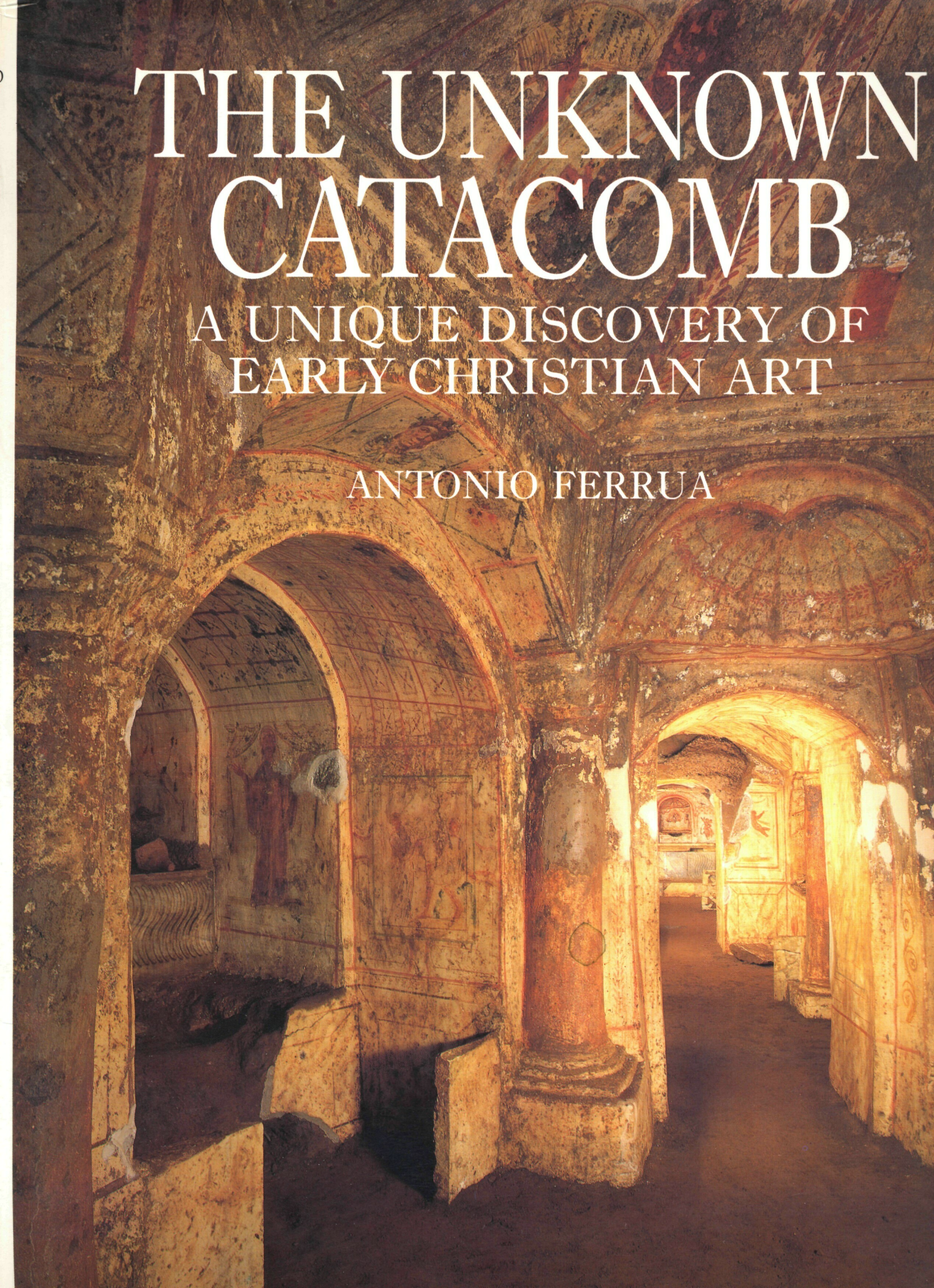

THE UNKNOWN CATACOMB

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

For anyone entering a Christian catacomb for the first time, the impression is of making one's way down into a dark, mysterious kingdom—into another world, made up of tall narrow galleries, corners and sudden bends, openings with other tunnels branching off, stairways and shafts. The sensation of unease and disquiet is a natural one, reminiscent of the nagging apprehension of losing oneself in a labyrinth. Even at a time when the catacombs would have been regularly frequented by people visiting the tombs of martyrs or those of members of their own families, such feelings appear not to have been uncommon. As St Jerome wrote, "When I was a boy at Rome and was being educated in liberal studies, I was accustomed, with others of like age and mind, to visit on Sundays the sepulchres of the apostles and martyrs. And often did I enter the crypts, deep dug in the earth, with their walls on either side lined with the bodies of the dead, where everything is so dark that it almost seems as if the psalmist's words were fulfilled: 'Let them go down alive into hell' (Psalms 55:15). Here and there the light, not entering through windows, but filtering down from above through shafts, relieves the horror of the darkness. But again, as one cautiously moves forward, the black night closes round, and there comes to the mind the lines of Virgil: 'Surrounding horrors all my soul affright | And more, the dreadful silence to the night.' "

Of over fifty known catacombs in Rome, most are denied to our curiosity in order to protect their wall paintings, which even human breath could damage irreparably. The five open to the public—Agnes, Callistus, Domitilla, Priscilla, and *Ad Catacumbas* (St Sebastian) — are visited by more than a million people each year.

After the long exploration underground, the visitor re-emerges into the light of day with a sense of relief, almost as if a secret tension had been relaxed, because visiting catacombs is not an objective experience. Still implicit in such a visit are the risks that were run from the first to the fourth centuries AD by the sect called the Christians, against whom the Roman Senate had issued severe edicts and for whom more than one Emperor had demonstrated his aversion.

Kata kumbas, in Greek, literally means "at the hollows," and in ancient times referred to a natural cavity alongside the Via Appia (where the Basilica of St Sebastian now stands) in which were buried the corpses of those who, believing in bodily resurrection, refused the pagan rite of cremation. It is the catacomb that developed here, *Ad Catacumbas*, that has given its name to the language, and it was the only one in Rome whose existence was never forgotten in subsequent centuries, continuing to be visited by pilgrims despite the upheavals of Roman history.

The Via Latina catacomb, on the other hand, disappeared from history for over a thousand years, and its rediscovery in the 1950s, so admirably described in this book,

The entrance stairway to the Domitilla catacomb. Loculi can be seen in both walls.

has revealed a new source of information about — and insights into — early Christian art. First, however, we must look at the context within which the Roman catacombs developed.

Hominum mortuum in urbe ne sepelito neve urito, "A dead man may neither be buried nor burned within the city," was laid down in the tenth bronze tablet of Roman law, and this was imposed on all citizens of the *urbe*, whatever their religious belief. Burial grounds had, therefore, to be situated at a suitable distance from the city walls.

Archeologists now challenge the centuries-old belief that the catacombs existed before the Christian era, and were used as hiding places to protect the first followers of the apostles Peter and Paul. But it would have seemed reasonable to expect the first architects of Christian cities of the dead to have modelled their structures on the cities of the living. One might have expected a definite orientation towards the four cardinal compass points, and the traditional *cardus* and *decumanus* pattern, as used throughout the Roman Empire.

But no. We find instead a maze of narrow passageways, a sort of underground casbah designed to make it difficult or impossible for an outsider or infiltrator to escape or find the way back. At the very least, those first tunnel diggers must be allowed the legitimate concern of seeking to safeguard the tombs from what would otherwise have been all-too-easy sacrilege by enemies or thieves.

In a singular and now rare publication of late in the nineteenth century, the Neapolitan hermetist Giustiniano Lebano quoted pertinent original sources to support his theory that the *Pontum* to which the poet Ovid was expelled by Emperor Augustus was in fact an underground "exile" near Rome, where *Nec coelum, nec aquae faciunt, nec Terra, nec aurae*, "No sky is there, nor rain, nor fields, nor breezes" (Tristia, El:VIII). He deduces that exile to the *Arena eruta*—"to the sandstone," in other words—was not unusual for a certain elite from the capital. In the second century BC, Rome had imported the mysteries of Isis and Osiris, and failure in the difficult tests associated with the initiation rites was severely punished. In Egypt, the punishment for the unfortunate novice was to be thrown to the crocodiles of the Nile. In Rome, the sentence was hard labour for life, digging deep, blind tunnels in the bowels of the earth.

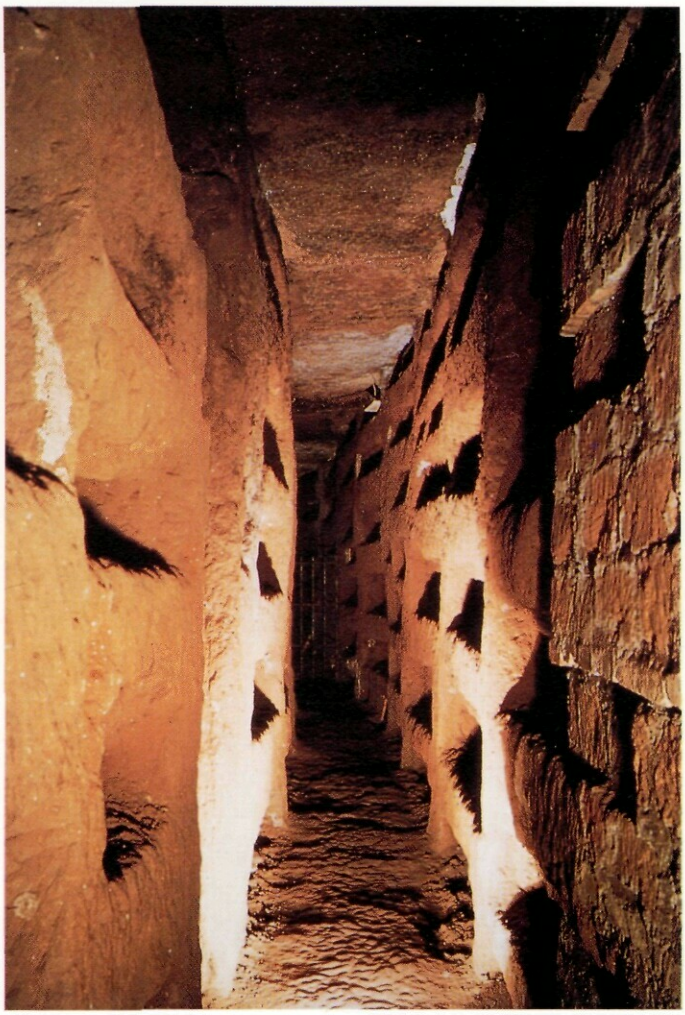
This is not to say that the first Christians fled from the persecution of Tigellinus' or Nero's praetorians to the refuge of the subterranean labyrinths that they knew to be feared and avoided because of popular superstition. Nonetheless, we cannot deny the existence of a mysterious, lightless suburban *Pontum* where *Nec mihi solstitium quicquam de noctibus aufert*, "Nor does any solstice ever bring the night to me," so it is possible that the knowledge of existing underground passageways may have suggested the idea of a necropolis that it would be hard to penetrate.

