, 390). According to the works of contemporaries, Marangoni copied a number of Jewish inscriptions (D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe*, II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1995, nn. 184 and 535) at or near burial sites in which Jewish tombs were later found.

¹¹ M. Buonocore, “I due inseparabili: Giuseppe Marchi e Giovanni Battista de Rossi”, in S. Piussi (ed.), *Giuseppe Marchi (1795-1860), archeologo pioniere per il riscatto delle catacombe dalla Carnia a Roma*, Atti del Convegno, 11 febbraio 2011, Editreg, Trieste 2012, 37-39.

¹² Bosio thought the Monteverde catacomb might have been in use by Jews even before the time of Jesus (Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 367). Catholic scholars familiar with Latin translations of the Talmud and other Hebrew texts,

Like the vast majority of the catacombs in Bosio's work, the Monteverde Jewish catacomb surfaced time and time again in the centuries that followed, typically as quarrying picked up in the caverns around the site. Yet its features are consistently described in the way they had been by Bosio, and the marble epitaphs that make their way into select private collections offer confirmation of the linguistic and artistic elements that Bosio had found. Even the first site excavations of 1904-1906 document unadorned grottoes and galleries, with an irregular layout and uneven distribution of graves. Bosio, then, had not received a mistaken impression of the site's precarious position and humble design, but how greatly did it differ, in fact, from the Christian sites?

Until recently, the response often heard was: quite a bit. Directed all too often by coeval currents of ethnic stereotyping and the noted lack of primary sources about the ancient dispersion of Jews to Rome, critical scholarship has long preferred to speculate about what the catacomb might reveal about Ancient Jewish society rather than address what the site actually represents for burial practices in Ancient Rome.¹³ The idea that the Monteverde catacomb manifests a uniquely Palestinian "prototype" for the Jewish and Christian catacombs in Rome, or at the very least a catacomb of great antiquity, is part of this interpretive reading.¹⁴ The issue, of course, connects to a much greater

including Jewish epitaphs from the Medieval and Early Modern periods, were also attracted to the theory that Early Christians had perpetuated the burial customs of their "Antichi Padri", the Jews, rather than those of the polytheists in Rome.

¹³ Scholars have long sought ways to distinguish between Jewish, Christian and pagan graves. N. Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba am Monteverde zu Rom: Der älteste bisher bekannt gewordene jüdische Friedhof des Abendlandes*, Kauffmann, Leipzig 1912, 28, considers the unusual width of many of the galleries in the Jewish sites an indication that Jews had not "copied" the Christians in the excavation of underground cemeteries, and, on page 34, reiterates Bosio's impression that the Jewish wall graves, or *loculi*, had been sealed in a different manner from the *loculi* in Christian sites. See also Elsa Laurenzi's discussion of a hypothetical Jewish purpose for the "atria" in the stairwells of the Vigna Randanini and Villa Torlonia sites in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 77-78.

¹⁴ A list spanning generations of scholars in the Rossi - Di Mento bibliography includes A. Bosio, G. Marchi, N. Müller, H.J. Leon, J.-B. Frey, B. Lifschitz, and L.V. Rutgers. A number of these individuals were influenced by misconceptions about the age of the Christian catacombs, or an over-emphasis on certain kinds of evidence, like the dated stamps on bricks or the contents of inscriptions that could have been re-used in a Jewish cemetery at a later date. In addition, what was

one concerning the proliferation of underground communal cemeteries in the suburban regions around Rome by the third century CE, and while the latter appears well on the way to resolution, or at least a greater articulation in the context of other archaeological data from that time, the belief still lingers that the Monteverde Jewish catacomb could represent some sort of “missing link” in the movement toward inhumation burial in Rome on a communal scale.¹⁵ If future structural analyses of the Roman catacombs continue to reveal strong familial or collegial roles in the preparations for burial, and the existence of many autonomous units within a networked hypogaeal site, then perhaps what was perceived as distinctive in the Monteverde cemetery might not appear quite so unique.¹⁶ Whether or not the evidence points to Jewish burial practices in other areas of the Mediterranean, as has long been claimed, is far more difficult to establish. The catacomb itself no longer exists. Or does it?

This was the question that the Soprintendenza Speciale per I Beni Archeologici di Roma had opportunity to address in 2009. In the fall of that year, soundings for the foundations of an underground multi-level parking garage next to the Gualandi Institute for the Deaf-Mute at via Vincenzo Monti n. 3 detected the presence of cavities on two separate levels, at roughly 10 and 20 meters below ground. Further probing with specialized cameras indicated that these openings appeared to be galleries filled with dirt and debris. No wall tombs were evident, but the design and location of these cavities raised the possibility that they might have some relation to the vestiges of a Roman graveyard seen in

perceived as inherently “Jewish” by previous generations of scholars is not necessarily perceived in same manner today.

¹⁵ A 2005 seminar held in Rome on the “Origine delle catacombe Romane” did not directly address the origins and development of Jewish catacombs, but the idea that catacombs had some relation to the diffusion of subterranean burial chambers in the Hellenistic kingdoms of the Mediterranean East was briefly discussed in the seminar’s “Round Table” conclusion: V. Flocchi Nicolai, J. Guyon (eds.), *Origine delle catacombe romane: Atti della giornata tematica dei Seminari di Archeologia Cristiana*, Roma, 21 marzo 2005, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Città del Vaticano 2006, 257-263.

¹⁶ Including E. Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, Cornell, Ithaca NY 2009; A.M. Nieddu, *La Basilica Apostolorum sulla via Appia e l’area cimiteriale circostante*, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Città del Vaticano 2009; and J. Dello Russo, “Marginal or Monumental? ‘Kokhim’ in the Catacombs of Rome”, in press.

the area a century before. What excited the archaeologists of the Soprintendenza and their collaborators from the LATERES cooperative even more was not just that the galleries could pertain to a catacomb, but to “the” catacomb, the long-lost Jewish catacomb of Monteverde. It was the chance to indulge in what the region’s archaeological inspector Daniela Rossi called the “romance” of discovery, and what the press soon picked up on as the mystery of the “lost catacomb” or “phantom catacomb.”¹⁷ The very circumstances of the find echoed those which had led to the sensational discovery of a «Pinacoteca of the Fourth Century,» in a previously undocumented catacomb at the corner of the via Latina and via Dino Compagni in 1955.¹⁸

In reality, catacomb discoveries are not so uncommon: a dozen galleries just below street level came to light in front of the Church of San Lorenzo fuori le Mura as recently as 2012.¹⁹ Yet the situation on Monteverde was all the more interesting and complex by virtue of being a potential “Jewish” discovery as well as an emergent triumph for “rescue archaeology” in Rome. All traces of the catacomb had disappeared not long after its early 20th century excavation. Almost nothing was in print to explain why this was so, and the little that was known brought even the site’s location into question. Most troubling, perhaps, for the legacy of one of the oldest centers of Jewish life in the West, little mention had been made of the disposal of the human remains that this site had surely contained. Too many questions remained unanswered to dismiss the chance discovery of tunnels near to where a Jewish cemetery once lay.

¹⁷ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, xvii. Articles published at the time of the Monteverde study’s release in 2013 include C.A. Bucci, “Rinasce il cimitero degli antichi ebrei di Monteverde”, *La Repubblica* (June 21st, 2013) 21; M. Vitale, “La catacomba ebraica di Monteverde”, *Moked*, www.moked.it (access: July 3d, 2013); P. Cusumano, “La catacomba ebraica di Monteverde”, *Zenit*, www.zenit.org (access: June 27 and 28th, 2013); and F. Bisconti, “Sulle orme di Antonio Bosio”, *L’Osservatore Romano* (July 10th, 2013) 4.

¹⁸ A. Ferrua, *The Unknown Catacomb: A Unique Discovery of Early Christian Art*, transl. by I. Inglis, Geddes & Grosset, New York 1991.

¹⁹ Rome’s Archaeological Superintendence excavated the San Lorenzo site: L. Larcana, “La catacomba dei bambini a San Lorenzo: scoperte dodici gallerie sotto la Tiburtina”, *La Repubblica* (May 16th, 2012): http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/05/16/news/la_catacomba_dei_bambini_a_san_lorenzo_scoperte_dodici_gallerie_sotto_la_tiburtina-35227588/. An international team of scholars has also excavated mass graves in the catacombs of Pietro and Marcellino in recent years.

The Province of Rome and its 12th Municipal Region have now funded the publication in a limited edition of *La catacomba ebraica di Monteverde: vecchi dati e nuove scoperte*, a collection of studies edited by Daniela Rossi and Marzia Di Mento, who have left no stone unturned on Monteverde in their quest for the Jewish site. Clocking in at 432 pages and profusely illustrated with maps, photographs and original graphics, the volume contains an extensive but by no means exhaustive account of the catacomb's location, layout, contents, and exploration, as well as pertinent information on the area's geology, topography and physical transformation over time. In a real sense, it communicates what should have been published on the site years before, or at the very least, presents the data in a modern format. This has led to the publication of scientific and archival evidence not previously studied, as well as clarifications or amendments to what is already known.

The collection is prefaced by the words of local dignitaries (Giuseppina Maturani, Fabio Bellini, Cristina Maltese, Mariarosaria Barbera, and Claudio Procaccia) who represent a wide range of institutional supports. They also reveal varied motives for the study of an ancient Jewish monument of which so little, if anything, remains. First and foremost, the project focuses on a district outside of the city center, and divulges very recent archaeological finds. It elaborates upon the historic presence of the Jews in Rome, whose cultural heritage is tantamount to the city's own. It even dovetails nicely with works in progress in other Jewish catacombs. All these considerations, and more, have generated interest in the catacomb's possible recovery. The present "disclosure" is thus conceived, as Dr. Barbera implies, as a gift to the community of its past (although some persist in looking the gift horse in the mouth by objecting to the resultant street closures and seemingly infinitesimal construction delays).

This volume's great bulk does not permit here a minute review. Priority is thus given to an evaluation of the new data and a determination of which lacunae still need to be filled. In short, it is a happy task of finding «much to praise, and a few items that merit further discussion.»²⁰ Certainly, our goal in doing so is to encourage the authors to persevere in their important work.

In her introduction, city archaeologist Daniela Rossi provides a rapid overview of the circumstances that have led to a re-evaluation of the Jewish catacomb. Striking are some of the approaches that she describes: the consultation of hundreds of photographs of the excavations from 1904-1906, apparently hidden for decades in the dome of the Ber-

²⁰ A. Ferrua, "Epigrafia ebraica", *La Civiltà Cattolica* 87.3 (1936) 128.

lin Cathedral, the careful consideration of what longtime residents recall of Monteverde's underground tunnels and caves, and the government's close supervision at present of any construction-related activities in the zone.

A lengthy review of archival sources fills up the next two sections of the work, for the catacomb's ill fortune from the 17th through 20th centuries is a road of scholarly inquiry much taken in recent times.²¹ Archaeologist Marzia Di Mento has made extensive use of this dense body of literature in her own account, but offers some new twists to an old story through the introduction of archival evidence previously overlooked or not thoroughly considered. Taking into account that Di Mento uses a lot of the same material in both chapters, it is thought best to consider them together in this review.

One trail of thought explores the topography of this remote corner of the Janiculum ridge. Bosio, of course, had returned to the Monteverde area upon numerous occasions in search of the handful of Christian cemeteries believed to exist in this zone. For whatever reason – by instinct or hearsay – Bosio was convinced that the two subterranean burial areas he had found in 1600 did not complete the picture. And he was right: the Catacombs of Ponziano only came to light in 1618. Bosio and two colleagues accessed the Jewish catacomb from the upper slopes of Monteverde, climbing down a steep incline at the southwest extremity of the ridge into the ruins of a cemetery. It was winter: the lack of vegetation no doubt made it easier to see the crevice, as well as the gaping quarries below. In two hours, Bosio was able to inspect a number of galleries and two small chambers, seeing enough instances of the menorah motif on the graves to reasonably conclude that it was a Jewish site. By this time, he had been burrowing into catacombs for nearly a decade, and recognized from the start this singular feature in the Monteverde crypts. What is more, he was well aware of Jewish funerary artifacts in other sites in Rome.²²

²¹ The bibliography in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, includes works on this topic by Leon, Vismara, Rutgers, Noy, Ghilardi, Cappelletti, Hirschfeld, Dello Russo, and Laurenzi, just to name a few.

²² As noted in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 11, Bosio copied a Jewish epitaph on a sarcophagus in the Church of San Salvatore in Corte (Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, n. 549), where martyrs from the Ponziano cemetery (the Christian site nearest to the Jewish catacomb) had been enshrined, and another from the Church and Monastery of S. Cecilia (Noy, n. 544), a site Bosio knew very well from his work, *Relatio inventionis et repositionis S. Caeciliae et sociorum in the Historia passionis B. Caeciliae virginis, Romae 1600*.

The intriguing “Hebrew” remains are nonetheless dead last in his series of cemeteries along the via Portuense. A critical reading of Bosio’s account by Leonard V. Rutgers has made strong arguments as to why a Jewish catacomb would have been included at all in a Counter-Reformation study, and Di Mento emphasizes Rutgers’ points by stressing how the opening paragraph of the chapter on the site was not the work of Bosio, but rather that of an Oratorian priest Giovanni Severano, who edited the *Roma sotteranea* with high-ranking Church sponsorship after Bosio’s death in 1629.²³

Building upon years of study of the zone in question, Di Mento then engages in the challenging task of clarifying the references to area landmarks in Bosio’s work. The archival sources do not agree on many points, and the suburban estates changed names almost as often as they changed owners. Bosio is on the whole quite careful to name the current tenant on a site, but in this instance, another key witness, Giovanni Zaratino Castellini, provides a different name for the terrain below which the Jewish catacomb is found.²⁴

In light of such difficulties, Di Mento tries to pinpoint the catacomb site by focusing on what would have remained a fairly consistent physical feature over time: the public roads through this zone. Her review of four centuries’ worth of historic maps and plans confirms more or less Bosio’s own exploits up and around the Monteverde slopes. Along the first mile of the via Portuense, two streets are regularly shown as heading westward away from the river: a “vicolo” that twists and turns up the hillside between two historic estates (those of the Missioni and S. Michele), and a “via delle Cave” that skirts the natural depression of the Pozzo Pantaleo before running into the via Vitellia *en*

²³ L.V. Rutgers, *The Jews of Late Ancient Rome*, Brill, Leiden 1995, 8-14.

²⁴ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 8, note 45. According to Bosio, the property was owned by the heirs of one Muzio (Mutio) Vitozzi who had inherited the estate from the Bishop of Melfi, Alessandro Ruffini (see M. Calvesi, A. Zuccari, *Da Caravaggio ai caravaggeschi*, CAM, Roma 2010, 286-287, note 29, for the 1602 Inventory of the «Haredi del Sig.re Muzio Vitozzi de Ruffini»). Zaratino Castellini identifies the site instead as the «vinea de Panillis,» perhaps the name of a tenant. P. Aringhi’s mention of the site as that of the «Victorii» (Mutii olim Victorii) in Aringhi, *Roma subterranea*, 236, could refer to the «Vigna Victorii» in this zone mentioned by Flaminio Vacca in the mid-16th century (Tomassetti, *Campagna romana*, 334, note 1).

route to the sea.²⁵ The path of the first road is thought to be largely covered by the via Federico Rosazza and via Ambrogio Traversari, and the second starts off as the via Carlo Porta and via Giuseppe Parini before returning to its older title of via di Monteverde after the Piazzale Enrico Dunant.²⁶

More problematic is Di Mento's interpretation of Bosio's own study of the zone. The second book of the *Roma sotterranea* concludes with several chapters on the cemeteries of the via Portuense (chapters XV-XXII). In keeping with the literary constructions of his time, Bosio uses the first chapters in this sequence to go over the textual evidence ("Della via Portuense e Porto Romano, e delle profane memorie", "Del cimitero di S. Felice nella via Portuense", "Del Cimitero di Pontiano e de' suoi martiri Abdon e Sennen *ad Ursum Pileatum* nella via Portuense", "Del cimitero di Generosa *ad Sextum Philippi* nella via Portuense", "Del Cimitero di S. Giuliano Papa nella via Portuense", and "Delle altre sacre memorie della via Portuense e del Porto Romano, e dei molti santi martiri, che ivi partirono, o furono seppelliti"). No mention is made of a Jewish site.

What follows, however, is a discussion of the material evidence that Bosio has found ("Delli cimiteri ritrovati, e scoperti dall'autore nella via Portuense"). From the start, Bosio acknowledges that many of the shrines described in the previous chapters cannot be located with precision, but makes clear that this is not because no traces of Christian cemeteries survive: on the contrary, isolated galleries had indeed been found, but in such a desecrated state, that he was in no way "satisfied" that these were in fact the venerated sites he was seeking.²⁷ He lists two such "anonymous" cemeteries seen for the first and only time in 1600: one in the possession of Antonio Raby, courier to the court of France, close to but not strictly within the Pozzo Pantaleo trench, and another, higher up on Monteverde, on the grounds of one Antonio Bassano.²⁸ The road to the latter site is the same one that Bosio says he later used to access the Ruffini-Vitozzi estate «in an eminent place.»²⁹ The ceme-

²⁵ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 52 and 57, note 27. According to Tomasetti, *Campagna romana*, 313, this second route was described in 1554 as leading «from the Massimi Chapel towards the fields.»

²⁶ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 57. The «Pozzo Pantaleo» begins at the site of the Vigna Jacobini quarries roughly a mile outside of the old city gates.

²⁷ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 4, note 28 and 355.

²⁸ Id., note 27 and 52.

²⁹ Ibid.

tery itself was made up of galleries and whitewashed chambers, a square-shaped skylight, and few, if any, Christian signs. That in the Vigna Raby, on the other hand, preserved traces of paintings with Biblical motifs. Most of the succeeding topographical studies have followed Bosio's example by not assigning a known Christian shrine to either of these sites.³⁰

Two years later, in 1602, in a diligent search of «all the vineyards and other sites along the via Portuense,» the Jewish catacomb comes to light.³¹ Yet it is only in 1618 that Bosio's persistence is finally rewarded with the discovery of a large Christian cemetery on the upper slopes of Monteverde that he correctly identifies as the *Coemeterium Pontiani*. It is found in proximity to a quarry on land owned by the English College at the time. To reach this location, Bosio takes the second side road, which brings him on a torturous route up the cliffs of Monte Rosaro. Arriving at his destination, he notes that the quarries are to his right, on the hillcrest facing the Tiber River and Church of St. Paul's Outside the Walls on the opposite bank. On a return trip, Bosio not only increases his candle supply but also the number of workmen now armed with pickaxes, who hack away at the obstructed galleries to reveal an underground water fountain and clear signs of Christian devotion (and all of this done, as Bosio happily notes in the *Roma sotteranea*, on the vigil of the feast of Abdon and Sennen, the Christian martyrs particularly revered in this site).

The story, however, does not end there. After Bosio's death in 1629, Giovanni Severano also visits the Ponziano cemetery as plans are being made to illustrate and map out this important find. Severano makes no further remarks on the catacomb's location, but does add that in «a remote area» additional galleries and chambers had been found, most of the latter simply whitewashed, rather than painted, except for one interior room. The reference to whitewashed chambers in a remote area of the Ponziano site could signify that Severano had, in fact, come across the cemetery on the Bassano property that Bosio had seen years before.³² It is clear from Bosio's need to "excavate" that many parts of the Ponziano catacomb were already in a state of col-

³⁰ Id., 151, note 127: the Cemetery of S. Felice has been placed on occasion in this zone, but could also be situated by the quarries of the Vigna Pia (formerly Vigna Casoni).

³¹ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 4, note 28.

³² Bosio, *Roma sotteranea*, 137.

lapse, and in such conditions, isolated galleries might not always have been seen to connect to a larger site.³³

The considerable attention paid to the Ponziano cemetery, accessed time and time again, makes it difficult to accept without reserve Di Mento's theory that Bosio and Severano confuse its location with that of the Jewish cemetery and inadvertently switch the order of the roads to these sites.³⁴ Given the traces of monumental architecture and devotional images still *in situ*, the cemetery of Ponziano was a spectacular find.³⁵ It is entirely possible that Bosio climbed into the Ponziano cemetery from below, using a dirt trail or path on private property that would not necessarily have been included in a government survey of the zone. By his own account, the site was at his right, which would have corresponded to an approach from the south. He also relates that he had accessed the Jewish cemetery from above, and therefore from a point overlooking the second road at the edge of the Pozzo Pantaleo valley.

By the 19th century, the road between the vineyards of the Missione di Monte Citorio and Ospizio di S. Michele a Ripa had been closed, and Marchi and Armellini resorted to the second side road, the

³³ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 52, note 7, places the Bassano cemetery in a central part of the Monte Rosaro crest, while the pictorial cycle of Jonah around the central motif of the Good Shepherd in the vault of a cubiculum below the Raby property strongly resembles the ceiling of a chamber in the Ponziano site apparently not yet visible in Bosio's time, suggesting that these sites were one and the same (the Ponziano paintings are described in J.H. Parker, *The Archaeology of Rome: The Catacombs*, Parker & Murray, Oxford - London 1877, 62). The Ponziano catacomb appears to have developed on multiple levels, and the galleries visible to Bosio and his contemporaries southwest of the entrance, probably with a separate point of access, are now beyond our reach (M. Ricciardi, "Pontiani, coemeterium", in A. La Regina, ed., *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae: Suburbium*, IV, Quasar, Roma 2006, 215-218). As noted in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 51, note 2, Bosio's vague reference to the location of the catacomb on the Raby property is indeed unusual, and might suggest some apprehension for its proximity to a Jewish site.

³⁴ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 57.

³⁵ C. Palombi in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 147-149, defines the Ponziano site as the «most important» Christian cemetery in the area. Literary sources dating well back into Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages name several martyrs and saints buried in this site, and it remained a site for pilgrimage well into the 9th century CE.

via di Monteverde, for their ascent.³⁶ To Di Mento, an error on Bosio's part in the street order could explain why later explorers failed to find the Jewish site (aside from the fact they could no longer follow his original route due to a road closure). Yet another topographical indication could be the source of the confusion. Bosio locates the Jewish site at the extremity of the Colle Rosaro estates, at the point where they overlook the Tiber above great caverns in the tuff. We read in Marchi that he arrives at the site of the Catacombs of Ponziano from the second road, which divides from the via Portuense at the chapel of the Madonna del Riposo dei Massimi, across from which large quarries are exposed.³⁷ A private path at right through the property of one Sig. Cristofori leads Marchi to these gaping caves and ultimately to the Christian cemetery of Ponziano farther up the slope.³⁸ Bosio's mention of quarries on a sharp cliff overlooking the Tiber would naturally lead one to this extremity, above the viale di Trastevere of today, rather than to the crag farther west, from which the Tiber was still visible, but at a greater distance.³⁹ Indeed, Marchi specifically sought out this area in hopes of being able to contrast (and thereby distinguish) Christian, Jewish and pagan burial grounds in one site (pl. II.1-2).⁴⁰

No matter the source of the confusion, the fact remains that Bosio's account of the Jewish catacomb was the first and only source of information about the site. A Latin edition of his work – Paolo Aringhi's *Roma subterranea novissima* of 1651 – does little to deserve its claim of being «new and improved», although it does stress the hunt for holy relics and other items of value in these sites. Bosio himself can no longer speak to readers directly, but the fruits of his research are nonetheless apparent in Aringhi's running commentary on his text.⁴¹ The

³⁶ Id., 22-23, note 127 and 54, note 19.

³⁷ A. Nibby, *Della via Portuense e dell'antica città di Porto*, Ajani, Roma 1827, 15.

³⁸ Marchi, *Monumenti*, 24 and 275, n 3.

³⁹ Marchi's original plan was to superimpose the structure of a quarry over the Jewish and Christian catacombs in this zone: Marchi, *Monumenti*, nn. 1 and 2. That he sought the Jewish catacomb in the same area is clear from the reference on page 18 to a «water tank» or «piscina limaria» that he encountered while searching for the Jewish site: this could be the «piscina» pictured in t. 2.

⁴⁰ Marchi, *Monumenti*, 20: the quarry he illustrates in t. 2 is that accessed from the via di Ponziano today (photograph in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 95, nn. 46-47).

⁴¹ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 12-13, note 72, although it should be noted that it was Aringhi, rather than Bosio, who was more inclined to proclaim upon

only item of note in Aringhi's chapter on the Jewish catacombs is the reference to Lucas Holstein's exposition of the twelfth century travelogue of Benjamin of Tudela, in which there is an allusion to a "cavern" above the right bank of the Tiber in which "ten martyrs" had been laid to rest.⁴²

In this context, it is not surprising to learn of only a scattering of funerary artifacts with Jewish motifs, a good number of which were in the possession of individuals or religious institutions that either owned land on Monteverde or were in some way connected to the Church entities that were authorized to extract relics from these sites.⁴³ Certainly, by the turn of the nineteenth century, new episodes of vandalism in the Jewish catacombs had already occurred.⁴⁴ Just as destructive was the quarrying for volcanic materials taking place just above or below the

controversial subjects, such as the origins of the Roman catacombs (Aringhi, *Roma subterranea*, chapters 1-2). Aringhi may have contributed very little to Bosio's topographical analysis, but changes and additions were indeed made at this time to Bosio's text.

⁴² Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 3, note 22. What inspired Benjamin's account is not clear, but could relate to the epitaphs in Greek in the Jewish catacombs of Rome that augured a peaceful sleep "with the just" (μετά τον δίκαιον), a phrase incorporated as well into the epitaphs of Medieval Jews.

⁴³ Another possible culprit is the mid-seventeenth-century humanist, Antonio degli Effetti, who took over the property of the English College that Bosio had visited not many years before. A noted church scholar and passionate antiquarian, degli Effetti would likely have been familiar with the Bosio-Aringhi work, and is known for the many precious objects that he recovered from cemeteries on the Monteverde, a number of which ended up in the possession of the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, Gaspare di Carpegna, who also had Jewish artifacts in his collection (Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, n. 589). P. Sante Bartoli's account of Degli Effetti's excavations in a "sacred" cemetery in C. Fea, *Miscellanea filologica, critica, e antiquaria*, I, Roma 1790, 238.

⁴⁴ A review of the archaeological activity in this area from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries is in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 13-26. According to R. Venuti, *Accurata e succinta descrizione topografica delle antichità di Roma*, II, Roma 1763, 181, parts of the Jewish cemetery had remained accessible, and marble inscriptions continued to be recovered by city authorities, including Venuti himself and the Abbot Giacomo Severini, Custodian of the Holy Relics and Sacred Cemeteries of Rome from 1782-1800.

level of the graves.⁴⁵ Catacombs inside the cliffs were especially vulnerable, as it was most convenient to burrow into the geological strata at these points.⁴⁶ Industrial-scale terracing in the late 19th century laid bare even larger quantities of the area's ancient remains, and Forma Urbis creator Rodolfo Lanciani now perceived Monte Rosaro as «honeycombed with catacombs» in a heavily damaged and anonymous state.⁴⁷ One alleged catacomb was described in 1892 as conserved «not only poorly, but horribly and indecently used as a site for trash and a real mess.»⁴⁸ Another cemetery, «a little distant from that of Ponziano», had served a «wretched people»: to some, this might well have been

⁴⁵ Gravel quarries («cave di ghaia») on the Monte Rosato are noted in the *Collezione di carte pubbliche, proclami, editti, ragionamenti ed altre produzioni tendente a consolidare la rigenerata Repubblica Romana*, II, Roma 1798, 182.

⁴⁶ A. Ferrua, «Via Portuense», *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 111 (1988) 23, note 36 and 25, note 44: a Sig. Pellegrini showed the «roughly transcribed» inscriptions to Rome's Antiquities Commissioner, Carlo Fea. In the early 1860's, Giovanni and Michele Stefano de Rossi and their colleagues from the Prussian Academy in Rome conducted their own search for the Jewish site, perhaps after another Sig. Pellegrini had approached de Rossi with copies of epitaphs he had found in an ancient burial grounds «sotto Monteverde» (the inscriptions themselves contained no inherently «Jewish» elements): Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 21, note 20. A good number of 19th century references to a «Vigna Pellegrini», however, indicate a property by the same name on the via Aurelia, which also contained catacombs below its grounds.