What is certain is that in the later Republican period and the first centuries of the Empire a new concept of man and of the world was developing in Rome, with an increase in introspective analysis and in the freeing of the body from instinctual natural forces. The purification rites associated with Isis were exercising a strong influence well beyond Egypt, and the cults of Attis and Astarte, Serpides and Mithras had reached Rome from Asia Minor. As Von Poelmann writes[1]: "After the night battle at Bedriaco, Vespasian's soldiers saluted the rising sun in the Syrian manner." These were the veterans who brought the Phrygian and Mesopotamian cults to Rome, mixed with the beginnings of a Christian-style syncretization.

From the eastern provinces, in fact, came those cults which the Roman pantheon had not yet found room for and which aimed to make men better in a world made better. They proliferated within the Empire.

The cult of the sun god Mithras spread throughout the entire Roman military

Priscilla catacomb: a labyrinth of tunnels, making access difficult for intruders and facilitating escape when necessary.

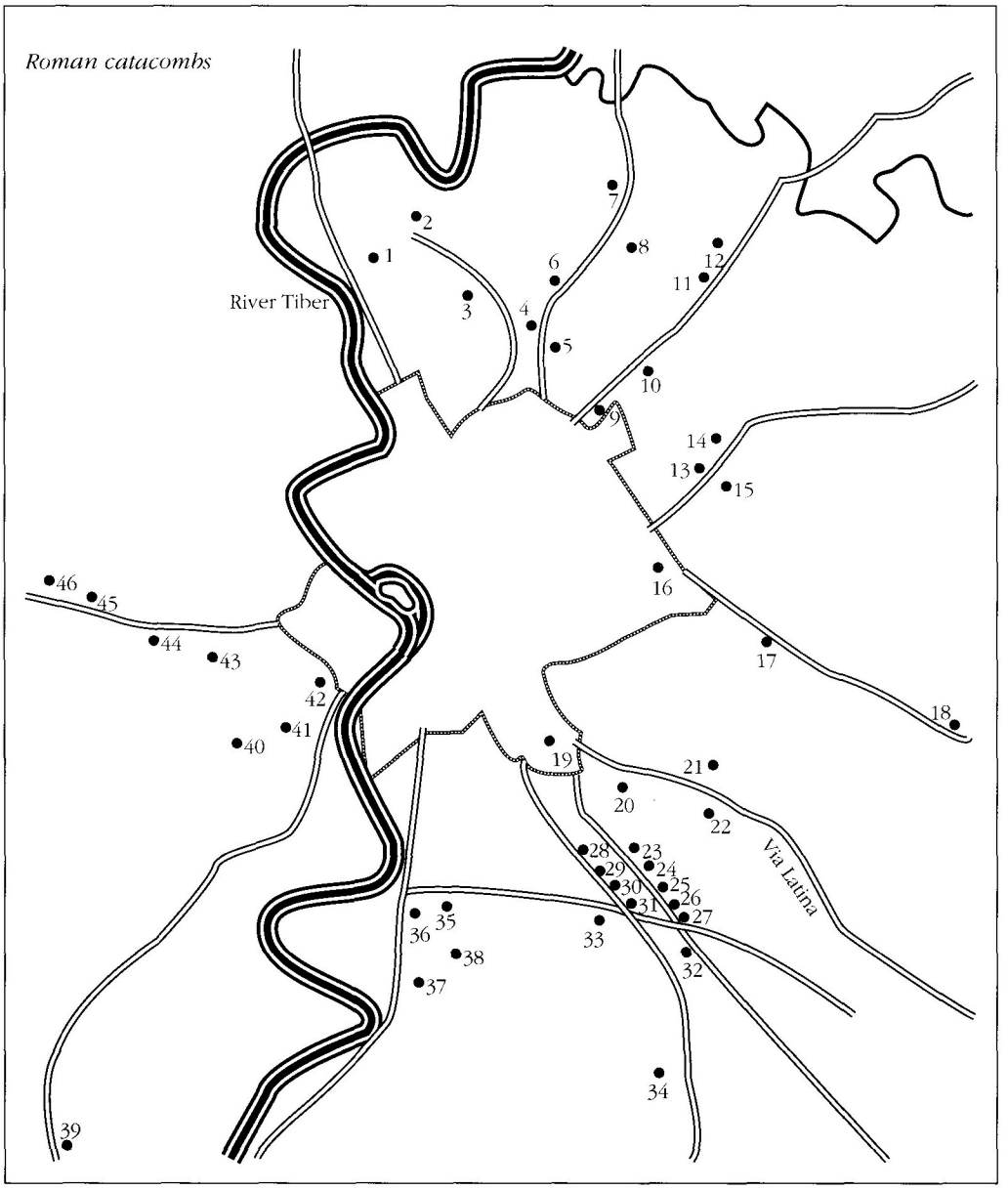


Tall, narrow tunnels dug into the tufa or sandstone, like these in the Callistus catacomb (left), could accommodate a large number of corpses. Ventilation is by means of wide, deep air shafts connecting the underground floors with the surface, as in the Priscilla catacomb (right).

machine, from Africa to Britain, and, as from the second century AD, had its altars and rites within the city itself. Emperor Commodus was initiated into its mysteries and the *sol invictus* of Aurelian, elevated to state divinity, was a symbolic personification of Mithras.

There were many analogies between the Mithraic and Christian cults. Ahura Mazda is the father and Mithras the son who is consubstantial with Him. Helios is the mediator between father and son. The creative force of the father is contained in the cosmic bull which generates the universe. Mithras is portrayed in the act of ritual sacrifice of a bull. The blood from the wound flows over the novice who kneels beneath the sacrificial stone. The dying bull's life force falls like rain on the neophyte in the same way as the life force of the cosmic bull, from whose blood life is born, the wheat from its kernel, every living species from its seed.

A tacit understanding with the Christians, temporary hospitality in the catacombs, or a takeover with the Emperor's consent? Christianity was not taken over by this cult—it was strengthened by it. The strictly masculine religion of Mithras excluded women from its mysteries and engaged its adepts in the strenuous defence of good against



1 Valentine
2 *Ad Clivum Cucumeris* ("At Cucumber Hill")
3 Hermes (Bassilla)
4 Pamphilus
5 Felicity
6 Thrason
7 Prisci1la
8 Jordani
9 Nicomedes
10 Villa Torlonia*
11 Agnes
12 *Coemeterium Maius* ("Main cemetery")
13 Novatian
14 Hippolytus
15 Cyriaca (St Laurence)
16 Hypogeum of the Aurelii
17 Castulus
18 Peter and Marcellinus
19 Campana
20 Gordian and Epimachus
21 Apronian
22 Via Latina
23 Vibia
24 The Hunters
25 The Cross
26 Vigna Randanini*
27 Praetextatus
28 Soter†
29 Balbina†
30 Basileus (Marcus and Marcellianus)†
31 Callistus and Lucina†
32 *Ad Catacumbas* ("At the catacombs") (St Sebastian)
33 Domitilla
34 Nunziatella
35 Commodilla
36 Timothy
37 Thecla
38 Pagan catacomb
39 Generosa
40 Monteverde*
41 Pontian
42 *Ad Insalsatos*
43 Pancras
44 Processus and Martinian
45 *Duo Felices* ("The two Felixes")
46 Calepodius

* Jewish catacomb
† Connected system

the forces of evil. In the Christian religion, a virgin was the mother of God and interceded with Him on man's behalf. Perhaps even more than their menfolk, Christian women witnessed to the truth of the Gospel with their lives, in prison and in the arenas. The bull could not stand up against the lamb, rectitude and force had to yield before the power of love as preached by the apostles of Christ. The image of the Good Shepherd soon took the place of Mithras plunging his sword into the neck of the bull. And when Tertullian began to suggest among the soldiery that it might not be legitimate to kill one's brothers in Christ, whatever their race, nation or religion, the cult of Mithras began to decline, even among the legions, and Christian solidarity became dominant.

The catacombs reflect Roman life from the first to the fourth centuries AD, up to the time, that is, of the Edict of Constantine in 313, which tolerated the Christian cult, and the later Edict of Theodosius in 384, which finally proclaimed Christianity as the state religion.

The first catacombs were probably family burial grounds for an elite. These would be noble Romans, converted to the Gospel, who had tombs dug in their own land and subsequently allowed them to be enlarged—and not just in territorial extent—to accept the burials of brethern and acquaintances.

But it was in the second and third centuries that the catacombs took on their full importance and conquered the faithful. The first signs appeared on the burials—a memorial, a greeting, words of comfort or regret. Words written in red or black, later cut into the tufa, stone or marble. The images confirm and strengthen a belief in the afterlife by means of symbols full of hope: Christ's monogram, the phoenix rising from its ashes, the anchor symbolizing the firmness of faith, the fish as cryptogram for Christ, the peacock as emblem of immortality. Yellow and green colours were used to bring messages of sunlight.

A relief of the god Mithras in the foundations of the church of San Clemente.

Commodilla catacomb: signs and symbols of faith and hope traced on the tombs in red. They are the Greek letters alpha and omega, beginning and end of man and the world, in the Pax *offered and promised by the cross of Christ.*

Domitilla cemetery: an early fourth-century inscription cut into a marble disc. The central hole was for funeral libations.

In accordance with Semitic practice, the dead body was completely wrapped in linen bands, over which a layer of lime was then spread (hence Christ's scornful reference to the "whited sepulchres"). The corpse was then placed in the loculus, dug horizontally into the wall of tufa or sandstone. The loculus was then closed up by means of a vertical wall of stones or tiles. In order to recognize the tomb, the relatives would wall in with the bricks such conventional items as the bases of glasses or goblets, potsherds, metal objects which had belonged to the dead person, or else they would write or sculpt the name and the age of the deceased.

In his recent book on Christian inscriptions,[2] Carlo Carletti states, "More than half of all the epigraphs of the *Orbis christianus antiquus* belong to Rome: 45,000 inscriptions, of which 75 per cent are of funerary nature." He continues, "An apparently surprising fact emerges on first examination, and that is the very high percentage, approximately 80 per cent of the inscriptions, which have no specifically Christian sign—but, it should be noted, no specifically pagan sign either." The sign of the new faith is unambiguously present in only 13 per cent of the inscriptions, almost exclusively in the form of a series of expressions centring on the word "peace," in either Latin or Greek. Note that where inscriptions are reproduced, square brackets indicate a supposition where a letter or letters are missing or illegible, while round brackets complete an abbreviated form of a term.

The most ancient epigraphs are in the Priscilla catacomb — for example, the epitaph of one Octavia: *Pax ti[bi Oc]tavia in p[ace!]*. This is followed by those in the Lucina crypt in the Callistus complex, where eight third-century pontiffs were buried in the cubiculum called "the popes' crypt."

From the middle of the third century can be dated a substantial decrease in the use of Greek in epigraphs, with an increase in the extent of the eulogies to the dead, although still within the modest range of terms such as *dulcis*, *dulcissimus*, *carus*, *carissimus*, together with the ever more frequent exhortation *in pace*—ειρηνη in Greek – "in peace."

Meanwhile, the frequency of conversions and the sheer weight of numbers in Christian communities brought with them the logistical and organizational problem of burial. The faithful looked to the afterlife and required that they and their relatives be properly remembered. Hence the rush to purchase a *locus*, or "place," which could become a *bisomus*, *trisomus*, or *quadrisomus* for multiple burials. Sales were managed or mediated by the undertaker, who was also the *fossor*, or digger of the loculi as well as their guardian.