⁴⁷ R. Lanciani, *New Tales of Old Rome*, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston 1901, 247. Railway construction, too, brought dramatic change to the zone. An «urgent» notice was sent to Italy's Ministry of Public Instruction in February 28th, 1890, reporting a «perilous» excavation into the flanks of the Monteverde for the «grande strada di circonvallazione.» Just as the work began, a gallery emerged. Judging from records of the time, a good portion of the artifacts from the work site came from tombs (and the unnamed «foreigner» who purchased some of the artifacts is probably the English Lord Saville, who excavated tombs in the Vigna Jacobini in 1887: see N. Young, *Murray's Handbook for Rome and the Campagna*, E. Stanton, London 1908¹⁷, 27). Between 1906-1911, a new train station and rail yard extension were built just east of the Jewish catacomb site, about 300 meters south of the older Trastevere station, on land formerly belonging to the Baldini, Pica, Jacobini and Tabanelli: Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 34.

⁴⁸ Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Direzione Generale delle Antichità e Belle Arti, 2.2, n. 739 (February 10th, 1896): «È tenuta la catacomba non solo male ma orrendamente ed indecentemente ... (un) luogo di immondezze e vero serraglio.»

the cemetery of the Jews.⁴⁹ Yet researchers who hoped that the sweeping changes were indeed the «all-consuming excavations» necessary to bring the Jewish catacombs to light were profoundly disappointed.⁵⁰ The time had not yet come for its release.

The catacomb stayed out of reach for just a little bit longer, until the turn of the 20th century, at which time a landslide above a quarry on the Pellegrini-Quarantotti property peeled away the final coatings of soil from its galleries and tombs. Even then, as Di Mento observes, the authorities were slow to act upon reports of three crevices newly exposed at some distance from the Christian sites.⁵¹ At long last, in late October of 1904, a government inspector denounced the damage that was visible even from the public road, but major portions of the Jewish cemetery were by then in ruins at the bottom of a giant sinkhole 50 meters in diameter and 6 meters in depth. And thus begins a whole new pattern of variations to the site (pl. III.1).

Di Mento's archival research has also led her (on my recommendation) to the Theology Faculty at Humboldt University in Berlin, where Professor Nikolaus Müller's photography archives are now housed.⁵² Apparently used for decades as glass panels in the dome of the Berlin Cathedral, the black and white glass plate slides – around 350 in number – have been digitized and are now in the process of catalogiza-

⁴⁹ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 25, note 142; and A. Silvagni, *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, n.s., I, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Romae 1922, n. 4731, found, according to L. Bruzza, «in una casa sopra l'antico cimitero degli Hebrei.»

⁵⁰ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 28, note 157. Nikolaus Müller was among those hunting for traces of the Monteverde catacomb at this time (in 1884 and 1888).

⁵¹ Ibid. Müller, too, notes the delay in notification, in *Die jüdische Katakomben*, 1. Lanciani's description of the site in in *New Tales*, 247, suggests the exposed areas were the grottos III-V, XII and XXX on Müller's plan.

⁵² The contents of this archive are reviewed in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 44-45. The New Testament Seminar at the Berlin University under the direction of Prof. A. Deissmann inherited Müller's archives, and with continued sponsorship by the Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums, published Müller's photographs and notes on the Monteverde inscriptions in 1919. Müller's colleagues H. Gressman and H. Lietzmann would later study two other Jewish catacombs below Rome's Villa Torlonia, but Müller, like Bosio centuries before, would have the last word on the Monteverde site.

tion.⁵³ The vast majority of these show inscriptions from Rome and Venosa.⁵⁴ The small number of images that depict structural details and more panoramic views of the Monteverde site have for the most part already been published in print or digital form.⁵⁵ It is nonetheless startling to see well-dressed men and women joining Müller's workmen in some group shots amidst masses of rubble and debris.⁵⁶ Nothing else expresses quite so clearly the challenges of Müller's dig.

On top of these visual testimonies, it would have been helpful for the Rossi - Di Mento study to provide more insight into the circumstances favoring Müller's involvement with the dig.⁵⁷ Financial backing for a scientific study of the Monteverde catacombs over two seasons in 1906 was provided by the Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums (the Society for the Advancement of Jewish Studies), which sought a broader approach to the study of Jewish culture and Jewish self-definition in the modern world.⁵⁸ This progressive movement allowed its affiliates considerable freedom of interpretation and it is not hard to see how the Monteverde project might have attracted its support as a means to evaluate and even challenge the Catholic Church's ideas on Early Christian funerary rites and customs. Müller

⁵³ L.V. Rutgers, "Neue Recherchen in den jüdischen und frühchristlichen Katakomben Roms: Methode, Deutungsprobleme und historische Implikationen einer Datierung mittels Radiokarbon", *Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie* 15 (2009) 23.

⁵⁴ Müller's research on the Venosa catacombs (the main focus of his unpublished manuscript, *Die altjüdischen Coemeterien in Italien*) has not been well documented and explained. He is known to have transcribed all of the Jewish catacomb inscriptions (in 1884 and 1888) and took photographs of these items during his "100 days" in Venosa in the fall of 1904.

⁵⁵ A number of these photographs are in Rutgers, *Neue Recherchen*, fig. 2 and fig. 15. Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 11, describes the one arcosolium in the Monteverde site as being in a cubiculum: it is unlikely therefore to be the image described in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 45, note 232, which was probably taken at Venosa.

⁵⁶ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 45-48, nn. 24-26. Among the individuals in n. 27 is Müller himself, the bearded gentleman at the far left: at center is Dr. A. von Harnack, Professor of Ancient Christian History at the University of Berlin.

⁵⁷ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 25, note 145.

⁵⁸ Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 20, explains that this society had enabled him to insure and pay the workers in his 1906 excavation. Additional background on the movement is in H.C. Soussan, *The Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaft des Judentums in Its Historical Context*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2013, 193.

was without any question an authority in the field, but how exactly he had obtained funding from the group is not clear.

What is better documented is Müller's lifelong fascination with catacombs, which began while he was in Italy on a German travel grant in 1883-84. His first work on the subject illustrated a newly discovered catacomb that he boldly proclaimed as Jewish, despite the absence of all the reliable markers of a Jewish tomb.⁵⁹ The site disappeared from view soon thereafter, but not before Müller had forged ties to the Roman archaeologists, that bore very fruitful results, for a decade and a half later, when it came to the catacombs, few could surpass Müller in learning. His entry on "Koimeterion" for *Die Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* was book length (and also released in book form).⁶⁰ This exhaustive review of Early Christian burial sites reveals Müller's deep familiarity with the literature amassed by the late 19th century on this concern; above all, the work of Giovanni Battista de Rossi, to which Müller gave much weight in defining the origins of the catacombs in Rome.⁶¹ Yet Müller himself delayed the release of his own definitive work on Ancient and Medieval Jewish burial grounds in Italy. The Scottish writer Norman Douglas illustrates in somewhat comic terms the dilemma Müller faced in concluding this lengthy affair:

Professor Müller ... has been engaged the last twenty-five years in writing a ponderous tome on (the catacombs). Unfortunately (so they say), there is not much chance of it ever seeing the light, for just as he is on the verge of publication, some new Jewish catacombs are dis-

⁵⁹ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 25, note 145. Müller's supposition was drawn for the most part from the absence of any artifacts with Christian motifs, the stylized palm trees beside the only example of a gallery *arcosolium*, and the catacomb's proximity to one of the entrances into the Vigna Randanini site.

⁶⁰ N. Müller, "Koimeterien", in *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, X (1901), 794-877.

⁶¹ Namely, that the Christian catacombs appeared to have been constructed on pagan rather than Jewish patterns: Müller, "Koimeterien", 863. G.B. de Rossi, in the *Roma sotteranea cristiana*, I, Salvucci, Roma 1864, 90-91, found that the structural evidence for Jewish cemeteries in Rome (the Vigna Randanini site), did not suggest a greater antiquity than the other cemeteries of this form, but ventured that Christians, Jews, and others influenced by Eastern Mediterranean customs would probably have had the Palestinian burial caves in mind when developing such sites, although the "Christian innovation" was to connect the crypts to manifest the spiritual ties that united all members of the Christian faith.

covered in another part of the world that cause the Professor to revise all his previous theories. The work must be written anew and brought up to date, and hardly this is accomplished when fresh catacombs are found elsewhere, necessitating a further revision. The Professor once more rewrites the whole ...⁶²

What might have been the cause of so many shakeups in Müller's work? The pattern of interruptions suggests that a rash of new discoveries was not the only culprit, and that Müller was still attempting to theorize upon what had been found. He and a number of his contemporaries were in fact seeking evidence of a direct link between the burial customs of Ancient Palestine and the Jewish communities of the Diaspora.⁶³ In Rome itself, structural elements inside the "Hypogeum of the Flavii" in the Catacombs of Domitilla were at times treated as Jewish in origin because they resembled those in a Jewish catacomb nearby.⁶⁴ A room in the catacomb of St. Agnes was called the "Semitic Chamber" because its single trough grave and stone door seemed to match the literary descriptions of ancient Middle Eastern rock cut tombs.⁶⁵ Mariano Armellini, while unsuccessful in his quest for the Monteverde Jewish site, nonetheless proposed a Jewish origin for the cemetery "ad catacumbas" on the via Appia, given its proximity to at least two other Jewish burial grounds.⁶⁶ And Müller's good friend Orazio Marucchi, director of the Vatican's Egyptian Museum, stated in a very popular early 20th century survey of the Roman catacombs that the Christians had not imitated the burial practices of Diaspora Jews, but rather those of Ancient Israel (this went somewhat further than de Rossi had been

⁶² N. Douglas, *Old Calabria*, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston 1915, 38. On October 6th, 1904, Müller was made an honorary citizen of Venosa. But the news reached him shortly thereafter of the rediscovery of the Monteverde site, and the Venosa study was again put on hold, this time, as it would turn out, permanently.

⁶³ The idea of a "Palestinian prototype" for the catacombs had already led Marchi to the Monteverde in 1843 to prove that a people "tenacious" in their adherence to ancestral law and custom would never have embraced pagan customs for burial.

⁶⁴ Müller, "Koimeterien", 862 and *Die jüdische Katakombe*, 23, adding that these areas contained a higher density of tombs. Also O. Marucchi, *Roma sotterranea cristiana, n.s. 1.1. Monumenti del Cimitero di Domitilla sulla via Ardeatina*, Spithoever, Roma 1909, 91, nn. V and XXV, on the idea that some catacombs were begun by Jews and later were "finished" by Christians, or Judeo-Christians.

⁶⁵ Müller, "Koimeterien", 862.

⁶⁶ M. Armellini, *Le chiese di Roma dalle loro origini sino al secolo XVI*, Tipografia Editrice Romana, Roma 1887, 721-722.

willing to go in tracing the communal crypts to older burial practices in the Middle East).⁶⁷ Yet there was still the “missing link” to resolve, the catacomb prototype, which Müller believed to be the Jewish cemetery on Monteverde. «Its discovery,» he wrote in his 1901 encyclopedia entry, «would be of extraordinary value» to this claim.⁶⁸

In essence, Müller staked his claim on Monteverde as being «the oldest Jewish cemetery of the West» with what he saw as evidence of a chronological progression from family crypts in an “Oriental style” (the so-called “grottoes”) to more “catacomb-like” arrangements of galleries in the peripheral areas of the site.⁶⁹ Such was his belief. Yet one wishes he had taken a stroll farther down the via Portuense to see the tombs in the quarries of the Pozzo Pantaleo valley, or even those in the Vigna Jacobini close by.⁷⁰ He might have seen a tomb distribution similar in many respects to what he had found.⁷¹

Di Mento’s presentation of Müller’s excavations from 1904 to 1906 in Section 2.1.3 summarizes in detail his 1909 report, along with the site plan drafted in October of 1906 by CDAS engineer Guglielmo Palombi (fig. 36). The Palombi plan records the condition of the site in 1906 (even the portions destroyed in a landslide of 12-13th April, 1906).⁷² It does not show the arrangement of the wall-tombs, but an earlier site plan from 1904-1905 (n. 16) illustrates at least one rectangular-shaped chamber whose walls are covered by tiers of tombs cut

⁶⁷ O. Marucchi, *Le catacombe romane*, Desclée, Lefebvre et Co., Roma 1903, 112-113. Also in Marucchi’s *Guida del Museo Cristiano Lateranense*, Tipografia Vaticana, Roma 1898, 162, the Jewish catacombs are described as being «imitations of the Palestinian burial caves.»

⁶⁸ Müller, “Koimeterien”, 861.

⁶⁹ Id., *Die jüdische Katakombe*, 28.

⁷⁰ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 36 (note 187) and 61 (note 38).

⁷¹ Id., 152.

⁷² The plan drafted prior to this time, probably in 1904, suggests, in fact, that virtually all of the northeastern sections of this catacomb had already collapsed, for, as G. De Angelis d’Ossat later observes in *Geologia delle catacombe romane*, (Roma Sotteranea Cristiana 3), Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Città del Vaticano 1943, 22, «the galleries surrounded on all parts the great oblong-shaped crater (of 1904).» According to Müller, *Die jüdische Katakombe*, 25, many of these had been in the form of «grottoes.» The plans do not match up on many points, although Palombi’s Grotto V might be that marked “A” on the earlier plan.

parallel to the surface in the manner of *loculi*.⁷³ This chamber “A” is one of the three openings visible around an oblong crater, which could be the one on the Palombi plan that separates grottoes V and XXX (both exposed in 1904).

An accurate visual record was important to Müller, and something he took care to note as often as he could was the find spot of an inscription and the date when it had been found. This record was transmitted in part in the Müller - Bees volume of 1919 (*Die Inschriften der Jüdischen Katakombe am Monteverde zu Rom*), and reveals curious details not always explicit in the text, such as the system Müller had adopted to label with Roman numerals the different areas of the site, from I to XLII.⁷⁴ This labeling was strictly on a topographical basis, and did not distinguish between the different types of spaces. Thus, in the northwest area marked in sequence as VII-XIII, there was at least one grotto (XII), two or perhaps three recesses (VII, XI, and XIII), and three galleries (VIII, IX, X).

Some of the numbered sites also have tombs at or below floor level labeled with lower-case letters, being those that Müller was able to excavate before their demolition. This second system reveals how he “grouped” the tombs in various numbered areas in an attempt to trace the chronological progression of burial in the site. For example, two ditches in a square cubiculum (XVII) are labeled a and b, and two other tombs of the same type in the gallery leading up to this site (XV) continue the sequence as c. and d. The tombs in Grotto XII are labeled a-c, but those in the adjacent Recess XIII are given a non-sequential labeling from a-b. The arrangement of tombs in the grottoes and galleries at southeast is even more complex: those in a neatly arranged sequence in Grotto XIX begin with a. and b., with c. and d. superimposed above them to indicate that there are multiple levels of burials on this spot. Tombs e. and f. continue toward the back wall of Grotto XXX, but the sequence then leads into a separate area for tombs g-j, contingent to XXVIII. A good number of what are probably *formae* (burials in ditches below the floor) and “casement tombs” (containers in masonry, here marked by thick black lines) stacked on top of the other burials in galleries XXVI and XXVIII are not labeled, nor are some of the smaller

⁷³ Müller proposed that the tomb architecture in the Monteverde site suggested distinct burial practices not employed by the Christians, although no examples of what was then seen in Rome as the Jewish tomb *par excellence*, the “kokh”, had been found in his dig.

⁷⁴ N. Müller, N.A. Bees, *Die Inschriften der jüdischen Katakombe am Monteverde zu Rom*, Harrassowitz, Leipzig 1919.

passages which connect to these sites. Müller's absences from the excavation no doubt made the consistency in labeling very difficult, and he could not explore all that he had hoped to in his dig.⁷⁵

What was it about the "grottoes" that so excited Müller?⁷⁶ Again, he treated these as evidence of burial caves of the kind described in Mishnaic texts. The spaces in question had partially collapsed into the quarry below, no doubt because they were wider than the average gallery or chamber and separated from each other by thinner piers of tuff. Müller does not note any reinforcement of these cavities, which he finds quite "raw", and thinks their size, somewhat irregular dimensions, limited points of access, and high density of tombs as indicative of family burial vaults rather than a collective or unified cemetery (that said, a cluttering of tombs in these areas could also be due to their proximity to the entrance I-II, rather than the desire to be buried in a specific family tomb, for no skylights were noted in this site).⁷⁷ Along similar lines, he attempts to build a bridge between these allegedly "pre-collective" hypogea and the rock-cut tombs of the Hebrew Bible, supporting, in effect, the long-held assumption that the Jews would have continued their ancestral practices in the Roman Diaspora, and that the presence of such burials in Palestinian caverns somehow connected to the genesis of the catacombs in Rome.⁷⁸ This fascinating but largely unsubstantiated claim – backed up by the argument of a "chronological progression" from grotto to catacomb within a single site, and Müller's dating of some artifacts whose relevancy to Judaism is now very much in question – nonetheless gave Monteverde the reputation as being the "oldest Jewish cemetery in the West", an attribution that nothing in the present study can support.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 46. A number of inscriptions are noted as having been found in «April-October, 1906,» the period in between Müller's two excavation campaigns. On the basis of Müller's recorded find spots for the inscriptions, much of the catacomb was exposed by early 1905, with only three galleries at northwest (XX-XXVI) and those in the vicinity of the stairwell (I-IV; XV-XVI) excavated in April of 1906.

⁷⁶ *Id.*, 23.

⁷⁷ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 71. The only retaining walls were in the antechamber and stairways (nn. I, II, IV).

⁷⁸ *Id.*, 71; and Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 24-27, for a heavily theological interpretation of these features in the site.

⁷⁹ Objectively, what remains of "grottoes" on Palombi's plan clearly shows that they were an integral part of the cemetery, as many galleries branch off from

Di Mento also contributes greatly to our understanding of the 20th century urbanization of the Monteverde district with reference to the changes in property zoning that led to landscape alterations on a destructive scale (Section 1.6). With Müller's project on hiatus after 1906, the catacomb was left unprotected and essentially willed to disappear by its owners, the Pellegrini-Quarantotti, who saw it as a liability in their sale of the site.⁸⁰ Once the «vincolo archeologico» was removed along with much of the catacomb in 1910, contractor Adamo Brunori resumed quarrying (and intercepting probable Jewish tombs). In 1912, a new property owner, Odoardo Tabanelli, subdivided the land into building lots for «villini» (including those of the Gualandi Institute and Cooperativa fra il Personale del Senato del Regno).⁸¹ Yet the fractured and dangerous quarry site remained undeveloped for some time along a great new avenue through the zone, the Circonvallazione Gianicolense.⁸²

Particularly significant is the new data concerning Jewish catacomb galleries and other evidence found after Müller's final season of excavations in October of 1906. He had, of course, stated upon more

these sites, but the majority of areas are dug in a manner analogous to other underground tombs. Müller's excavations revealed only one arcosolium at the back of a chamber. Additional photographs from the early 20th century document typical Roman funerary architecture of the fourth century CE. The site contained few traces of parietal decoration and other architectural motifs, and even the chambers held *loculi* rather than tombs on a monumental scale, but the catacomb's apparent "poverty" in this regard did not render it unique among Roman cemeteries. In all probability, pre-existing cavities were adapted for burial, in a site later enlarged as a cemetery proper. Müller would not have known of the quarry-cemetery below the Church of San Sebastiano, not yet visible in his time, and seems also to have excluded a structural relationship to the anonymous cemeteries in the man-made caverns of the Pozzo Pantaleo, then perceived as "novel" in tomb design (Tomassetti, *Campagna romana*, 339).

⁸⁰ A summary of events from 1906-1910 is in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 31-32. The property owner, Marquis Benedetto Pellegrini-Quarantotti, died in late 1905, leaving the site to multiple heirs, who tried to compel Müller to abide by non-negotiable conditions for his last season of excavations in 1907, including a set deadline for the completion of the work and the demolition thereafter of all that which remained.

⁸¹ *Id.*, 33-34 (note 178) n. 17 and 61.

⁸² *Id.*, 34. The Circonvallazione Gianicolense (formerly Viale della Vittoria) was first planned in 1909, and later extended to the via del Casaleto.

than one occasion that his work had been interrupted, and that not every area of the cemetery had been explored. The tombs that emerge in a nearby worksite in 1910-1911 are on the whole simple and unevenly laid, with some cut right into the cliff as shafts or ditches.⁸³ Just in back of the Vigna Pellegrini, however, above a railway embankment, more catacomb galleries and Jewish inscriptions came to light in 1913. This region had an independent point of entry, but could also be reached by one or more quarry caverns that were difficult, if not impossible to patrol.

Following reports of vandalism in May of 1914 (which had already occurred in Müller's site), the Vatican's Commissione di Archeologia Sacra – by now the established protector of the Jewish cemeteries of Rome – began stripping the catacomb of any salvageable remains.⁸⁴ In this case, even the objects that did not have specifically Jewish “markers” were put into storage, where they still remain. But this agency's operations did not go undetected. The May 12th, 1914 edition of the Genovese periodical *Il Caffaro* denounces the presence of «Tomb Raiders» in the site.⁸⁵ Having found clear signs of tomb violation during his own unauthorized visit to the area under investigation, the *Caffaro* reporter – none other than Gabriele D'Annunzio, writing under the pen name of Mario de' Fiori – accuses the Italian authorities of doing little to stop the theft of Jewish funerary artifacts by persons unknown.⁸⁶ Indeed, the murky situation he describes in an area destined to house Italian Senate employees suggests that people in high places might have pushed for a quick resolution to the potential roadblock to building on the site.⁸⁷

This theory might also explain the even more obscure circumstances surrounding the recovery of twenty-five Jewish epitaphs in

⁸³ Id., 36.

⁸⁴ Id., 313: vandalism in March of 1907 had defaced some *loculi* (Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, 64).

⁸⁵ A second article on this theme was published in the Roman daily *Il Messaggero*, possibly a reprint of the D'Annunzio's original denunciation in *Il Caffaro*.

⁸⁶ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 36-37, n. 19 (but D'Annunzio not named); also 61-62.

⁸⁷ Published accounts identify the site as the property of one «Rey» (or Ray), but the archives list the owner as the Honorable Count Papadopoli: Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 400. From the presence of a quarry, it would appear to be situated right after the intersection of via Vincenzo Monti and via Giuseppe Guinazelli.

1919 by archaeologist Roberto Paribeni, who apparently found them in the area first excavated by Müller (Circonvallazione Gianicolense, n. 50, near via Francesco Massi) below deep cuts into the hillside for a plateau of buildable land.⁸⁸ His was nothing more than a rescue operation carried out as more of the hillside was blasted away for a sharp ridge and the illusion of stability, which would cause many complications for area residents later on.

The 1919 incident is the last confirmed report of a Jewish catacomb on Monteverde. What remained of the site is believed to have collapsed in a landslide on October 14th, 1928.⁸⁹ Building density increased on these slopes during the Fascist and Post War eras, and older residences made way for multi-purpose edifices along streets like the via Francesco Dall'Ongaro, via Lorenzo Valla, and via Giacinto Carini. Underground cemeteries cropped up in a number of locations, but did not contain signs of Jewish use.⁹⁰ One can even say with irony that for most of the twentieth century, the Jewish catacombs were more forgotten than ever before beneath a maze of asphalt and concrete (pl. III.2). Once rendered off limits, the Monteverde tunnels became much larger than life, especially to area children. The distant memories of long-time residents in Section 1.7 allude to narrow openings in the hillside, cluttered tunnels, and underground lakes. These, indeed, lend an air of romance to the site.

In an abrupt departure from the epic saga of Monteverde, Elsa Laurenzi prefaces her review of other Jewish catacombs in Rome with an interesting discussion of major unresolved issues in the study of these sites.⁹¹ Her first point of contention is where the Jews of Rome were

⁸⁸ Id., 39, (n. 20) and 62. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, 9: only the marble plaques were preserved, with all but one (Negroni n. 081) now in the National Roman Museum. In the archives of the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology is the note of an "Adunanza del 25 aprile 1919 - Notizie sul cimitero ebraico di Monteverde, distrutto in gran parte con autorizzazione del Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione" published on the PCAS website: www.arcsacra.it.

⁸⁹ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 42 (note 213) and 62.

⁹⁰ Id., 40, n. 21, 43 and 64-66, including a site near the Jewish cemetery studied in 1919. That indicated as below the Fiorani property could be one of the "entrances" into the cemetery of Ponziano last seen at the end of the 19th century in the Vigna Merluzzi (Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Direzione Antichità e Belle Arti, 2.2, 424).

⁹¹ Laurenzi, in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 77, note 108, names these «canonical» sites, but does not exclude that other «minor» catacombs with Jewish

buried before the catacombs took off in popularity in the third century CE. Given the almost complete lack of evidence for individual Jewish burials in Rome in the Late Republican and Early Imperial periods (end of 1st century BCE - beginning of third century CE), it is quite possible that for centuries Jews simply made use of local burial practices that would render their tombs virtually indistinguishable from those of other members of their social rank and file. This would not necessarily exclude clusters or collections of Jewish tombs in the graveyards around Rome, but the very nature of such burial – often in ditches or other types of encasements in the ground – does not lead to great hopes that the human remains in these sites today can be identified as those of ancient Jews.⁹²

Also not satisfactorily explained to date is how the Jewish underground cemeteries came into being and remained in use for some generations. That a small number of catacomb clients chose to list synagogue affiliations and specific roles in Jewish assemblies has perpetuated the idea that the synagogues must have had a hand in the local burial operations, much in the way that the early Church in Rome to have taken on the responsibility for many analogous Christian sites. Yet far more common than the synagogue office is mention of one's familial ties, for it was to a family that the tomb mattered most. While the logistics of tomb excavation and distribution could have been left in the hands of the professionals – as was probably the case for the production and sale of suitable memorials for a site – deliberate measures taken in the layout and design of many of the tombs suggest a sort of hierarchy in place, no doubt linked to cultural dynamics within the local Jewish society, and indeed society as a whole in Rome.⁹³

Of course the “primordial problem” comes up, and even now awaits an answer: Who thought up the catacombs – and when? A decade or so ago, the international press reported that the radiocarbon

tombs might not have been properly identified in the last century and a half of rapid city growth.

⁹² L.V. Rutgers' recent demographic studies on the Jews of Rome could have been discussed at this point, including his “Nuovi dati sulla demografia della comunità giudaica di Roma”, in G. Lacerenza (ed.), *Hebraica hereditas. Studi in onore di Cesare Colafemmina*, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli 2005, 237-254; Id., “Reflections on the Demography of the Jewish Community in Ancient Rome”, in M. Ghilardi, C. Goddard (eds.), *Les cités de l'Italie tardo-antique (IV-VI siècle)*, Ecole Française de Rome, Rome 2006, 345-358.

⁹³ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 80, note 135.

dating of organic materials in a sampling of Jewish tombs in the Villa Torlonia suggested that the Jewish catacombs predated their Christian counterparts by at least a century.⁹⁴ Yet in a conference of that year, scholars debated the genesis of catacomb excavation in Rome without any mention of these finds.⁹⁵ Laurenzi chooses the path of least resistance by pointing out the high levels of expertise required to create prime burial space (hardly “clandestine”) at a reasonable distance from the residential areas of Rome.⁹⁶ Communal cemeteries were to be found on virtually every public roadway outside of the ancient city, often with deep roots into contingent, semi-rural estates. On the origins and development of the Jewish catacombs in particular, Laurenzi has to say about each catacomb summarizes what she has already written in her 2011 guide to the Jewish catacombs of Rome. The first parts of the section, however, raise many good points to consider, and, generally speaking, Laurenzi’s contributions should have been better integrated into the other parts of this book.⁹⁷

In Section 3, Regional Inspector Daniela Rossi reports on the archaeological studies carried out in Monteverde Vecchio from 2009-2013. Many grew out of the Superintendence’s routine oversight of public works, but others were in response to the unexpected. Beginning in 2009, the XVI (now XII) Municipal District has taken special care to note any possible remains of Jewish burial sites within its jurisdiction. The core of the new study of the Monteverde catacomb consists of these finds.