As from the middle of the fourth century, and especially during the pontificate of Damasus (366-384), many sanctuaries dedicated to martyrs were created in the catacombs. To these were brought the mortal remains of "heroes of the faith," who had given up their lives to witness to the teachings of Christ. To record their sacrifice, monuments were erected *in memoriam*. Faith in the martyrs' powers of intercession led people to try to buy one or more loculi close to where the sacred relics were buried, in the belief that this proximity would act as a benevolent mediation between the soul of the dead person and God, in the search for eternal peace in paradise.

On a marble stele found near the basilica of St Peter's, between the second and

1

2

3

4

5

6

1. The Latin cross; 2. The cross and anchor united in a single symbol; 3. XP, the initials of the Greek word "Christ"; 4. MR, the first and last letters of the word "martyr"; 5. The letters alpha and omega are the first and last of the Greek alphabet and thus symbolize the beginning and the end; 6. M, the first letter of the word "martyr."

7

8

9

10

11

12

third lines, practically at the centre of the stone, are two fish facing each other, with an anchor between:

d(is) m(anibus)
ιχθυς ζωντων
Liciniae Amiati be-
nemerenti vixit
[...]

"To the gods Manes. Fish of the living. To Licinia Amias the well-deserving, lived..."

On a tile in the Priscilla catacomb is painted in red:

Celestina
pax!

"Peace, Celestina"

At about the same time in the Callistus catacomb was written:

φηλειχλα ειρηνη σοι εν K(υρι)ω

"Felicola, peace to thee in the Lord"

On a marble slab of the year 404 we read:

lepusculus Leo[5]
qui vixit anum
et mensis undeci
et dies dece et nove,
perit septium ca-
lendas augustas
Onorio sexis A(u)gusto.

"Leo, little leveret of mine, lived one year, 11 months, 19 days, died on 26 July of the year of the sixth consulate of Onorious the august."

Especially after the Edict of Constantine, the eulogies become more eloquent and explicit:

Mercurius Iustae co-
iugi benemerenti po-
suit, quae vixit mecum
annis XIIII; mater filiorum

7. The swastika; 8. The cross of St Andrew; 9. The pax, "peace," promised by the cross of Christ and signifying Christ; 10. The first letters of the Greek words "Jesus" (I) and "Christ" (X); 11. The Greek cross united with Christ's monogram; 12. MP, the Greek letters as monogram of the martyrs.

VII ex quibus reliquit II. tup(ete) et
tu p(ete) pro eos.

"Mercurius placed this for his well-deserving consort Julia. She lived with me 14 years, bore seven children and left two of them behind. Pray, pray for them."

The Latin inscriptions collected last century by Mommsen in his colossal *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum* contributed greatly to our knowledge of classical antiquity. So also did the burial inscriptions collected from the end of last century, and throughout this, by such famous scholars as G.B. de Rossi and Silvagni and, in our own time, by Antonio Ferrua. These have thrown light on unexpected corners of daily life, showing us the social behaviour of the various communities. Originally deriving from donations or concessions from traditionally rich families, the tomb became a democratic aspiration, representing wellbeing and ambition, especially if the incumbent desired that his epitaph should tell posterity what his profession was. In the Domitilla catacomb a marble slab reads:

locus Adeodati
porcinari et acutu-
lae. Sibi [v]ibi fecerunt.

"Tomb of Adeodato the grocer and of Acutula. While alive they made [this tomb] for themselves."

In the Praetextatus catacomb:

Domitius Taurus pernarus de platia macelli.

"Domitius Taurus, grocer in the market square."

In San Lorenzo:

[l]ocus Donati qui
manet in Sebura
[m]aiore ad nimfa-
[s]lintearius, bisomu.

"Two-burial tomb of Donatus the weaver who lives in Subura at the nympheum."

The eulogies become increasingly fulsome. On a fourth-century marble slab in the Callistus catacomb we read:

[Felici?]tati virginiae suae Probilianus,
queius fidelitatem et castitate et bonitate
omnes vicinales experti sunt, quae
annis n(umero) VIII absentia virgini sui cas-
titatem custodivit unde in hoc loco santo deposita
est II kal(endas) febr(uarias).

"Probilianus to his consort Felicita, whom all their neighbours recognized for her fidelity, chastity and goodness. During her husband's eight-year absence she remained chaste; then she was buried in this holy place on 30th January."

An arcosolium in the Callistus catacomb, subsequently transformed into an altar.

A double arcosolium in the St Sebastian catacomb.

The most ancient image of the Madonna with the Child in her arms, in the Priscilla catacomb.

The holiness of these places is now confirmed and sanctioned by the presence of the martyrs' relics, by the rites which commemorate the Last Supper, by the celebration of the cult which prefigured the future *missa domini.*

In the Act of the Martyrs an ancient inscription in the Priscilla catacomb invites the faithful to pray for the dead: *Vos precor, o fratres, orare huc quando venitis...*, "I exhort you to pray, brethern, when you come to this place."

At tunnel intersections, small chapels were built, where *cum voto et triumpho magno*, "with votive offering and great triumph" (Passion of St Cyprian) were brought martyrs' remains that bore no epitaph but just the solemn title "MARTYR," later abbreviated to "MR" or simply "M."

The social and spiritual importance of the dead person also conditions the external appearance of the tomb. From the simple *locus*—with its diminutive loculus—to the solemn and almost triumphal arcosolium (from the Latin *arcus*, an arch, and *solium*, a burial arc or sarcophagus). This was a stone burial chest or arc lodged in an arched niche specially dug in the wall and closed with a cover called a *mensa.* Sometimes, instead of being arched, the niche was a parallelepiped or trapezoid. The arc was finally covered by a flat slab set horizontally, in contrast with all the other loculi which were walled in by a stone or tiles built vertically. Like loculi, arcosolia could be used for more than one burial. When not recording a martyr, the epitaph frequently commemorated a benefactor, an *episcopus*—sometimes even a pope—or else a pious married couple.

Previous pages: paintings on arcosolia in the Commodilla catacomb.

The veiled woman *in the Priscilla catacomb, representing a woman at prayer.*

Another singular characteristic of the catacombs is that they extend vertically rather than horizontally. This was because ownership of land was not limited to the surface but also extended below ground, and it would have been dishonest and an abuse to stray without permission into someone else's territory underground. So, once a first cemetery had been dug—first in chronological order—the diggers excavated a second one underneath it, branching out at will but always within the territorial limits determined on the surface. Subsequently, as at Priscilla, the growing number of the faithful and the consequent demand for loculi could lead to the excavation of a third necropolis even deeper down.

Ventilation was by means of shafts which penetrated from ground level down to the lowest floor, opening out towards the various tunnels on the way so as to maintain an efficient airflow.

Some archeologists, such as the Italian G.B. de Rossi and the German G. Wilpert, declared that they had detected a slight perfume as they opened loculi still protected by a wall of tiles or stones—a sign that, before burial, the corpses were washed and perfumed and the linen bands themselves were impregnated with fragrant essences.

According to Wilpert's monumental work of research,[4] the most ancient paintings are those decorating the crypt of one Ampliatus, in the Domitilla catacomb. The wall ornamentation is vaguely reminiscent of that at Pompeii. The anonymous artists engaged in the decoration naturally made use of the means available to them and of the figurative language of their own time. This we may define as "tonal-descriptive"

when the decoration is markedly naturalistic, and "informal" when the artist voluntarily neglects form, seeking to synthesize shape and colour in order to achieve certain chromatic tones in a skilful play of light and shade.

In the early frescoes, carried out in narrow, lightless places, there are no specifically devotional motifs but rather a decoration which would help to identify the loculus. Among the first Christian images, from about the middle of the second century, the figure of the Good Shepherd dominates, together with Old Testament scenes. In the Priscilla catacomb, against a reddish background there stand out the scenes of Noah and the ark, Daniel in the lions' den, and the famous *Fractio panis*, the first commemoration of the Last Supper. To this period, which may still be considered archaic, we can attribute a fresco, unfortunately now seriously damaged, of the Madonna and Child. This is painted on the vault of a gallery in the so-called "sandstone area" of the same Priscilla catacomb, and is certainly the most ancient image of the Virgin Mary yet known. In the adjacent cubiculum is another famous fresco, called *The veiled woman.* The woman is raising her arms in prayer. Over her head she wears a veil which falls down over her shoulders.

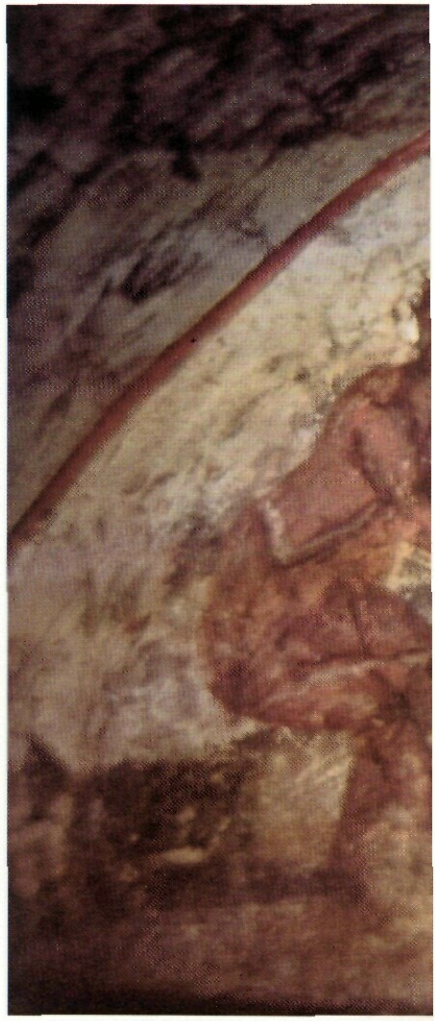
Towards the middle of the third century, the wall painters' means of expression become more refined in order to represent a more naturalistic vision of reality. Critics use the term s*tile bello* to refer to a style which links back to the great classical tradition. The extraordinary and priceless evidence of what the painters achieved in this style is to be found in the Via Latina catacomb, excavated in the middle years of this century by the eminent archeologist Father Antonio Ferrua. The present volume provides faithful colour reproductions of his discoveries, in their entirety, for the first time.

As in a great symphony, we find in the Via Latina the fusion of themes from pagan classicism—reappearing perhaps through the agency of Gnostic syncretization—with those from the Old and New Testaments and with the symbols and signs proper to the new faith and its belief in resurrection. The catacomb actually becomes a picture gallery and is a millennium in advance of the medieval *bibliae pauperum* which set out to illustrate the story of God for the sake of the populace.

Here again we find the Good Shepherd, the person at prayer, the palm tree, the peacock and the phoenix, alternating with images of Susanna bathing under the profanatory eyes of the elders, images of Hercules and Minerva, and significant scenes from the Scriptures, such as Jonah and the whale, Daniel in the lions' den, Moses dividing the waters of the Red Sea, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the fall of Adam and Eve. There are the seasons, personified in the faces of Roman girls, an anatomy lesson, a resurrection of Lazarus whose gesture anticipates the famous Renaissance one by Piero della Francesca, floral or grotesque ornamentation, plants and flowers. This is no longer the narrow, tortuous environment of the first catacombs. Here the tufa and the sandstone have been modelled and graced with columns and vaults to make a place which it is easy and pleasant to walk in, a place bursting with the colours of the sun, skilfully applied all over its walls.

Then in the fifth century, apparently all of a sudden, catacombs became obsolete. In the area around Naples they did continue to exist for a few centuries more, but their function was over. The bodies of the dead were gathered into more accessible urban cemeteries, situated among evergreen trees and beds of flowers.