The catalyst was the detection of underground galleries in the gardens of the Gualandi Institute for the Deaf-Mute near the intersection of via Vincenzo Monti and via Lorenzo Valla in 2009. Drilling for the foundation piles of an underground parking garage broke through cavities at two points below the perimeter of this property. The small dimensions of the drill holes made possible only an inspection by micro camera. The first gallery was 10 meters below the modern street level

⁹⁴ J. Owen, “Catacomb Find Boosts Early Christian-Jewish Ties, Study Says”, *National Geographic News* (July 20th, 2005): http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/07/0720_050720_christianity_2.html.

⁹⁵ See note 15.

⁹⁶ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 81.

⁹⁷ Laurenzi’s review of tomb typology in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 78, notes 118-123, could have been formatted as an easily referenced table, and the summary of “Jewish symbols” in Section 6.5 is essentially an index without citations.

and ran east – northeast and west-southwest for 7 meters below the sidewalk on the western edge of via Lorenzo Valla, before possibly joining to a second gallery perpendicular to the first. It measured 1.50-1.80 meters in width and an estimated 2 meters in height. While the ceiling had partially collapsed, the walls appeared straight, though with no signs of tombs. The second opening at a lower level – a good 10 meters below the first – appeared to run more or less perpendicular to the upper gallery, but was of indeterminate form. Due to pre-existing pipes and cables, neither hole could be enlarged to allow for a closer look, though it was possible to identify burials just below the present ground level close by. The galleries' notable depth and positioning on a sharp incline also suggest that they had been dug out at a lower point.

The second discovery of underground cavities in this area of Mon-teverde was brought about in a more dramatic fashion. Work on the gas lines below the via Daniello Bartoli on April 27th, 2012 was interrupted by a sinkhole large enough to consume the back end of a large truck. The study to determine the cause of this accident identified a series of cavities below street level that had already been intercepted by city services in recent times. Parts of this underground feature were found to have been buttressed with piers and arches in rough masonry, but there was no visible evidence of tombs. The site, however, was never fully exposed, and Dr. Rossi feels that its location close to one of the proposed sites for the Jewish catacomb at the edge of the former Vigna Bennucci (via Guido Guinizelli, between via Daniello Bartoli and via Giuseppe Revere), could someday confirm that it, too, has some relationship to the cemetery in question.⁹⁸

Traces of an ancient cemetery have also been found just below street level on another edge of the slope. On the via Vincenzo Monti n. 19, work again on the gas lines at about 80 cm. below the street unearthed ceramic fragments dating to the end of the second century-beginning of the third century CE. Slightly below this deposit amidst service pipes and cables were the graves of at least five different individuals. Anthropological and osteological analyses confirmed that these were primary depositions made fairly close to where the Jewish cemetery once lay.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 100. On page 68, there are two separate accounts from 1885 and 1889 of tombs «a cappuccina» in this same site. As in the area of the Jewish catacomb (vigna Pellegrini), this property developed later than the other parcels in this zone: id., 113, n. 67.

⁹⁹ The discovery was made in April of 2012. Id., 68, note 74, there is also an account of tombs found during roadwork on the via di Monteverde in 2010.

In the area of another documented catacomb site close to the church of S. Maria Regina Pacis on the via Anton Giulio Barilli, tombs were found during repair work on electric cables in April of 2012 at about 77 cm. below ground, although in a disturbed state which made their dating very approximate to the first through fourth centuries CE.¹⁰⁰ Additional work by the electric company on the western end of via Lorenzo Valla on October 23d, 2012, intercepted the foundations of an ancient Roman wall. Although pre-existing fiber optic cables of recent installation prevented a complete site investigation, it was still possible to make out the foundations of a second wall below the first.¹⁰¹ Farther south, other traces of wall masonry were found, flanked by a tomb. The fill from this zone revealed many fragments of pottery, tile, glass, and metal, none in an intact setting amidst an intricate modern network of conduits, cables and pipes.

Rossi's detailed summary of very recent archaeological data makes evident the many traces of human and manufactured remains lying just beneath the surface of this zone. And virtually every one of these sites appears to have been violated over the course of the 20th century for buildable land a stone's throw from the city center. So much has been lost by our time, although Rossi presents a few possibilities for further investigation. Yet in a hard look at the evidence, has anything of the Jewish catacomb actually been found? An overview of where these sites are located in respect to the Pellegrini quarries makes a Jewish connection quite tenuous. What we know of the catacomb's layout does not suggest a site of so great an extent.¹⁰² Many of the new finds described above are as close, if not closer, to the Ponziano catacomb, which developed westward (and is far from being documented completely, although a new topographical study is in the works).¹⁰³ In short, on this evidence alone, it cannot be proven that something of the Jewish cemetery still exists.

¹⁰⁰ Id., 102.

¹⁰¹ Id., 103.

¹⁰² The issue surfaced once more in the spring of 2014 with the excavation of five columbaria and other tombs on the Circonvallazione Gianicolense opposite the Church of Saints Francesco and Caterina: V. Lupia, "Anfore e colombari, torna alla luce l'antica necropoli di Trastevere", *La Repubblica* (May 28th, 2014): http://roma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/05/28/news/anfore_e_colombari_torna_alla_luce_lantica_necropoli_di_trastevere-87431695/#gallery-slider=87432010.

¹⁰³ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 149, note 112 (n. 98).

But Rossi presents once more type of evidence for our consideration, the written and oral testimonies of long-time residents of the zone. Witnesses to Monteverde in wartime and later eras bring us back many decades to a world where children climbed up and down steep railway embankments into crevices leading to endless caverns below ground. The charming stories, in retrospect, have some truth to them, as was made evident just a few months after this book's release. In October of 2013, speleologists from the "Roma Sotteranea" association descended into a deep well on the far side of Monteverde and found themselves on the shores of an underground lake in one of the vast caverns that area residents had described. Perhaps the recollections of tunnels with wall cavities and the "bones of nuns" might also someday prove real (pl. IV.1).¹⁰⁴

In Section 4, geologist Maurizio Lanzini reports on the stratigraphy of Monteverde to illustrate in which of the geological layers the caves and catacombs are found. Since the area in question is particularly well defined from the Tiber river valley and other natural depressions, Lanzini is able to identify at least seven geological deposits from the Pliocene era to the present day, not including the recent man-made filling of gullies along the major traffic arteries through this zone. Buried beneath the fill and debris of the Tiber flood plain (SFTba) are many of the sites where the Ancient Romans obtained mud for bricks (MVA) and lithoid tuff for building (VSN1). In the higher elevations of Monteverde, 48-50 meters above sea level, is a layer of granular pozzolana, a key ingredient in Roman concrete. The Jewish catacomb is situated in the upper reaches of this stratum (VSN 2 and VSNa), with a number of its galleries ultimately penetrating a different geological formation known as Monte Mario Tuff (MTM), greyish-yellowish in color and more friable in mass.

Lanzini notes that water springs course through this layer, although the Jewish cemetery has no recorded traces of water infiltration, except for possible drains and conduits near the surface of the site.¹⁰⁵ In addition to labeling the different geological layers, Lanzini provides insight into the changes to Monteverde in very recent times.

¹⁰⁴ "Urban legends" of catacombs in the area are found on the *Narkive* website: <http://it.discussioni.leggende.metropolitane.narkive.com/5wDatBSZ/it-scolaresca-dispersa-nele-catacombe>. Websites rich in photographic memories of this zone include *Roma Sparita* (www.romasparita.eu) and the *Facebook* page of the "Bar Vitali" on via Lorenzo Valla, 38 (established in 1922): <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.45050263467.52602.37632983467&type=1>.

¹⁰⁵ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 116.

The ancient quarries at the foot of its slopes are almost all blocked up by modern construction, except for some old storerooms in the buttresses along the via di Ponziano.¹⁰⁶ One cavity (fig. 67, 3) was seen on the via Giuseppe Parini in 2002, but like the more recent findings described in Section 3, this, too, has been filled.¹⁰⁷ Lanzini positions it on the 1924 map on the outer edge of a cluster of large, probably ancient open-air quarries for lithoid tuff just east of the Jewish site. Artificial cavities are also apparent in a layer of lithoid tuff on the far southern corner of Monteverde, just a few hundred meters away from a railway booth, which puts them in close proximity to the Rey property in which a Jewish catacomb was found in 1913.

Lanzini's presentation of the technical material is greatly supported by strong visuals that use the modern street layout to help locate each cavity he describes. The geological sectioning in nn. 68-71 evidence the complexity of identifying excavations in the various layers below the street level, while the re-labeling of geological strata in de Angelis D'Ossat's 1935 map (n. 72) and photograph of the galleries at the corner of via Massi and the Circonvallazione Gianicolense (n. 73) in alignment with the table created by Lanzini on page 118 point to what most likely caused the catacomb's collapse. A succession of landslides and sinkholes in the area during the time that the Jewish catacomb was exposed (1904-1928) indicate just how rapidly the geological stability of the area was being undermined by the large-scale terracing of the slopes.¹⁰⁸ If further proof is needed, it is found in the account of the sinkhole on the via Daniello Bartoli on April 27th, 2012, which revealed that the hill had been stripped away to the layer of Monte Mario tuff (MTM), putting the actual street level much closer to the underground cavities in this zone.

In conclusion, Lanzini superimposes the present street plan over that of 1924 to pinpoint the Monteverde's known catacomb sites (n. 67, 3-5). This suggests that any last vestiges of the catacomb would be located to the right of via Francesco Massi on a site now occupied by apartment buildings and a driveway running perpendicular to the street. To the south and east would be quarries also covered by modern asphalt and concrete. But Lanzini comments that «little is known of the

¹⁰⁶ Id., 95.

¹⁰⁷ Id., 117: between via Giovanni Prati and via Lorenzo Valla.

¹⁰⁸ Id., 117, culminating with a fatal sinkhole on October 14th, 1928.

extent of these quarries,» a gap in our knowledge that might soon be filled thanks to the publication of his work.¹⁰⁹

In Section 5, archaeologists Marco Arizza and Cinzia Palombi review the occupation of Monteverde from the Late Republican period down to Early Medieval times. What emerges is that the locality remained distinctively rural in appearance, aside from some picturesque fountains and shrines, and, as time went on, a marked presence of tombs over even the most irregular stretches of terrain.¹¹⁰ Great quarries for gravel and tuff were created and then abandoned, with the walls and floors of a number of these eventually modified to permit the layering of multi-level shaft tombs. Like the Janiculum's «fine mansions and gardens of the wealthy offering a visual contrast to the humble dwellings (in the river district below),» the necropolis on the via Portuense had its own visual stratification, with some truly extravagant memorials like mausolea and stone sarcophagi amidst a larger – though materially speaking, much poorer – mass of simple tombs.¹¹¹ It is reasonable to suppose much of this reflected the demographics of Rome's Regio XIV, the Transtiberim, the “Oriental” quarter of «foreigners, traders, dockworkers, and slaves.»¹¹²

While the Portuense burial grounds seem to have experienced little growth after the fifth century CE, a suburban settlement continued in this area during the early Middle Ages to take advantage of the Monteverde's situation above the Tiber and abundant supply of ancient building materials that could be recycled and sold; likewise, some roads remained open to pilgrims and other travelers who favored this approach to the sea.¹¹³ A Medieval *Campus Judaeorum* or Jewish burial grounds was set up right inside of the old city gates, and a great stretch of land extending south to the Pozzo Pantaleo also becomes associated with the Jews, perhaps in reference to the sites of far older Jewish tombs.¹¹⁴

The true gem in the collection is Alessandra Negroni's catalogue of 258 epitaphs from the Monteverde catacomb and vicinity (Section 6.1). If only it had been mounted in a manner fitting to its value! For Ne-

¹⁰⁹ Id., 118.

¹¹⁰ Id., 141. The vast majority of the tombs excavated into the ground or bedrock of the hill had no indications as to the religion of the deceased.

¹¹¹ H.J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, Hendrickson, Peabody MA 1995², 137.

¹¹² Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 153.

¹¹³ Id., 130-131, 145 and 151-153.

¹¹⁴ Id., 3, note 20 and 5, note 35 (n. 15). Marchi held that the trilingual inscription came from an “open air” necropolis, rather than a catacomb.

groni painstakingly reviews all the previous literature on each piece before making the bold move to organize the collection anew, according to the criteria now employed by the major collections of epigraphic materials from Rome.¹¹⁵ Guided by specific content, the epitaphs are thus arranged in the order of those that list titles or positions, and then alphabetically based on name of the deceased, the name of the donor, and so on. The departure from the traditional chronological/topographical order last set out in Noy's *Jewish Inscriptions* might throw off those who read much into where and when an inscription was found (although the matter is greatly simplified by the fact that here we are dealing with a single site). To address this concern, Negroni points out that very few of the epitaphs were found in a primary context inside of the catacomb (especially true in the case of those incised or painted onto marble slabs).¹¹⁶ Müller took pains to record find spots the times he was on the scene, but his drawings and photographs show virtually every shaft opened, with at best only the fragments of words and letters clinging to the outer extremities of a tomb.¹¹⁷

Within Negroni's established framework, new patterns and connections can be made to demonstrate, in Leon's words, that the Jews made «no linguistic island in Ancient Rome.»¹¹⁸ Many interred in the site had names derived from Latin and Greek cultural terms, to the point that the names of pagan gods could be used – and even attributes commonly associated with Christianity.¹¹⁹ In this same context, terms of affection were often identical to those on Christian or pagan tombs.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Id., 157.

¹¹⁶ Id., 157, note 20; and Müller, *Die jüdische Katakombe*, 33: a relatively small number of the graves had been sealed with marble and brick. More appeared to have been walled up with pieces of tuff and mortar.

¹¹⁷ Müller, *Die jüdische Katakombe*, 65, documents less than a handful of inscriptions that had been scratched into the plaster, contrary to Bosio's impression of what was in the site in 1602. Negroni, too, can only list a few (Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 158, notes 25-26).

¹¹⁸ Leon, *The Jews*, 92.

¹¹⁹ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 160, and commentary for Negroni nn. 015, 018, 019, 023, 027, 039, 058, 086 (most often in a Christian context), Negroni, nn. 087 and 115. Negroni adds that the application of non-Jewish names is especially apparent among females in this site.

¹²⁰ Id., 160.