In the fourth century, Pope Damasus gave Christians a new devotional impulse to seek out the tombs and relics of the martyrs in their various catacombs. Thereafter the catacombs themselves were gradually deserted by the faithful, with the eighth and ninth centuries seeing the relics transferred to city churches, which thus became dedicated to the various saints and martyrs.



A message of peace and resurrection in the Coemeterium Maius *(above), and a commemoration of* The Last Supper *in the Via Anapo catacomb (below).*

A fresco of Daniel in the lions' den *in the Via Anapo catacomb. Daniel's faith demonstrated in the lions' den became an example of salvation for the early Christians.*

A painting of The Good Shepherd *in the Priscilla catacomb, a scene inspired by a similar hope for salvation and resurrection.*

During the Middle Ages, even the entrances to the catacombs were forgotten, with the exception of those catacombs which developed beneath the main basilicas outside the walls of Rome.

Only in the fifteenth century, when the Roman Curia itself felt the fervour of the new humanism, did the first explorations begin. Fortuitous and occasional at first, they were carried forward with scientific rigour and commitment in subsequent centuries, and especially in the nineteenth.

This volume owes its existence to the passionate and learned commitment of an archeologist of our own time. The happy and sensational discovery which it documents sets a fitting crown upon a long and sedulous work of research.

Bruno Nardini
Florence, 1990

PREFACE

PREFACE

The Via Latina catacomb began to come to light in 1955. During 1956 and 1957 we conducted a full exploration and cleared and repaired the monument. Given its extraordinary importance, we sought to make information on this find available as soon as possible, and the present text first appeared at Easter 1960. It is now republished with a full and faithful panoply of colour photographs. The original text has been revised and corrected where necessary, and a full bibliography is included. The bibliography is in itself sufficient evidence of the extreme interest with which scholars immediately reacted to the discovery of these paintings.

Given the very special character of the catacomb, we decided from the outset not to attempt an exhaustive and detailed description of the archaeological monument as a whole, but, as our title implies, to concentrate on the paintings it contains. Our presentation of these is as succinct, faithful and objective as possible, so as to provide scholars with a true representation, including all the elements that may help towards answering the various historical and artistic problems that the paintings pose.

Chapter IV does, indeed, deal at some length with these problems, but this is intended as an overview, seeking rather to set them out for more competent study than to attempt to provide answers of our own. We are convinced, in fact, that no definitive conclusions can be early expected regarding problems which are so difficult and so encumbered with unknown factors. We have seen fit to point to some of the more immediate of these factors, but we wish to leave the rest open to what will be long and, we hope, useful debate, so that those most expert in the field may one day reach agreement on at least the most salient points.

For this reason, Chapters II and III are confined to setting out what we consider may prove of use in understanding and evaluating the paintings themselves. Initially, we faced the fairly basic problem of how actually to describe them. We had to decide whether to provide minute descriptions of the smallest details or to limit ourselves to an overall description, leaving the individual reader to a personal interpretation and view of what the paintings offer. Granted the large number of paintings involved, we have preferred the summary approach, in practice picking out only those details that might seem controversial or that might otherwise escape notice at a first reading. We have also paid attention to details that may appear to be poorly reproduced, given the deteriorated state of many of the original paintings.

For the same reason, we have included the actual dimensions of each painting and its exact location within the catacomb. The paintings are described topographically as this also represents the order in which the catacomb was developed. The same order has been followed in the presentation of the colour plates, so that it is easy to refer from illustration to text and vice versa. Description of the colours within the

paintings has been kept to a minimum - the splendid reproductions accompanying the text are the best witnesses to the reality.

We have been similarly brief with iconographical comparisons, except where these were necessary for the interpretation of a difficult subject, especially a new one. For subjects already known from other catacomb paintings, we have therefore spent little time on comparisons or references. This despite the temptation presented by such attractive scenes as *The raising of Lazarus*, *The chariot of fire*, *Christ and the woman of Samaria at the well*, or *The sacrifice of Isaac*. Readers can easily make their own comparisons by referring to Wilpert's collection of catacomb paintings and others subsequently published.

Taking into account Wilpert's other work on sarcophagi, we have likewise refrained from extensive comment on those details in our paintings which had been known until now only from sarcophagi. We have limited ourselves each time to stating "New subject in cemetery painting." We use another expression, "New subject in cemetery art," to indicate those subjects previously known only from non-cemetery art, especially that found in basilicas and on ivories. More attention has been given to these subjects in Chapter IV, where we examine their possible derivation. Even here, thanks to the wealth of material available to us in the Art Index of Princeton, we could have continued at much greater length.

This then is the volume we now present to the public. As I write this introduction, my thoughts are for a dear colleague, the late Professor Pasquale Testini, who, as secretary of the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, contributed so much to the preparation of the first version.

Antonio Ferrua
Rome, Easter 1990

A FOURTH-CENTURY ART GALLERY BENEATH THE VIA LATINA

CHAPTER I

DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION OF THE CATACOMB

Early in 1955 we learned that building work on a house at one end of the Via Dino Compagni in Rome had uncovered a catacomb. Nowhere in catacomb study or exploration, ancient or modern, had there been a hint of the existence of a catacomb in this area and, since the news was also very vaguely couched, at first we paid little attention to the information. This attitude can be justified by previous disappointments, when word-of-mouth reports had proved to be fruitless and timewasting. Discoveries of underground cavities are not infrequent, and these cavities very often are mistaken for catacombs, especially when they are in fact ancient abandoned sandstone quarries. This particular information had also reached us late in the day. The building was already finished, and there was now no chance of preventive investigation.

Some days later, Mario Santa Maria, a graduate engineer, called on us at the Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana. He had had direct experience of the construction work in the Via Dino Compagni, and he showed us photographs he had taken of paintings he had seen. During drilling operations for installation of support piles, a large underground cavity had been found. He had courageously had himself lowered through the hole cut by the pile-driver, to find himself in Hall I (fig. 3). From there, he had made his way through fallen earth and debris to Room L and Cubiculum M. Amazed by the large size of the rooms opening in front of him, and struck by their decoration, he returned a second time to take photographs.

The visits of this sincere and thoughtful admirer were unfortunately to be followed by those of greedy and ignorant looters and vandals, who not only carried off pieces of painted plasterwork detached by the pile-driver in Rooms L and M, but who also attempted to remove the finest scenes from the walls, damaging some of them irreparably. These events are dealt with in more detail when we come to describe the monument as a whole.

There could now be no doubt that we were dealing with a genuine catacomb, although certainly a unique one, to judge by the description of its rooms and decoration and by the evidence of the few photographs we had seen. This increased our desire to be able to enter the catacomb in order to form a clearer idea of the monument itself and of any treasures it might contain.

The day following his visit to us, Thursday March 17th, Mr Santa Maria accompanied us to the site so that we could examine the terrain with a view to possible excavation and deep sampling. The building on which construction work had led to the breaching of the catacomb was the first on the right of the Via Dino Compagni, indicated by arrow 1 in figure 2. The building having been finished, there was now no free space available for an excavation area close to where the catacomb had been breached.

Fig. 1: Looking from Room D into Cubiculum E.

Fig. 2 Above the catacomb. The Via Latina is on the left, the Via Dino Compagni on the right.

On subsequent visits we learned that serious subsidence had occurred some years previously in the courtyard of the building opposite, the point where the Via Latina and the Via Dino Compagni meet, between arrows 2 and 3 in figure 2. The subsidence had been serious enough to require urgent structural reinforcement to the building, and we inferred from this that the catacomb might well extend beneath this second building as well as under the street separating the two. Given the inconvenience it would cause the residents, together with the further danger to the building's stability, there was no hope of obtaining agreement to an excavation of the courtyard. We also considered the courtyard an unsuitable area, both because of the practical difficulty of removing excavated material and because of the near-certainty of finding ourselves in a major cave-in, with all the consequent problems.

It appeared, therefore, that the only reasonable access point would be from the Via Dino Compagni itself, at the point indicated by arrow 2 in figure 2. Since it was now late in the season, we decided to postpone the work until the autumn. Meantime, we approached the Commune of Rome to obtain the necessary authorization to undertake excavation work in a public thoroughfare.

On November 2nd, 1955 we began to sink a vertical shaft at our chosen point. For approximately the first 33 feet (ten metres) we found only soft soil and filling material, but on November 18th we struck a layer of very hard tufa. Beneath this we came upon much softer rock, the classic outcrop for the digging of catacombs. By November 23rd, a depth of 53 feet (16.20 metres) had been reached, and it seemed as though we were mistaken in our choice of access point. Then a thin diaphragm gave way,

and we found ourselves in the northernmost corner of Room D. The walls were completely covered with paintings, although some were split and in danger of falling (see plan in figure 3). It was a moment of great excitement for all of us.

To the east and to the south, however, Cubiculum F and Gallery 4 were completely buried under a great landslip, which had also affected part of the roof of Room D, the room we were in. Soil completely blocked access to Cubiculum E and almost completely the exit towards the northwest. Having established that this was the direction of the centre of the catacomb and the part already discovered, we began to remove the cone of soil which had formed in Room G under the light well. On November 26th, we entered the long Gallery 6 and, having closed the light-well mouth, from there we reached Gallery H.

We set about clearing this of soil, and on December 13th we encountered the first of the foundation piles for the building above. We found that Hall I had several of them, three in the front part having caused very serious damage by demolishing about half of the painted vaulted ceiling. In addition, the entire area had been filled with soil when the workmen were pouring the concrete for the piles. Towards the exit, the work on two other piles had been poorly carried out, and concrete had leaked during pouring and overflowed into the nearer part of Room L. Up to over three feet (one metre) in height, the resulting solidified mass cost much time and great effort to remove with sledgehammers and chisels .

In Hall I and Room L we recovered only part of the painted plasterwork brought down by the pile-drivers, and practically nothing of what had subsequently been chipped off by vandals. The fragments had either pulverized or had disappeared. We recovered more in Cubiculum M, although here too the piles had created extensive damage, especially to the two arcosolia, and there had also been a leakage of concrete, which had overflowed into the entrance of Cubiculum N. Fortunately, this was our last important construction obstacle in this area, and we found the rest of the catacomb clear and in good condition. Exception has to be made for the damage caused by plunderers in the ancient past, which is discussed later.

Meantime we cleared Cubiculum E and the long Gallery 6 of small amounts of soil. We also repaired several loculi which had already fallen in or were at serious risk. Towards the end of the year we were therefore ready to tackle the huge cave-in which had almost completely filled Gallery 4 and closed Cubiculum F. This was the landslip which had led to the settlement of the foundations of the second building, the one at the corner of the Via Dino Compagni and the Via Latina. We solved the problem by erecting a complex system of scaffolding, and on January 13th, 1956 we reached the landing of Stairway 3. From there we could easily descend to the painted Cubicula B and C, which we found partly obstructed with soil from the catacomb itself.

We then ascended to Cubiculum A. Not only was it half-filled with soil, we also found parts of the painted plasterwork detached and lying on the detritus, evidence that this area had suffered a lot of movement, probably during construction work on the building overhead. Torrents of water had entered the catacomb, filling Cubiculum A above the arches of its arcosolia and Cubicula B and C up to the foot of the vaulting. This flooding had badly damaged the paintings, and the plasterwork had become detached from the rock, falling to the ground in fragments. The threshold of Cubiculum A was blocked by mounds of soil which had come from Cubiculum A' opposite. This had been affected by the same landslip as had buried Cubiculum F and Gallery 4. Immediately inside, we came upon a cone of soil and all kinds of debris sloping down from the nearby light well. This was evidently infill thrown down when the modern building was being erected overhead.