Similarities in the technical qualities of some of the pieces suggest the work of a particular stonecutting workshop.¹²¹ Stonecutters, too, do not always appear to have known what they were writing, or spelled a word according to how it was probably said at the time.¹²² Overall, the quality of the work seems to have been in direct relation to the value of the materials used on a tomb, and the symmetrical arrangements of motifs might testify to a workshop's aesthetic sensibilities rather than to some deeper symbolic meaning behind the number of images used (a similar approach could be used in interpreting the compositions on Jewish "gold glasses").¹²³ In one inscription (035), the menorah motif is used twice: once with straight branches, and the other time with its branches curved. Another (040) displays a menorah at center, flanked by a jug at left and what appears to be an oversized ivy leaf at right that keeps the series in balance. For all their significance and rarity, Hebrew terms seem to have been employed at times as decorations, with a number of words or phrases broken up on either side of a Jewish visual motif.¹²⁴

The formulae, on the whole, had few original elements, and tended to be reduced in content (and not always for reasons of space): likewise decorative elements could appear spare and "neutral" in appearance, although, as Bosio first noted, even the most compact epitaph scratched or painted on mortar could sport the menorah.¹²⁵ Negrone's claim for 036 that the Psalmic-sounding phrase «In peace his/her/your sleep» occurs «very often» in Greek inscriptions to Christians is not supported by the evidence in the *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Ro-*

¹²¹ Negrone nn. 105, 107 and 017, based on the letter forms and similarities in how the motifs are designed.

¹²² For example, Negrone nn. 035, 066, 083, 170, 086, 116, and 159.

¹²³ Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomben*, 66-67, found that the gravestone makers took more care with the carved images than they did with the painted/graffiti ones. He also noted the symmetrical arrangements of many of the visual motifs.

¹²⁴ In Negrone n. 090, the Hebrew term ישראל, «Israel», is broken up into two equal parts around a menorah.

¹²⁵ In Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 161, Negrone points out standard/neutral formulae that were also used by pagans and Christians (for example, Negrone nn. 024, 069, 073, 105, 167, 299, 300 and 302). She finds that the rosette in n. 029 not only resembles those on ossuaries in the Middle East, but also examples on Roman gravestones (though she does not specify whether or not they are locally produced).

mae: perhaps the abbreviated version «in peace» here is meant.¹²⁶ At least one inscription invoking underworld deities is restored to the Jewish canon (079), because, as Negroni observes, the term had really lost all of its pagan implications by this time the piece was probably made in the 4th century CE.¹²⁷ Nothing, in fact, seems sacred: even the eloquent Latin inscription to Regina (123) shows signs of having been broken up and reused (and the piece itself remains ambiguous, for like many of the Jewish inscriptions on sarcophagi, it is accompanied by no explicitly Jewish visual motifs).

Yet the distinctly “Jewish” terms or motifs that appear in these pieces provide the bulk of what we know about Jewish communities in Late Antique Rome. Negroni does not fail to define these terms, usually selecting the most conventional interpretation (the «priestess» in 039 is described as the «wife or daughter of a priest»). It is hard to agree, however, with Negroni’s observation in 046 that *ὁσία* (pious) is rarely found in the Jewish inscriptions; the Christians in Rome display a decided preference for *ἅγιος*, and as she herself notes in 084, *μετά τῶν ὀσειον* is a variation on a Biblical text from the Septuagint.¹²⁸ Other curious details are not always singled out, like the absence of the menorah in the arrangement of Jewish motifs in 015.¹²⁹ Even if the significance – if any – of this detail continues to escape us, calling attention to it helps develop the critical eye of the reader to recognize the importance of the visual data in these texts (pl. IV.2).

In addition to the task of literary compilation, Negroni has also conducted a thorough inspection of the Monteverde epitaphs that are now in various collections around Rome.¹³⁰ The process to study and

¹²⁶ Negroni n. 036.

¹²⁷ Also Negroni nn. 098 and 106 are neutral in character (and a good portion of examples of this type are for infants). Negroni nn. 254-258 are included because they are found in Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, but here they are identified as “pagan” or “neutral” based on form, content, or find spot – not in a grave, but, for example, in the architrave of a chamber doorway, such as Negroni n. 257). Other inscriptions that seem to come from the cemetery area above the catacomb are not included for reasons of space (Negroni in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 156).

¹²⁸ See also Negroni nn. 095 and 097.

¹²⁹ This is an observation by Prof. Danilo Mazzoleni during a lecture in Rome of 2001.

¹³⁰ For a list of the sites, see Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 158. On this matter, it is important to point out that few questioned the decision made in the

measure all aspects of a text's physical characteristics leaves her reader with the pleasurable illusion of being able to touch and feel the texture of the material, its weight and thickness, and the impressions of incised or painted words.¹³¹ Her record of measurements also seems more precise than those previously given. Negroni even makes note of the back-sides of many epitaphs, which might bear traces of a reworking or reuse or clue as to their installation.¹³² These characteristics were first noted by Müller, but were subsequently kept out of sight for many years, for the bulk of the Monteverde artifacts wound up in the Lateran Museum, where they were for the most part set into the walls so only one of the faces was on view.¹³³ Another complication is that many of the epitaphs were cleaned up, mounted, and repainted, at times altering original details of the piece (pl. V).¹³⁴

In actuality, the Monteverde inscriptions met a far better fate than most catacomb artifacts. Müller placed great value on conserving the collection in its entirety, even the tiniest fragment, because he had found «deplorable» the dispersion of so many pieces from the Vigna Randanini site.¹³⁵ As early as December of 1904, artifacts were being moved into storage, while many in the adjacent cemetery of Ponziano were left strewn about.¹³⁶

Negroni's recognition efforts have allowed her to correct many small errors of transcription in earlier catalogues, and she also provides

early 20th century to donate these Jewish grave markers and other artifacts to the Roman Catholic Church. Some plaster casts of these pieces were made for display in the Jewish Museum of Rome and for an exhibit that traveled to both Israel and the United States, but the vast majority of artifacts from these sites are not in collections owned or administered by Jews.

¹³¹ The reverse sides of a number of pieces from the Museo Nazionale Romano collections could not be seen (Negroni nn. 014, 015, 023, 029, 033), and well as those in Naples' National Archaeological Museum.

¹³² Negroni nn. 051, 061, 087 (opisthographs); those reused – often face down – include Negroni nn. 084, 093, 094, and 130. Also Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomben*, 33, who found marbles already fallen from the graves, but still conserving traces of mortar to indicate how they had been attached.

¹³³ Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomben*, 47.

¹³⁴ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 125; and Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, 9. Still, most of the inscriptions had, in fact, been painted in antiquity.

¹³⁵ N. Müller, "Il Cimitero degli ebrei posto sulla via Portuense", *Dissertazioni della Pontificia Accademia Romana d'Archeologia* 2.12 (1915) 240.

¹³⁶ Ferrua, "Via Portuense", 5.

one new interpretation (041) and textual reconstruction (009 and 010 are parts of the same piece). Her changes do not really affect the readings of the texts – they are, in fact, more like corrections of “spelling” or syntactical errors (but with that said, her use of the exclamation point to call attention to these “errors” or vulgarisms in the transcriptions is distracting). She accepts some proposed reconstructions of abbreviated or damaged texts, but often puts these theories in her commentary, rather than in the transcription.¹³⁷ What Negroni is most confident in doing is providing a systematic classification of hundreds of inscribed artifacts, most in fragmentary form, and a comprehensive approach to their dating (often later than that traditionally assigned).¹³⁸

Negroni’s record contains a number of epitaphs attributed to the Monteverde catacomb before 1904. The selection is carefully limited to those seen in the vicinity, or attested to by reliable sources.¹³⁹ Negroni has not been able to track down any of the pieces that have long gone missing, nor does she theorize that the ancient inscriptions found in the vicinity of the Medieval *Campus Judaeorum* on the via S. Francesco a Ripa also come from the Monteverde site.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ For example, Negroni does not accept «presbyteros» in n. 188.

¹³⁸ Negroni in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 161. In this, she follows Ferrua’s inclination to date most of the Monteverde inscriptions on the basis of their linguistic and paleographic characteristics to the 4th century CE.

¹³⁹ Unfortunately, Negroni did not view in person the epitaphs conserved in Naples (Negroni nn. 008, 016, 017, 044, 047, 067, 104, 113 and 132).

¹⁴⁰ There are two pieces in this catalogue that are not in Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II (Negroni nn. 100 and 162), but which have already been cited in other sources. Negroni n. 140, a trilingual inscription found near the S. Michele a Ripa, was never at Palazzo Rondinini: it was found in 1842, long after the Rondanini collection had been dispersed. Negroni does not offer any thoughts on Marchi’s theory that it came from an open-air cemetery (G. Marchi, “Intorno ad una lapide poliglotta trovata a Roma nello scavare le fondamenta delle nuove scale che dalla Ripa Grande scendono al Tevere”, in *Dissertazioni, discorsi, orazioni d’argomento archeologico*, Ms. Marchi 30.XI.III, Archivio Storico della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Roma), but it is worth mentioning it was found not far from the Medieval *Campus Judaeorum* that lay just within the new city gates (built 1644). Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, n. 548 was also found in this same area in the rebuilding of the Church of the SS. Quaranta in 1744, along the street that led to S. Francesco a Ripa (where Noy, n. 542 was found). Likewise, S. Salvatore in Coorte, containing Noy, n. 549, was quite close to the Jewish burial grounds, as was Sta. Cecilia (Noy, n. 543 and 544).

Negroni's greatest contributions remain her discussion of these epitaphs within the broader context of pagan and Christian inscriptions (especially helpful in a system of comparative dating), observations about the technical aspects of the works, and precise segnalations for each text, including where lines or words are missing, or where noticeable gaps occur.¹⁴¹ In terms of the latest "epitaph technology", Negroni ventures some original hypotheses on why a given piece might have been made in a certain manner (like 164 and 181) although her ideas remain on the level of conjecture. That said, this detailed information would have been of even more value with an image for each piece. The veracity of Negroni's transcriptions are not in doubt, but the lack of visual evidence sends one back to J.-B. Frey's *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* of 1935, or even to the work of Müller-Bees. Negroni is able to include photographs of thirty of the inscriptions, the quality of which is often far better than that of images in the syllogies of Frey and Noy. Many are from Müller's archive, and while the bulk of these have already been published in Müller-Bees, Negroni reproduces the "uncut" versions, which show where the photographs were taken.¹⁴² We therefore see that many were taken right at the excavation, against the backdrop of a catacomb gallery (fig. 128) or the cliffs above the site (n. 88, figs. 116, 104 and 112).

A number of inscriptions appear on a travertine step or ledge (figs. 103, 106, 108, 114, 117a, 126), or were photographed when they had already been set into the walls of the Lateran Museum (fig. 109 and 125). The other illustrations are taken from the Frey volume or represent an epitaph in its current location.¹⁴³ They provide variety to the documentation, but do not have the immediacy of Müller's work, which treats these artifacts as true diamonds in the rough. It is very surprising – no, distressing – to find no indices for all this data. Not even a concordance between Negroni's syllogy and the *Jewish Inscriptions* of Noy. This unfortunate editorial decision will limit the section's usefulness, but until the long-awaited electronic database of Jewish in-

¹⁴¹ Negroni typically finds "non-Jewish" solutions to obscure signs and symbols (for example, Negroni nn. 183, 131 and 195) and illustrates where lines might be missing (Negroni nn. 144, 161, 164, 176 and 172).

¹⁴² The 1919 catalogue of Müller-Bees published many photographs of the inscriptions, but cut away the background from each image.

¹⁴³ All the historical photographs are in black and white, but the photographs from the collections of the National Roman Museum at the Baths of Diocletian and Vatican Museums are in color (nn. 101, 105 and 115).

scriptions is complete, the essential sources for the Monteverde epitaphs will be the works of Frey, Noy and Negroni.

Müller describes a number of the tombs in the catacomb as sealed with a combination of brick and tile, with the latter often lining the inside of the cover or stuck into the outer walls of rubble and concrete.¹⁴⁴ Only a few artifacts of this material can be traced to an exact find spot. A few carry the mark of a brick manufacturer's stamp, without reference to Jewish motifs or expressions, even though brick stamps or seals with these features are known to exist.¹⁴⁵ In all probability, the bricks were simply obtained from a local supply source, one that apparently dealt with used building materials. What they provide, instead, is a *terminus post quem* for burials, as the date of their manufacture is known. Negroni does not include in Section 6.2.1 a catalogue of the approximately 190 stamps from the Monteverde excavations now in Vatican storerooms, as they will be part of a larger inventory of more than 1600 stamped bricks and tiles from the deaccessioned Lateran collection.¹⁴⁶ Even without a direct relevance to Jewish culture, it will be a welcome addition to the collection of data from the Monteverde site, for many tiles bear traces of lettering or tomb decoration (Negroni 224-253), and a new study might recover additional fragments that are currently determined as of "provenance unknown".

The four marble sarcophagus fragments attributed to the Monteverde catacomb (Section 6.3) do not contain any of the decorative elements thought to relate to the practice of Judaism in Late Antiquity (the motifs described by Laurenzi in Section 6.5). Sarcophagi with Jewish motifs are, in fact, the exception rather than the rule in Rome. The Monteverde site held instead pieces that reflect more general trends in Roman funerary sculpture of the third and fourth centuries CE. They

¹⁴⁴ Müller, *Cimitero degli ebrei*, 229. On this note, the tombs "a cappuccina" found in the vicinity of the Jewish site in 1904 (Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 383) also used stamped bricks and tiles.

¹⁴⁵ Examples of stamps with Jewish motifs or markers in Ferrua, "Via Portuense", 36 and 42, to which can be added a unpublished circular stamp with representations of the menorah, a lulab, and another object that resembles a shofar that was identified by the author in an archaeological excavation at Piammiano (VT) in 2000.

¹⁴⁶ These artifacts are kept in the "Magazzino bolli presso il lapidario Cristiano ex-Lateranense" (Vatican Museums). A much smaller number of stamped bricks and tiles are recorded in the storerooms of the National Roman Museum (Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 319, note 480).

were what good money could buy, and regretfully preserve no clues as to the identity of their occupants, although the best-preserved example, the marble lid of a child's sarcophagus «a *kline*» now on display in the Vatican Museums, represents a boy reclining in formal dress on a couch with scroll in hand and a small dog at his feet. Generic or not, it is interesting to note that many of the same details are also found on another child's sarcophagus whose Greek inscription is thought to refer to a Jew.¹⁴⁷

The introduction to the catalogue by Di Mento takes note of two sculpted pieces that do not appear to have originated from the Monteverde catacomb but are significant nonetheless as objects of interest to Müller's work on Jewish inscriptions. The first (fig. 129) is a broken torso fragment from a "window relief" with a line of Latin inscription on its base referring to a *metuens*, or "(God) Fearer". Found in 1878 in what was thought to be the Baths of Constantine upon the Quirinal Hill, it indicates that early 20th century scholars were deliberating upon whether or not the term could refer to a Christian or a Jew.¹⁴⁸

The second piece (fig. 130) is the central tablet of the front panel of a sarcophagus that conserves its inscription in full. In fine Greek lettering, it praises the deceased as *μόνανδρος*, *φίλανδρος*, *φιλότεκνον*, *θεοσεβής*, *δίκαιον*, and *ἀγαθή*. The record of the deposition or burial is widely perceived as a Christian custom, and the piece is recorded, in fact, as n. 2895 in the first volume of the *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*.¹⁴⁹ Its presence among Müller's notes suggests that Müller may have been deliberating the significance of the terms employed (used in Rome by both Christians and Jews), or wished to compare the allegorical figures of Victory and the Seasons to those in another sarcophagus

¹⁴⁷ Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, n. 556. The dimensions of this sarcophagus *a lenos* do not match those of the Monteverde lid.

¹⁴⁸ Di Mento in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 322 (note 11); and Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 39-40.

¹⁴⁹ Of unknown provenance, and long classified as "ethnic", rather than as Christian, it is first recorded in Rome in the seventeenth century and later was taken to the collection of Cardinal Stefano Borgia, now part of Naples' National Archaeological Museum. Essentially, it is one of those unique epitaphs (like Negroni 123 or Frey, *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, I, n. 1) that can go either way, Jewish or Christian, or neither way, should it allude, instead, to one of the other religious movements afoot in Rome at this time.

front panel with an explicitly Jewish motif: the menorah.¹⁵⁰ It is, in fact, one of those rare pieces that can go either way – although the date of the deposition tips the balance in favor of Christianity.¹⁵¹

A report from the site following the first round of Müller's excavations in 1904-1906 takes note of a good number of lamps in terracotta of diverse and eclectic forms.¹⁵² Most were marked by the geometric designs very common on the market from the mid-third to fifth centuries CE. Nonetheless, a very small percentage of the intact samples bore motifs that recalled explicitly Christian, Jewish, or Classical themes, and two are classified as «unique.»¹⁵³ Müller is believed to have brought some of the lamps to Berlin to help with his dating of the site, but in all probability, the bulk of the clay or glass containers was never systematically catalogued or preserved.¹⁵⁴

The present catalogue illustrates nine lamps donated by the Pellegrini-Quarantotti to the Lateran Museum. These are decorated with images such as the rooster (n. 2), Chrismon (n. 3), palm frond (n. 4), the goddess Aphrodite (n. 9), and, in four cases, the menorah with five branches instead of the customary seven (nn. 5-8).¹⁵⁵ The difference in

¹⁵⁰ The piece in question is the fragment of a "Seasons' Sarcophagus" that also features a menorah. It is presently on display in the National Roman Museum (inv. 67611).

¹⁵¹ The date of the deposition of a corpse occurs far more often in Christian epitaphs, though here it is written on the frame of the tablet, and thus separated from the rest of the text. On a related note, the attribute of *δικαίον* occurs more often in the Jewish inscriptions from Rome, but *ἀγαθή* is more frequent in those thought to refer to Christians (examples of which are far greater in number).

¹⁵² The excavations of 1904-1906 brought up hundreds of lamps, including about thirty from a single wall tomb. Some of the coarse clay vessels are described in Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 51.

¹⁵³ Leon, *The Jews*, 224-225 also notes others depicted a galloping horse, an ibex, and a fish motif. The two singular examples (which Müller believed to have been fabricated outside of Rome), are «nearly elliptical» in shape, and decorated with simple motifs, primarily that of the palm frond (Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 55-56).

¹⁵⁴ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 31 (note 166) and 337-338 (note 101). Stamped bricks and tiles were also found in the Brunori quarries in 1911 and by R. Paribeni in the site in 1919 (id., 33, note 177).

¹⁵⁵ These are presently held in storage in the Vatican (inv. nn. 38108-38112). One other lamp has no figural decoration on its cover, but is bordered by a ring in high relief (n. 1): perhaps this is the "unique" lamp in Müller, *Die jüdische Kata-*

candlestick number can probably be explained by the very restricted surface area on the lamp's upper surface (easy to imagine by the measurements alone) or, perhaps, by a different source for the original from which a particular workshop took its ideas for the motif.¹⁵⁶ The large quantity of inscriptions from the Monteverde catacomb that are decorated with the seven-branch menorah are more or less contemporary in production to the lamps (4th-5th centuries CE), and a recent catalogue of all the menorah images from this period provides a wide range of possibilities for its design.¹⁵⁷

Ten of the thirteen known gold glass vessels decorated with Jewish motifs come from Rome, although still making up a very small percentage of what survives of this material (and in fragmentary condition). In Section 6.4.2, Elsa Laurenzi credits their workmanship to Roman glassmakers of the third through fifth centuries CE, and views their scarcity as a consequence of the fragility of their manufacture (in glass and gold leaf) and value as objects of prestige.¹⁵⁸ Given the late date of their appearance on the Roman market for luxury goods, probably as vases or goblets, it is not altogether surprising that a good number of the known examples bear Biblical scenes that would appeal to a Christian clientele. Even so, two of the gold glass fragments with Jewish motifs were found in close proximity to Christian tombs, and the find spots for the others are unknown.¹⁵⁹

kombe, 55. E. Josi copied two other lamps from Müller's dig that bear the seven-branched menorah motif, but these have never been published: Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 30, note 164.

¹⁵⁶ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 334, believe that the five-branch model was conditioned by the ban on representing the Temple Menorah, although the seven-branch model is far more commonly found in Rome on epitaphs, gold glasses, brick stamps, etc.

¹⁵⁷ Bosio, too, had found many lamps of terracotta, which he defines as crudely made and practically all broken. The only intact example bore the seven-branched menorah motif. This is not illustrated in the catalogue, but is identified as being of the Provoost 8K type. For an extensive catalogue of menorah images, see R. Hachlili, *The Menorah, the Ancient 7-Armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form and Significance*, Brill, Leiden 2002.

¹⁵⁸ According to Laurenzi, in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 337-338, the majority of the glasses date from the fourth century CE. The objects depicted on the Jewish pieces allude to important Jewish festivals such as Sukkoth and Kippur.

¹⁵⁹ One of these gold glass fragments had been found in 1882 in a site on the via Labicana near the Catacombs of Pietro and Marcellino and the other about a

For what it's worth, the recorded find spots for artifacts of this type almost invariably locate them in the mortar covering of a tomb. It is possible that they were broken in a deliberate manner at the time of the internment, perhaps to discourage looters.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, very few of the glasses could be pried loose from their mountings.

In Müller's words – although it is not clear how he could be so certain – «(the) catacomb contains many more glass and fragments of glass than the Christian cemeteries.»¹⁶¹ From the broken pieces of “everyday objects”, he is able to reconstruct bowls, vials, and an interesting “hemispherical shaped” container whose border is decorated with a Bacchic scene.¹⁶² Some of the containers contain a reddish crust, but it is not noted whether or not this is the substance still known as the “blood of martyrs” at the time.¹⁶³ The catalogue presents four examples of gold glass, although n. 1 (Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, n. 592) is not securely attributed to the Monteverde site (the Berlin museum which purchased it in 1912 also obtained a sarcophagus fragment from the Vigna Randanini). Unfortunately, this piece is also the only one that can be studied, for the others (nn. 2-4) – including one (n. 4) with the image of a man enthroned on a low podium outside of a monumental-type building with a winged putto above his head – were badly damaged by the change in atmospheric conditions brought about by the digging and almost immediately fell apart.¹⁶⁴ On that note, the challenge of finding a uniquely “Jewish” explanation for n. 4 is more difficult than arriving at the pragmatic solution that it functioned as the marker of an individual grave.¹⁶⁵

More unique finds in Section 6.4.3 include a marble game board or «tavola lusoria» found in 1913, the head of an iron pickaxe found by

decade later in a cemetery site on Rome's Monte Parioli (Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, n. 588).

¹⁶⁰ Laurenzi in Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 337: none of the examples from the Monteverde site were found inside of a tomb.

¹⁶¹ *Id.*, 337.

¹⁶² Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 52-53. The scene depicted dancing female nudes and a beardless man.

¹⁶³ The thorny issue of whether or not this feature was truly a “Christian” sign or practice is discussed at length in an unpublished manuscript of de Rossi from 1863: G.B. de Rossi, *Sulla questione del vaso di sangue: memoria inedita*, ed. by A. Ferrua, Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, Città del Vaticano 1944.

¹⁶⁴ Müller, *Die jüdische Katakomba*, 59-60.

¹⁶⁵ Leon, *The Jews*, 219.

Müller in the «largest grotto» (that nonetheless might date to a later period), and two intact bracelets of gold that were recovered in the vicinity of the stairway into the site. A photograph of one of these ornaments is published for the first time (fig. 142), but its current whereabouts, like those of many of the other items, are unknown.¹⁶⁶

From their analysis of hundreds of artifacts from Monteverde, Negrone and Di Mento propose a chronology for the catacomb's genesis and growth from the mid-third through fifth centuries CE. Even with a lack of stratigraphic data and precise find spots for most artifacts from the site, this idea is compatible with recent radiocarbon studies of oil lamps from Monteverde, as well as the broader view of when cemeteries of this type were most in vogue in Rome. In short, the authors find no evidence to suggest the Monteverde catacomb pre-dated any of the other catacombs in Rome.

Appendix 1 is a transcription of Bosio's chapter on the Jewish catacomb in the manuscript Vallicelliana G31, introduced and annotated by the paleographer Elisa Pallottini, who discerns a «stratigraphy of interventions» by two different hands, almost certainly those of Bosio and Severano, both of whom are known to have returned numerous times to the work.¹⁶⁷ Bosio is seen to have added material in the margins of his account, and Severano occupied himself with cutting details feared controversial, inserting transitional phrases or passages of his own composition, and moving some of Bosio's paragraphs to other parts of the text, a primitive "cut and paste" job that justifies, to some extent, his "great fatigue" in getting the *Roma sotteranea* into print.

Pallottini's purpose is to restore the chapter to its original form, and, at first glance, the differences between the two copies, the handwritten one and that which finally made it into print, seem quite notable.¹⁶⁸ A closer reading, however, confirms that actually quite little was cut from the original text. Severano's refinements were largely concerned with placing the Jewish catacomb in a broader theological context, fleshing out the literary citations and notes with more patristic

¹⁶⁶ The iron pickaxe head is described by Müller, *Die jüdische Katakombe*, 47 and Id., *Cimitero degli ebrei*, 239. Not specified in the catalogue is that many clay cups, pitchers, bowls, and jugs, some still with seals intact, also emerged in Müller's dig (Id., *Die jüdische Katakombe*, 49-52 and 95). The coinage was not found inside the tombs (id., 56).

¹⁶⁷ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 9-13 on how Ms. G.31 was prepared for publication after Bosio's death in 1629.

¹⁶⁸ Id., 10-11, note 64.

(and Jew-hating) sources, and the re-ordering of the subjects in the chapter so that several paragraphs on the image of the «candelabro» or menorah were moved to an entirely separate section on “symbols” – Book IV – in which more emphasis was placed on a Christian adaptation of this motif.¹⁶⁹

What did not make the cut, in a manner of speaking, is also suggestive of what was going on in the catacombs at this time. In the final version, Bosio’s comment about finding many «medals and clay lamps» is omitted, along with the notes on Jewish epitaphs seen in other areas of Rome and the observation that the use of the seven-branched candelabrum is “particular” to Jews.¹⁷⁰ Severano also leaves out the reference to Jewish epitaphs in San Salvatore in Curte and S. Cecilia.¹⁷¹ It is possible that Severano feared that the illustration of Jewish artifacts in a Christian setting might leave the door wide open to criticism about the exclusively Christian nature of catacomb relics, much sought after by his main audience, the Catholic devout.¹⁷² That said, the part about Bosio finding many fragments of clay lamps does make it into print, because here Bosio specifies that the only intact example bore the menorah motif.

Also revealing are Severano’s introduction and conclusion to the chapter, entirely his own composition, which hint at an unease in the inclusion of a Jewish site that he himself never claims to have seen.¹⁷³ In the very last lines of the chapter, Severano supports Bosio’s views, but adds that all these could change with “saner judgment” on the matter. Even with the “candelabrum” on view in other subterranean sites

¹⁶⁹ Bosio, *Roma sotterranea*, IV, chapter 46 “Del Candelabro”, 650-652. This section adopts virtually all of Bosio’s text from Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 366.

¹⁷⁰ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 356. For that matter, Bosio himself is contradictory on the nature of the epitaphs in the site, stating (ibid.), that «no marble fragments» had been found (possibly, Bosio was thinking of sarcophagi, rather than epitaphs on marble slabs, for, as de Rossi has observed in the *Roma sotterranea cristiana*, I, 36, “such riches” surrounded Bosio that he sometimes dismissed that which seemed very crude or mutilated).

¹⁷¹ Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions*, II, n. 549 and n. 544. Such objects in a Christian funerary context were then being interpreted as signs of martyrdom, especially those with the image of the palm frond.

¹⁷² Müller, *Die jüdische Katakombe*, 53, describes a “red crust” inside some of the fragments of glass and clay vessels, similar in substance to what was still believed by many at the time to be the “blood” of the early Christian martyrs.

¹⁷³ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 11-12 (note 171) and 355.

in Rome, Severano settles on Bosio's designation of the site as the «cemetery of the Hebrews,» until a «better evaluation» can be made of the Monteverde catacomb's contents and clientele.¹⁷⁴ That would, of course, take many centuries to complete.