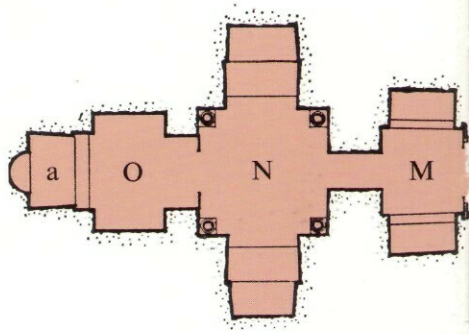
Having built up the walls and the ceiling of Gallery 4 and reinforced the entrance

to Cubiculum A', on February 10th we started to close the next light well and to clear soil from the rest of Gallery 3, which was in reasonably good condition. Gallery 2 and its cubiculum had little dirt to be cleared, and the work went quickly. On March 5th we reached the ancient entrance to the catacomb. It was full of soil, of course, but relatively well preserved. There could be no thought of opening it, however, since it lay beneath the perimeter wall of the building above, and gave into a basement area which was lived in. Faced with the problem of finding an alternative entrance, we judged it best to gain access from the adjacent pavement of the Via Latina by means of a stairway which led into Gallery 2 towards the southeast, carrying it slightly to the left in order to avoid the foundations of the building (fig. 2, arrow 3).

In the course of this delicate and difficult work, we first met with an ancient air shaft (indicated on the plan) and shortly afterwards the upper part of the columbarium to which it belonged. Above this there was only filling material. By mid-May the stairway was almost ready, and we began to use it as our access to the catacomb. Until then, the daily entrance and exit for workmen, materials, excavated soil, and commission personnel had been through the 53-foot (16.20-metre) shaft that had been dug in the Via Dino Compagni. These operations, using a rope hanging from a ratchet, had been accompanied all along by hostile looks and unpleasant comments from residents in the nearby buildings.*

It was now time to turn to the very delicate and difficult task of clearing Cubiculum F, the ceiling vault of which had caved in completely under the weight of the great subsidence. We had to rebuild it in situ, inserting a strong central pillar to bear the enormous thrust of weight from above, which the side walls—in poor shape and split in places—could not now support.

When this work was successfully achieved, on June 4th, the excavation of the newly discovered catacomb was substantially complete. There remained only to close up the last cracks in central Room D, and gradually fill up the air shaft at the northern corner.



We have already mentioned the serious damage done to the catacomb by the construction of the building on the right-hand side of the Via Dino Compagni. The somewhat older building opposite was unquestionably the cause of the partial collapse and total obstruction of the ancient entrance to the catacomb, giving on to the Via Latina, and it may also have been responsible for the serious flooding of Cubicula A, B and C. But there is a whole range of other sorts of damage caused to the catacomb at a much earlier period. This would have been at a time when it was accessible from the open countryside through the upper light well, or through the as yet unblocked original entrance, or perhaps through the spaces opened up by the great landslip in Gallery 4. No other hole was ever opened to penetrate the catacomb, and in any case the type of damage caused always betrays the same technique and the same motivation by crude greed.

All the sepulchres in the arcosolia, even when solidly walled in, had been broken into—if need be with sledgehammers. We found that Galleries 3 and 4 had been almost completely looted, and Gallery 6 showed all the signs of robbers' work. Most

* Right from the start the residents of the building whose foundation piles had so devastated Hall I and Rooms L and M used threats and served notices on us. As our work progressed, an action was even brought against us by the owners of the building in the Via Latina. It did, in effect, suffer some wall damage, due in part to the clearing of the excavated areas underneath, but in part also to the thoughtlessness which had sited the building on top of infill and large cavities. One of the first people to use our new stairway was the technical inspector from the law courts.

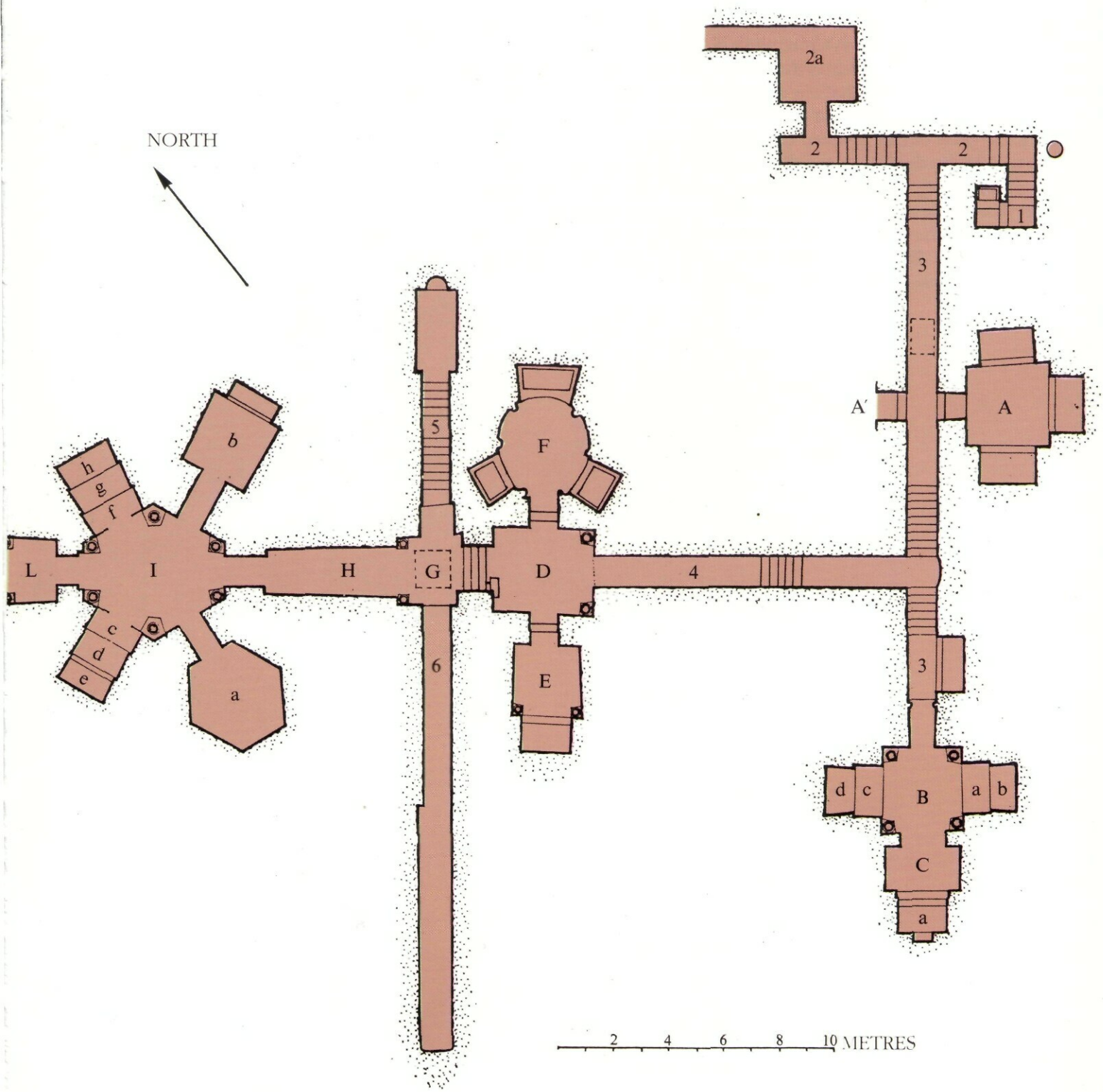


Fig. 3: Plan of the Via Latina catacomb.

of the loculi had been broken into, with parts of the corpses often being thrown to the floor. Many pieces of marble slab had been carried away. Lower loculi closed with masonry had been smashed into from above with pickaxes.

There were two things which most astonished us in all this. First, the sheer violence with which sledgehammers had been used to smash through fairly thick marble, such as the screens in Cubiculum N and Room I, the sarcophagus facing in Cubiculum Oa, and the capitals of the pillars in N, which are partly missing. The other astonishing discovery was that the painted plasterwork which had fallen from the vaulted roofs of A, B and F must have been removed from the catacomb, since our search of the piles of dirt in these cubicula yielded only a few of the fragments.

Who was it who demonstrated this weird covetousness, and when? Why did they leave in place those paintings still decorating the walls? Was it perhaps a love of fine painting? Was there a tact and respect in these robbers that had failed the ancients themselves when they drove new loculi through the great paintings of *Susanna and the elders* (fig. 38), *The crossing of the Red Sea* (fig. 134), *The raising of Lazarus* (fig. 137), or *The Sermon on the Mount* (fig. 40)?

CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTION OF THE CATACOMB

Today the catacomb is entered, as previously described, by means of the modern stairway that opens from the pavement outside number 258 Via Latina, at the point indicated by arrow 3 in figure 2. This is some seven feet (2.20 metres) lower than the point in the Via Dino Compagni where we had opened our first shaft (arrow 2).

Twenty-eight new steps lead down to the landing between Galleries 1 and 2, 30 feet (9.25 metres) below the level of the Via Dino Compagni. The air shaft previously mentioned, four and a quarter feet (1.30 metres) in diameter, is buried beneath the 23rd to 26th steps of the new staircase. Once inside the catacomb, Gallery 1 is on our left. This is closed for safety reasons, the foundations of the building above running immediately over the gallery steps. Gallery 1 goes up steep steps, turns on a landing and goes up another two, turns again and up a further two to reach a door which in ancient times opened almost at the edge of the Via Latina. The threshold is still intact, as are the jambs, at least to the height of just over three feet (one metre), which is as much as can be seen of them.

Leaving the entrance, Gallery 2 descends three masonry steps and then by a further seven to a depth of 42 feet (12.92 metres) below the level of the Via Dino Compagni. It is three feet (90 cm) wide and eight and a half feet (2.60 metres) high when it leaves Gallery 1. It maintains this height right up to the entrance to Cubiculum 2a. Several loculi are still intact: of these there are three children's burials on the right-hand side of the upper section. All the others had been destroyed, and were given masonry reinforcement because of the house above. There is nothing of particular note in Gallery 2, other than a loculus closed by two little gravestones, one certainly recording *M. Scribonius Storax* and the other a Pompea Aphrodisia.

The same applies to Cubiculum 2a and the gallery running off from it. The latter is in fact still half-filled with soil. It revealed nothing of interest, so we did not carry out a full exploration.

At the end of Gallery 2 we found a little pagan burial stone in three pieces. It measures 14½ x 9 x 3 inches (37 x 24 x 8.5cm) and was perhaps reused, reversed, to close up a child's loculus. Farther on we found the left-hand part of another pagan slab, measuring 6½ x 8½ x 1 inches (16 x 21 x 2.5cm), which probably served the same purpose. (Exact measurements are given in metric sizes in brackets preceded by the equivalent size in feet or inches to the nearest half inch.)

The closeness both to the entrance and to a number of pagan funeral monuments, such as the one buried beneath the modern staircase, sufficiently accounts for the presence of this pagan material in the catacomb.