Appendix 2 is an appraisal of the work of Nikolaus Müller by Tomas Lehmann, present curator of the Christian Museum at Humboldt University in Berlin, the post held by Müller at the time of his excavations on Monteverde. Its essence is that Müller's professional responsibilities were closely tied to his work on the catacombs, for he sought many ways to showcase the German collection's Early Christian and Medieval artifacts and casts. The Friedrich Wilhelm Christian collection as envisioned by Müller and his successors was broken up during the Second World War and never pieced back together. Dr. Lehmann and his colleagues are now attempting to digitally recreate the 19th century collection from period photographs and other forms of documentation, with the odd piece surfacing from time to time.

Di Mento's transcription of a decade's worth of communications (1904-1914) between government officials and others parties involved in the Jewish cemetery's fate in Appendix 3 is an absorbing end note to what she describes in Section 2.1. If anything, it emphasizes that real concern was brewing beneath the polite exchanges and dutiful modes of address. The transcriptions are exact, with only the occasional omission of a hand-written word or phrase – typically, the expression «urgentissima!» – (February 22d, 1909, 388, May 6th, 1910), marking a crisis in course.¹⁷⁵ It is nonetheless important to keep in mind that these documents represent the contents of a small number of Italian and Vatican government dossiers. Other archival evidence is cited, but not included, like a letter of Marucchi of April 2, 1909, and a communication of Müller to officials at the Ministry of Public Instruction (Antiquities and Fine Arts Division) sent by registered mail (*raccomandata*) on February 16th, 1910. The “rilievi e studi” of the Commissione di Archeologia Sacra in the first season of excavations (1904-1905) presumably include the 1904 site map (fig. 16), as well as a number of «calchi» or squeezes of inscriptions. Given these instances, it would have been helpful to annotate the transcriptions and signal where such *lacunae* in the files occur.

¹⁷⁴ Bosio, *Roma Sotteranea*, 143: «abbiamo giudicato e crediamo fermamente, che questo fosse il proprio cimitero degli antichi Hebrei, rimettendoci però a più sano, e miglior giuditio.»

¹⁷⁵ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, 398.

The death of Count Benedetto Pellegrini-Quarantotti on December 11th, 1905 signaled a sea change in his family's dealings with Müller. Not only was the German archaeologist required to pick up the tab for all expenses (which he repeatedly professed himself willing to do), but also adhere to a fixed deadline, after which time the site would be demolished to permit industrial-scale mining and other zoning relief. Rather than bringing the excavation to a rapid conclusion, this move prolonged it indefinitely. In the wake of another landslide in the site on May 19th, 1909, Antonio Munoz noted that the exploration of the catacomb was anything but complete.¹⁷⁶

The possibility of additional discoveries also motivated the Ministry to seek financial contributions from the Jewish Community of Rome. «Official overtures» are said to have been made (393, 394, 395) in 1909-1910, but the record here does not include any such communication. In the end, the preservation of the catacomb was judged beyond the government's means or control, and its demolition was permitted in the interests of personal financial gain from the sale and development of the site. The «many photographs and drawings» of the catacombs said to have been made by Edoardo Gatti in February of 1910 and sent in copy to the Ministry (395, February 16th, 1910) would also have been very helpful to trace, as they document the “few last tracts” of the galleries extant at the time. A final series of exchanges in 1913-1914 between Italian and Vatican officials cites a very important policy change that would have consequences for this catacomb as well as many others for years to come. This is the “concession” of oversight of «the Jewish and heretical catacombs in the Province of Rome» to the Vatican. The proceedings of the meeting on December 20th, 1912 (inventoried as n. 5396) are cited on page 399 (May 30th, 1913) with no other details of this historic accord, which had the immediate effect of leaving in the hands of the Commissione di Archeologia Sacra the Monteverde catacomb's artifacts from the excavations of 1913.¹⁷⁷

For all its weight and volume, the overall impact of this work, as Dr. Rossi herself states in her introduction, is to call attention to the many investigations in course.¹⁷⁸ It is essentially making a large amount of archival material accessible in print, and only lacks a unifying narrative thread to tie together many good ideas and careful research on the site. Much of this is due to the challenge of integrating

¹⁷⁶ Id., 361.

¹⁷⁷ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 9.2 (1917); Codex Juris Canonici, 626.

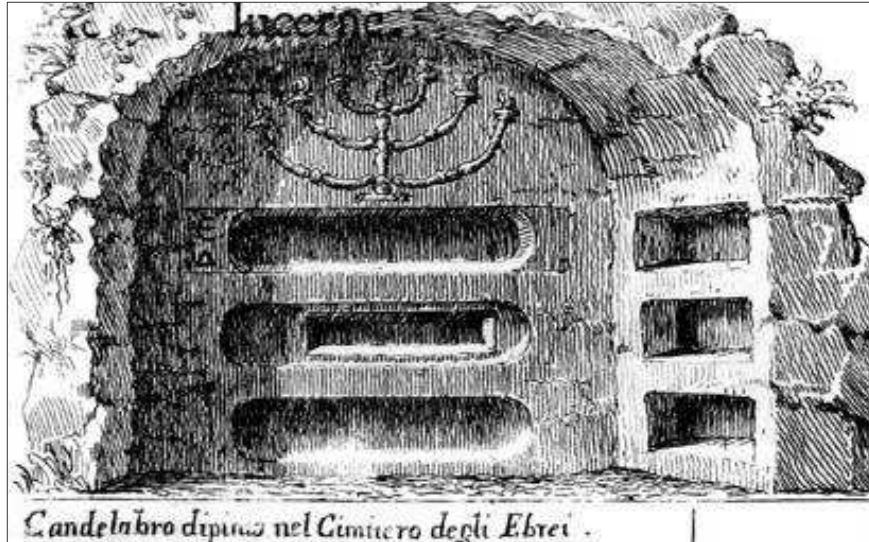
¹⁷⁸ Rossi - Di Mento, *Catacomba ebraica*, XVIII.

works by different authors into a single site study, for in the interest of space certain things have had to go, such as the epigraphic indices and an organized sharing of sources. For this reason, there are instances of repetition and a lack of cross-referencing within the text.

In terms of the project's overall goal to present the Jewish site in a topographical as well as historical context, not all the blanks have been filled. Questions that remain concern the cemetery's structural features, and especially how they have been interpreted over time. An excavation "deeper" into the archival sources might furthermore clarify the issue of its conservation. Yet these comments of a critical nature should not be seen to undermine the fundamental importance of the work, that is, without a doubt, deserving of a close reading and interpretation: rather, they are part of what the editors themselves call «a long history, still in process.»

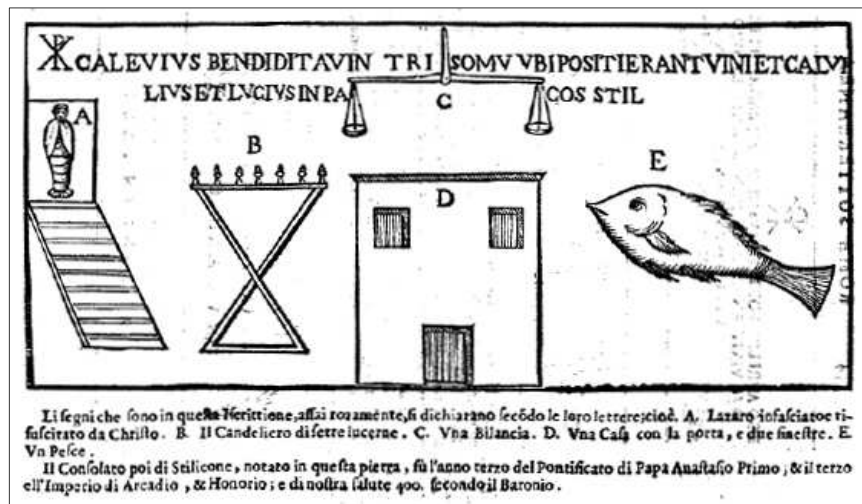
The Soprintendenza Archeologica has indeed made good on its word to "dig deeper." In late November of 2013, official announcement was made of great caverns below Monteverde, extending for hundreds of meters into the hillside, perhaps to the very point below which the Jewish catacombs once lay.¹⁷⁹ Underground lakes and tunnels are no longer a childhood fantasy but rather a perplexing reality beneath a heavily populated zone. What was once thought inaccessible is now within reach. And the Monteverde's residents take notice.

¹⁷⁹ Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali e del Turismo, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma, "Ricerche e scavi a Monteverde: Spettacolari cave ipogee sotto le catacombe ebraiche", Press release of November 27th, 2013. The depth of the cavities (at 25-30 m. below street level) suggests they were accessed from a point farther down the slope. The speleological association "Roma Sotteranea" is now documenting these caves.



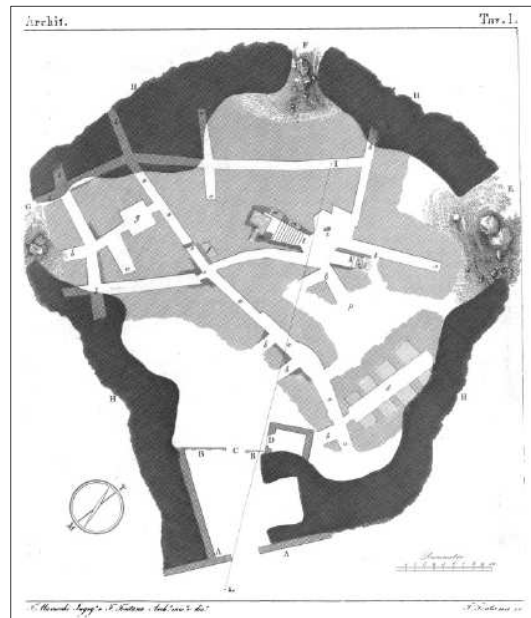
Pl. I.1 - Menorah painted on a gallery wall.

G. Vasi, *Delle magnificenze di Roma antica e moderna, libro primo*, Roma 1747.

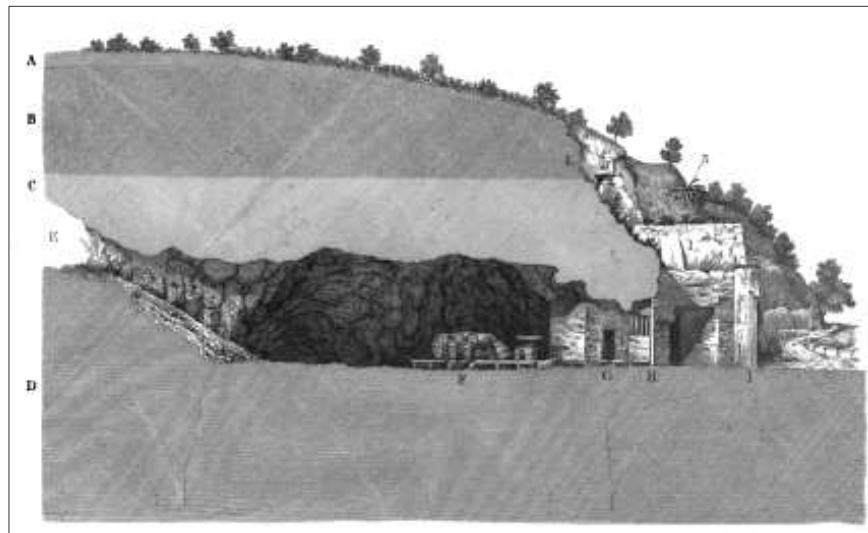


Pl. I.2 - «Candeliero di sette lucerne» (B).

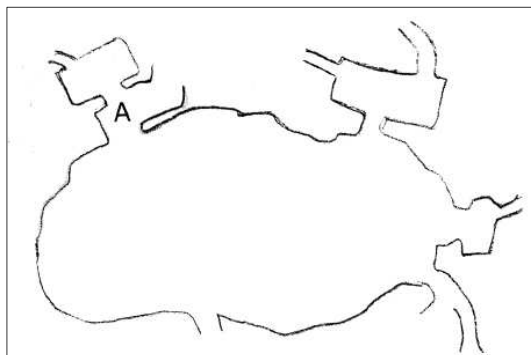
A. Bosio, *Roma Sotteranea*, Roma 1634, 333 (ICUR 6.15780).



Pl. II.1 - Plan of the Ponziano Catacomb superimposed upon that of a quarry.
 G. Marchi, *Monumenti delle arti cristiane primitive nella metropoli del cristianesimo*,
 Roma 1844-47, t. 1.



Pl. II.2 - Cross-section of quarry and its proximity to the Ponziano Catacomb.
 Marchi, *Monumenti*, t. 2.



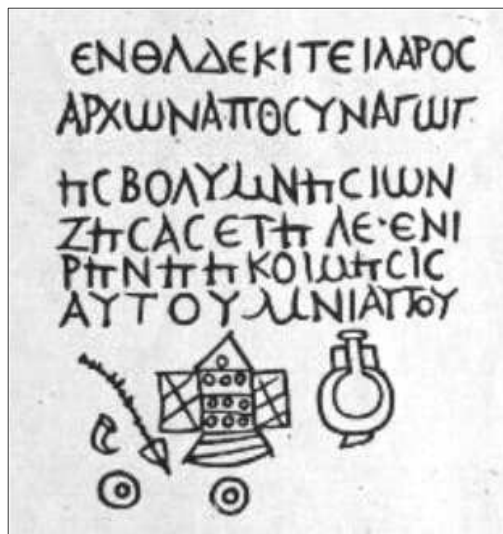
Pl. III.1 - Areas of the catacomb exposed in a 1904 landslide («Pianta d'insieme»).
Author elaboration of plan in Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Ministero della
Pubblica Istruzione, Antichità e Belle Arti, III vers., II pt, 56.122 (1904).



Pl. III.2 - View from the bridge over the Rome-Viterbo train tracks looking south.
Source: *Roma Sparita*.



Pl. IV.1 - Aerial view of the southern slope of Monteverde, ca. 1935.
Bar Vitali photograph collection, Rome.



Pl. IV.2 - Negroni n. 15 (R. Paribeni, "Iscrizioni del cimitero giudaico di Monteverde", *Notizie degli Scavi di Antichità*, 46, 1919, 64, n. 6).



Pl. V - Inscriptions from the Monteverde Jewish Catacomb in the Lateran collection. Photograph by Ernő Munkácsi (unpublished).