The long Gallery 3 leads off from Gallery 2 at a depth of 33 feet 4 inches (10.15 metres), reaching three feet, three inches (11.95 metres) after Cubiculum A, then

descending to 47½ feet (14.48 metres) at the entrance to Gallery 4, and on down a further seven steps to 53 feet (16.15 metres), which is more or less the level of Cubicula B and C. The gallery ceiling runs horizontally as far as the light well, and in this section the wall surfaces are completely covered with plasterwork down to the 33-foot 4-inch (10.15-metre) line—to the level, that is, of the landing itself. Even the tiling closing the loculi has been plastered over. A gallery, nine feet (2.75 metres) high, must first have been dug out on a level with the landing as far as the light well, as was the case for the whole length of Gallery 2. Once the light well had been cut through, the gallery was then deepened by means of the various stairways, and the new wall areas were left unplastered.

From the light well onwards, the height of the gallery is practically unvaried at nine feet (2.75 metres), except at its deepest point, in front of the arcosolium, where it is 12 feet (3.65 metres) high. The gallery is fairly well preserved, only the central part between Cubiculum A' and Gallery 4 requiring modern rebuilding because of damage from the great landslip.

We have mentioned that we closed up the Gallery 3 light well. This large light well is located some way before the two Cubicula A and A', not immediately between them. This may have been so as not to weaken the rock by over-excavation at one particular point, or it may be that the light well was executed before the two cubicula were planned.

Gallery 3's tombs are all loculus burials, mainly of children, with only one arcosolium. Only a few loculi are still closed, almost all of these with tiles. The robbers must have ripped away the marble coverings and taken away the finest of them, together with the best of the tiled ones. We found few tiles and stones still in the dirt on the gallery floor, and some of these may have fallen in from the light well. In fact, it was below the light, or not far distant, that we found the largest number of pagan gravestones. One of these, measuring 12 x 19 x 2 inches (31 x 49 x 4.5cm) is the upper part of a stele decorated with an axe and shows clear signs of having been reused to close a loculus in the catacomb. The same purpose was served, it seems, by a little memorial stone 10½ x 7½ x 1 inches (26.5 x 18.5 x 2cm); by part of an alabastrine marble slab, 10 x 5½ x 1 inches (25 x 14 x 1.8cm), with an inscription on the back; and certainly by another piece of memorial stone, 4½ x 11½ x 1 inches (11 x 29 x 2.5cm), which we found with lime sticking to its rear edges. A small columbarium slab only four and a half inches (12cm) high, certainly from outside the catacomb, would not have been so used. At the end of the gallery, in front of the arcosolium, we found two other columbarium slabs, one intact and measuring 4½ x 14 x 1 inches (12 x 35 x 2.5cm), the other, 5 x 10½ x 1 inches (13 x 27 x 1.9cm), slightly damaged on the left-hand side. They may have fallen from the light well and down the steps, or they may have been used to close children's loculi. Here also we found a piece of brick with the complete brick-stamp Dressel number 178, and farther on an enormous piece with brick-stamp Dressel number 719, and a large tile 16 x 21 inches (40 x 53cm) with this stamp:

C . R A B I R I *corona*
palma
TIBVRTINI VICTORIAE

which is a variant of Dressel numbers 1396-7. These had all evidently fallen from loculi in the gallery.

Below the mouth of the light well, we also found other fragments of pagan stones which had certainly fallen in from outside: various pieces of an oval sarcophagus decorated with lions; at least three pieces of a sarcophagus lid decorated with

Fig. 4: The left-hand wall of Cubiculum C.

Figs. 5-8: Loculi stones from Gallery 3.

dolphins; some pieces of carved marble; a *putto* head, six and a half inches (16cm) high, from a large sarcophagus; two fragments of terra-cotta piping; and the neck of a large amphora, with handle.

Lower down, in front of Cubiculum A, we found a very fine clay ampulla four inches (9.5cm) high, a jar of fine red argil two and a half inches (6cm) high, and a little jug three and a half inches (9cm) high, of much coarser pale clay. The first two are certainly from a columbarium, and perhaps also the third. Four little beaded oil lamps (Dressel type 30) were found on the edges of gallery loculi to which they belong. One of these still had its mortar attached.

The Christian stones unquestionably belong to the loculi of Gallery 3, having fallen out accidentally or, more probably, as a result of the destructive work of the robbers. We found them in the dirt obstructing the upper part of the gallery, especially in front of Cubiculum A.

The first is in Greek marble, 18 inches (46cm) in length, seven inches (17cm) high and one inch (3.1cm) thick (fig. 5). Despite its thickness, we can tell what it was used for from the lime still sticking to its edges. The lettering averages two inches (4.5cm) in height and reads *Maximus in pac*[*e qui vi*]*xit meses decem die*[*s tot*].

One stone, 11 x 33½ x 1½ inches (28 x 85 x 3.5cm), was in ten fragments (fig. 6). It is unusual for a Christian catacomb burial stone, in that the rear face of the marble is undressed. The inscription is easily read: *Simplicia* [*q*]*uae vixit annis III, meses XI, dies VII; deposita idus nob. in pace.* Above the inscription a bird pecks at a branch on which it is perching.

Another Simplicia (also probably a little girl) is commemorated on a small stone, 8½ x 37 x 1 inches (22 x 94 x 2cm), broken into three pieces (fig. 7). The lettering is one and a half inches (4cm) high and reads: *Herriae Sympliciae b*(*ene*) *m*(*erenti*) *fec*(*erunt*) *sui in pace.* It is interesting to note the "I" which false doctrine has subsequently corrected to "Y."

Yet another child is remembered in the large marble slab, 12 x 16½ x 1 inches (31 x 42 x 2cm), illustrated in figure 8, of which five fragments with lettering one to one and a half inches (3 to 3.5cm) high remain, together with several other detached fragments which are without inscription. We can read: *Proculus vixit ann. VI, d*(*ies*) *XXII; d*(*e*)*p. III k*(*al.*) *o*[*ct*].

Some 27 feet 9 inches (8.50 metres) from the beginning of Gallery 3 there are two cubicula. Cubiculum A' had been struck in full by the great landslip which had also breached Cubiculum F and Gallery 4. It is entered by two steps, with a threshold on the second of them. The walls are plastered but entirely without decoration. We decided to abandon A' and wall it in. Cubiculum A is entered by stepping up on to a threshold and then down two steps. The presence of thresholds leads one to imagine that the two cubicula may have been closed in some manner, but no trace of any such structure remains.

A is a normal cubiculum with three arcosolia and very narrow cross-vaulting. It is eight feet (2.48 metres) high. It was half-filled with dirt which included large fragments of painted plasterwork. We replaced these in position on the walls. For the entire left-hand part of the vault we could find only one large decorated corner fragment and another smaller one among the soil on the floor. What happened to all the rest may be accounted for by the water that — even before the aforementioned landslip but evidently dammed by dirt blocking Gallery 3 — had flooded the cubiculum to the height of at least three feet (one metre).

The arcosolium has a deep two-part pit with two extra loculi for children's burials on the right-hand side and an adult's loculus on the farther side. It would therefore have been large enough for a whole family.

The left-hand arcosolium has a supplementary loculus on each side of the pit. The loculus in the far wall could have contained seven bodies. The pit is on two levels, with a single sepulchre in the lower part and space for two loculi in the upper. Two extra loculi were also cut into the long rear side and a child's loculus into each of the shorter sides.

Finally, extra loculi had been dug in the lunettes of the three arches and in the lower sides of the arch of the right-hand one. As a result, the paintings had been heedlessly mutilated (figs. 35, 37-40). Evidently these loculi were not enough, and graves had been dug at floor level throughout the cubiculum. This, it should be remembered, is the oldest part of the catacomb, having remained in use for almost a century.

Fig. 10: Loculus stone from Cubiculum A.

Fig. 9: Loculus stone from Cubiculum A

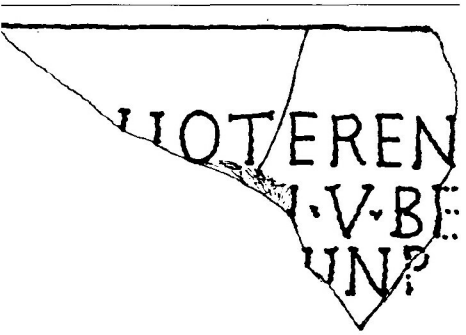
We found all these burials broken into and damaged. The arcosolia were completely uncovered, while the loculi still had a few pieces of tile closures here and there. However, some burial stones found in the sepulchre may belong here.

The first stone, 11 x 25 x 1 inches (28 x 63 x 2cm), is inscribed on the back. On one side is the pagan inscription to one Titus Elius Pollionis and on the other the Christian inscription (fig. 10) in letters two inches and one and a half inches (5 and 3.5cm) high: *d(is) M(anibus). Libertio d(ep.) non(is) oct.* The lime adhering to the edges clearly shows that this stone was used to close up a wall loculus.

Two pieces of the second stone remain. We found one in the pit of the left-hand arcosolium and the other in the adjacent grave dug in the floor of the cubiculum. Together they measure 7½ x 22½ x 1 inches (19 x 57 x 2.50cm), and again the traces of lime show that they closed a wall loculus. The lettering is not carved but written with charcoal in letters one and a half inches (3.5cm) high. Half the inscription has disappeared, what we can read is:

D M · AVR · ATTICIAN*o*...
DP III KAL · DECE*mb.*

It should be noted that both inscriptions, although certainly Christian, are dedicated to the Manes, the spirits of the dead. This leads me to believe that the first inscription in figure 9 is also Christian. The height of the marble—11½ inches (29cm)—



and its thinness—half an inch (1.7cm)—are appropriate to a burial stone. The tall lettering, roughly two inches (5 to 5.5cm) high, so closely resembling that in the stone we have shown beside it and the fact that the letters take up the full height of the marble are both characteristic of Christian inscriptions.

These fragments are from the soil in Gallery 3. The stones drawn beside them were found in the cubiculum and measure 13 x 17½ x 1 inches (33 x 45 x 3cm). The rubric lettering is two inches (5.5cm) high, and the lime around the edges indicates that the fragments were part of a slab closing a large loculus. We might hazard to fill out the inscription as reading *Aelio Terentio* | *q(ui) v(ix.) ann. V bene* | *merenti in pace.* As a surname *Terentius* is not unknown, and we have already seen, above, that *Libertius* could be used as a surname, although elsewhere it is used only as a title.

From a mould in this cubiculum also came the pagan inscription of a certain Augustale, 7 x 17 inches (18 x 43cm), which, judging by the lime left on its edges, must have been reused to close up a Christian loculus.

In the lower part of the gallery is a traditional arcosolium, utterly looted. Immediately beyond, two half columns in tufa, scarcely ten inches (25cm) wide, jut out from the side walls to support a tympanum. The columns and the tympanum are plastered in a dirty grey colour to simulate, I believe, a bardiglio or cipolin marble. This is the shabbily monumental view of the entrance to Cubiculum B. The entrance, which is in the form of an arched doorway, is up one step from Gallery 3 and from the cubiculum. The lower part of the left-hand wall is spoiled by the presence of two subsequent loculi.

The interior of the room (figs. 44-46) is of singular appearance. Four pillars in full relief, 12½ inches (32cm) in diameter, have been carved out of the tufa in the corners. They are plastered and painted to resemble red marble. A large architrave resting on three corbels runs from pillar to pillar, supporting a triangular tympanum. The whole

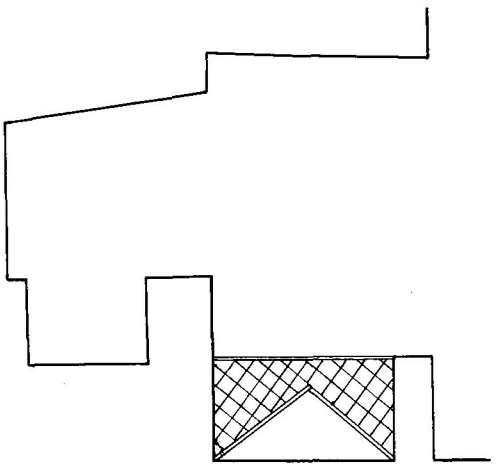


Fig. 11: Cross-section of the arcosolium in Cubiculum B

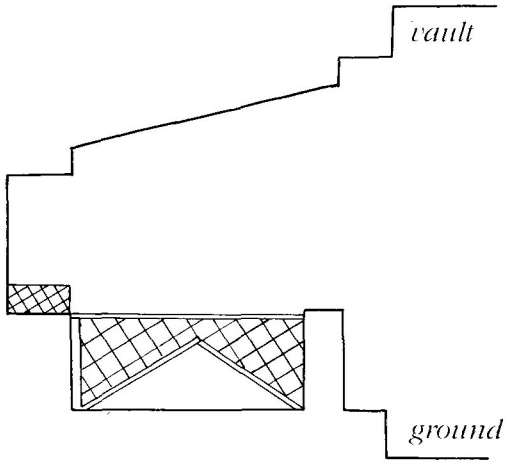


Fig. 12: Cross-section of the arcosolium in Cubiculum C

structure is carved out of the tufa of the cubiculum and has been plastered over.

The pillars and tympana carry the cross vault, whose ribs meet at the centre in a tondo 23 inches (58cm) across and nine feet (2.75 metres) from the floor. The tondo, the vaulting ribs and the sides of the tympana were all covered in stuccowork foliage, now almost all fallen away. Spiral stuccoes on the harder plasterwork also decorated

the sides of the corbels and the lower face, eight inches (20cm) deep, of the architrave. These also have fallen away.

The cubiculum has undergone settlement that has very seriously damaged the walls, the pillars (half of the first on the right has disappeared), and the southeast pediment. It has also caused the plasterwork to fall from the right-hand part of the vault, and we unfortunately were unable to find any of this in the soil which half-filled the crypt. Settlement had likewise caused a lengthwise split in the vault of the next cubiculum, C.

We found no trace of any sort of door structure, but there is a hard cement threshold running under the arch between Cubicula B and C (perhaps once surmounted by a stone slab), and the room was closed by a screen 19½ inches (50cm) high, an attachment point for which can still clearly be seen in the right-hand wall of B (fig. 46). The two rooms would have had a single owner and make up a double loculus unit. Indeed, the painted decoration in C repeats none of the scenes present in B.

With the exception of the two little loculi dug in the left-hand area of the doorway, which may well not have been created by the owners of the cubiculum, the burials in B are found only in the two deep arcosolia at the sides (fig. 11). Each is a double burial, having two tombs with two separate arches over them. The first tomb is only 21 inches (53cm) above the cubiculum floor and its arch rises up to five feet (1.50 metres) above it. The second one is 17 inches (43cm) above the first, with its arch rising over it to only three feet (0.93 metre). The second tomb was closed with a marble slab, the first with robust masonry resting on large fixed tiles (the reverse is the case in the left-hand arcosolium). This solid walling-up was not sufficient to deter greedy desecrators, unfortunately, and all the tombs had been broken into and damaged. Lying in the cubiculum were a large marble slab, 35 x 64 x 3 inches (89 x 162 x 7cm), and many pieces of another grey one, only half an inch (1.5cm) thick. These must have covered the tombs in the arcosolia.

Passage from Cubicula B to C is through a low archway, five feet (1.5 metres) in height. On either side are two shallow loculi with an arch rising to six feet nine inches (2.06 metres) from the floor. The roof is a barrel vault, seven feet six inches (2.32 metres) high, with deep cracks splitting it lengthwise.

The burials in the loculi are in the lower part only, below the paintings. There is one loculus on the left and two on the right. Originally closed in with brick and subsequently broken into, these are secondary burials. As designed, the room was intended for a single burial in the arcosolium at the back (figs. 12, 46). A marble slab only one inch (3cm) thick simulates the front of a sarcophagus, and behind it is a multi-celled grave, three feet nine inches (1.18 metres) wide. In the middle of the slab a panel, 16 x 12½ inches (40 x 32cm), has been prepared for an inscription which was never carried out. There are lines of strigils and, at the sides, a little Corinthian pilaster. The left-hand side has been broken open so that the grave of the arcosolium could be searched.

In the far lunette, a rectangular loculus, 12½ x 23 inches (32 x 58cm), has been dug, similar to those used in pagan tombs for cinerary urns. In this case it would be purely ornamental, like the one in the so-called red wall above the tomb of St Peter. Originally lower, it has had a five-inch (13cm) masonry step added, faced with marble.

In front of the grave is a masonry step nine and a half inches (24cm) high. At the springer of the pointed arch above it (fig. 46), two wide slots have been cut in the rock. Now filled with mud left behind by the water that at one time burst in and completely flooded the cubiculum, these slots were almost certainly to secure a

Fig. 13: Lettering found on the doorway of Cubiculum F

marble slab from which lamps would be hung to honour the tomb in the arcosolium. The slab has been stolen, but arcosolium Oa (figs. 27, 141), which imitates C, shows us how it must have looked originally.

Accustomed to pagan practice, the grave robbers would have believed that precious things would be buried beneath the floor of the loculus and consequently attacked it with picks, breaking it in half. On this occasion, however, their greed was disappointed.

Corresponding to the point where Gallery 4 branches off, vertical signs of the beginnings of excavation on the southeast wall of Gallery 3 seem to indicate an intention, subsequently abandoned, of opening a gallery in this direction also.

Gallery 4 leads off from the landing of Gallery 3 at a depth of 47½ feet (14.48 metres) and descends to 53 feet (16.20 metres) at the entrance to Room D. The six tufa steps leading downward are still preserved. Where it strikes off from Gallery 3, the ceiling of Gallery 4 is two feet (0.60 metres) lower—depth 40 feet 9 inches (12.45 metres)—than is usual in branch galleries. It maintains a height of nine feet four inches (2.85 metres) up to a point five feet six inches (1.67 metres) from the central Room D, where it drops all at once by two feet four inches (0.65 metre) to form the regular space for a doorway seven feet three inches (2.20 metres) high and three and a half feet (0.95 metre) wide.

Having been struck full on by the great landslip that extended as far as Cubicula A' and F, it has lost most of its upper loculi down as far as the steps. Those remaining had in any case been totally broken into and sacked, with only two still left intact, closed with tiles. The ancients had already been worried by the poor quality of the rock and had used lime to fill in a crack in the right-hand wall running along all the steps of the stairway.

Room D was designed for access to other areas rather than as a burial chamber, and, in fact, we found no tombs there. This was true also of Room G, of the large passageway, Gallery H, of Room L, and of other minor areas. In ascertaining this, we

Fig. 14: Square light well G between Room D and Galleries H, 5 and 6.

were discovering a novel aspect of the Roman catacomb, where normally every available space was used for burials. I believe that it is yet another sign of the wealth of the owners of this catacomb, already indicated by the richness of its decorative painting and the grandeur of its architecture.

Room D is square, with a cross-vault roof 10 feet 3 inches (3.13 metres) high. It was plastered and painted throughout, and decorated at the entrance by two columns cut from the tufa. These were also plastered and painted to resemble marble. With the exception of Gallery 6 and its unfinished cubiculum, all the catacomb is plastered like this. The columns have been carved out of the living rock and then covered with plasterwork and painted. There were probably two corresponding columns at the exit towards Room G, but we were unable to find sufficient evidence, perhaps because both the abutments were subsequently rebuilt.

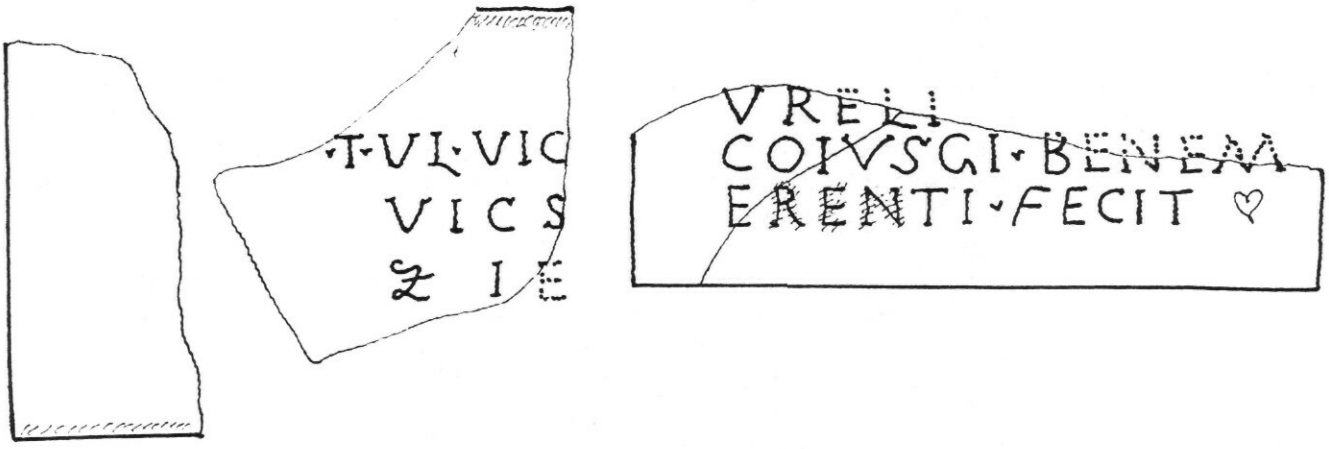
Unfortunately, the movement initiated by the landslip caused the eastern part of the vault to collapse, together with much of the right-hand column and wall and the two pilasters at the back. It also badly damaged the two columns and all the plasterwork left on the walls.

From either side of Room D two steps lead down to Cubicula E and F. There appears not to have been any form of door or other closure at the entrances to these rooms.

Cubiculum E is square, with a barrel-vault roof 10 feet 9 inches (3.32 metres) high. At the rear the arch is supported by two pillars cut from the tufa and at the sides by three tufa corbels which are connected by arches (figs. 77-79). In this case also, the burials were confined to the rear arcosolium.

The cubiculum contained a piece of pagan burial stone dedicated to one Mercenia Callichora, which is certainly from outside the catacomb. In the soil within Room D we found a similar piece of stone dedicated to one Flavia Domna, and five other

Fig. 15: Gallery 5.



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Figs. 16-19: Loculi stones found in Gallery 6.

smaller pieces which appear to have come into the hypogeum with the great landslip. A two-footed tile with Dressel number 1622 seems to have been the cover for a tomb.

Cubiculum F has an elegant oval shape. Originally it was roofed by a vault resting on a massive cornice supported alternately by a half-column and a corbel carved out of the tufa (figs. 81, 86). The great landslip that filled in the cubiculum unfortunately also destroyed the vault, which must originally have been 11 feet (3.35 metres) high. It was decorated with ribs rising from each pillar and meeting, probably, in a central tondo.

Here, too, burials were restricted to the three arcosolia. In the doorway area there is a graffito scraped into the dry plasterwork. The lettering, one and a half to two and three-quarter inches (4 to 7cm) high, seems hurried and irregular (fig. 13). It is difficult to read but may represent: *domino Fabalio* (?) INQVIPOSSIPONI (?).

From Room D, four steps lead down to a depth of 56 feet 9 inches (17.30 metres), on to which opens the large square light well G (fig. 14). On the northwest side it is supported on two pillars cut from the tufa. There were certainly no pillars on the opposite side, but there is a large arch rising from two pilasters to give more light. Towards Galleries H, 5 and 6, the light well finishes lower down, on semi-spherical vaults.

This room was never used for burials: it acted as the access to the adjacent galleries. Of these, Gallery 5 (fig. 15) is mainly a stairway of thirteen steps going down to a depth of 69 feet (21 metres) to reach the phreatic water table, the water being contained in a large rectangular chamber. The stairway is roofed by a barrel vault plastered in white throughout. In place of a handrail, there is an offset of approximately three inches (7cm) in each wall.

Gallery 6 is a typical catacomb burial gallery, seven and a half feet (2.30 metres) high. It was in a much better state of preservation than Galleries 1 to 4, probably because the landslip had made it difficult for grave robbers to reach it. Those who did manage to get into it did their usual damage, however, breaking open most of the loculi and seriously damaging the rock at their edges. In this case the rock is not particularly solid and shows frequent cracks, which the ancients had duly sought carefully to patch with lime (as we see done in many galleries of the *Coemeterium Maius* catacomb). However, we found many pieces of fallen loculi in the gallery, not all due, we believe, to the ill-omened work of treasure seekers.

Many of the gallery's loculi were closed with marble slabs, often with inscriptions, and most of these have survived, either intact or in pieces. They provided considerable enlightenment in our study of the catacomb.

Among the dirt right at the entrance to Gallery 6, we found three pieces of a large pagan stone with the epitaphs of two Scribonias. This stone had been reused, with the lettering upside-down, to close a mould. Not far beyond there were four pieces of another large pagan stone, 9 x 20½ inches (23 x 52cm). This had been cut and reused with the lettering inside to close up a loculus at the beginning of the gallery. Two other fragments found at the same spot are certainly from a Christian inscription to one Tullius Vittorinus, and another two fragments also probably belong to a Christian stone (fig. 16). The left-hand part of the first stone measures 10½ x 4½ inches (27 x 12cm) and the right-hand part 8½ x 8½ x 1 inches (21 x 21 x 2cm), with rubricated lettering 1½ inches (3.5cm) high. In the first line it is possible to read *T. Vl(pius)*. In the second line there was *vicsit*, and in the third *zies* for *dies*. The second stone measures 6½ x 19 x 1 inches (16.5 x 48.5 x 2.5cm), with lettering 1½ inches (3.5cm) high. It was dedicated by a certain Aurelius, after which, in error, the nominative *coius* had been started instead of *coiugi*. In an attempt to correct the error, the letters in the third line were carelessly cancelled instead of those in the second.

At the foot of the first vertical rank of loculi on the right, we found intact a fine stone, 11½ x 39½ x ½-1 inches (29 x 100 x 1.5-2.5cm) with lettering one and a quarter inches (3.20cm) high (fig. 17). The inscription reads: *Aprili bene merenti qui vixit ann. XVIII, mens. VI, dieb. XII; dep. idus sept.* The two holes scooped out at the sides do not penetrate the stone.

The inscription was first scratched in lightly with a hard instrument, and the words IDVS SEPT can still be clearly distinguished in the last line. From their position, one can deduce that the first tracing was not intended—as is commonly thought today—as a model for the shape of the letters, but rather as a guide for a proper distribution of the words.

Shortly farther on, at the mouth of the second ground-level loculus on the left, we again see large pieces of a pagan stone, 14½ x 28½ and 14½ x 16 inches (37 x 73 and 37 x 40cm), of one named Elii. The words were very finely carved, but are now legible only in part. The stone had been twice reused for pagan burials, as is shown by the rear face. Approximately half of the lower part of another pagan stone, 9 x 14 inches (23 x 36cm), was used, with the lettering inwards, to close another loculus.

Facing this, and almost intact, is the large stone illustrated in figure 18. It measures 8½ x 65½ x 1 inches (22 x 167 x 2.5cm) and is in position in a tall loculus. The rubricated lettering is one and a half inches (3.5cm) high and reads: *M. Val(erio) Pudemtiano qui vixit annos n(umero) XX, me. n(umero) VI, d. X, qui deponitur die V idus iunias.*

In the next loculus there is a similar stone, 9 x 56 x 1 inches (23 x 143 x 3cm), with generously rubricated lettering one and a half to two inches (3.5-4.5cm) high. It is still in position, although broken into six pieces by the grave robbers (fig. 19). The inscription reads: *Victor Severe coiugi bene merenti fecit que vixit annos plus minus XXX; dep. XI kal. iunias.* Above this stone there is another closing the left-hand part of an adult's tomb (fig. 20). It measures 11½ x 19 x ½ inches (29 x 49 x 1.3cm), with much rubricated lettering one and a half inches (3.5cm) high. The inscription reads: *Bictor q(ui) visit ann. XXXIII mess. IIII, benemerito*(Constantine monogram) *defunctus id. sep.*

On the floor between the second and third ranks of loculi was half of a pagan stone 5½ x 14 inches (13.5 x 35cm), placed by one Trophimus. This seems to have been reused in the catacomb with the lettering turned inwards. We also found intact a fine Christian stone that had not been used in the normal way but had been built on to a stone or brick closure, probably in the centre of the loculus. (We found various examples of this method of closing loculi, which is quite common in Roman catacombs.) It is of cipolin marble, 5 x 15½ x 1½ inches (12.5 x 39 x 3.7cm), with rubricated lettering three-quarters of an inch (1.8cm) high (fig. 21). The inscription, roughly boxed in, reads: *Peregrino benemerenti qui vixit annos XXIII, mensis II, dies V; recessit de saeculo XVII kal. octobris, positus in pace.*

Eleven pieces gathered from the floor below the third rank of loculi were put together to reconstruct the stone illustrated in figure 22, nine inches (23.5cm) in height, 56½ inches (144cm) in length, and half an inch (1.5cm) thick. The lettering is one inch (2.5cm) high and reads: *Adventa III nonas iulias.* The holes after the barrel shape and before the letters AS are defects in the marble which had been filled with lime in ancient times.

The left-hand part of the stone in figure 23 was still in position on its high loculus between the third and fourth ranks. The other six pieces were among the dirt on the floor beneath. The stone measures 9½ x 45 x ½ inches (24 x 114 x 1.6cm) overall, and its rubricated lettering, one and a half inches (3.8cm) high, reads: *GIII idus octobres Tzodoto in pace.* It is the epitaph of a boy named Diodotus.

Here, too, close to the end of the first arm of the gallery, we found a fine pagan

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Figs 20-23: Loculi stones found in Gallery 6.

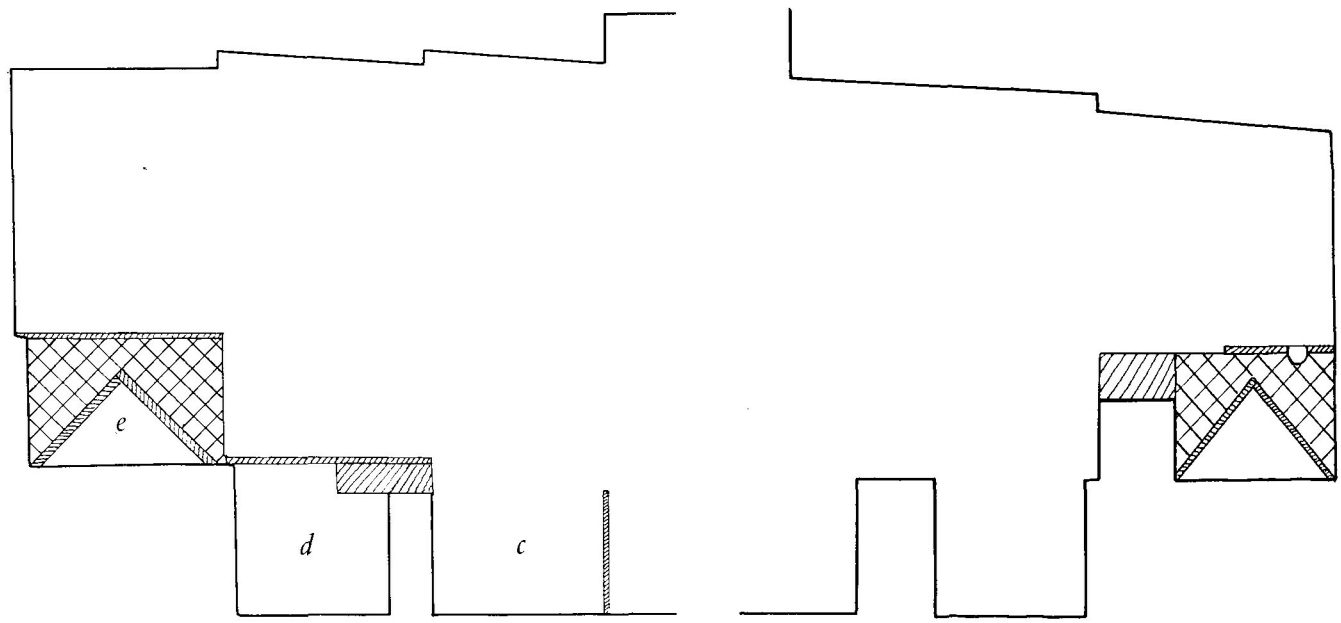


Fig. 24: Cross-section of the left-hand arcosolium unit cde of Hall I.

Fig. 25: Cross-section of the left-hand arcosolium of Cubiculum N.

stone broken into two pieces. Measuring 12 x 23½ inches (31 x 60cm), it had formerly been the front face of a pagan tomb above ground and had been reused with the lettering inwards to close one of the loculi in the catacomb. Farther on, in the second part of the gallery, there are only loculi closed with tiles or marble slabs without inscription. Many of these have fallen.

From the dirt on the floor we also recovered five little round-shaped, beaded oil lamps, Dressel type 30.

The large Gallery H leads gently downwards from Room G to central Hall I. The gallery is completely without burials. It is plastered overall and roofed with a barrel vault eight feet four inches (2.55 metres) from the floor at the start, rising to nine and a half feet (2.88 metres) at the end. The vault rests on a deep offset, three to four inches (7 to 10cm), in the walls. Some five feet (1.5 metres) before Hall I, the gallery narrows by 25 inches (63cm), and the roof drops by 17½ inches (45cm). This creates a doorway just over three feet (one metre) wide and eight feet (2.43 metres) high.

Hall I is a hexagonal chamber roofed with a six-celled vault. The cells tie into a central tondo, 13 feet (4 metres) above the floor. In this part of the catacomb the floor itself is approximately 58 feet (17.80 metres) below the reference point in the Via Dino Compagni. Hall I, which had been plastered and painted throughout, was badly damaged by the foundation work for the modern building above, as already mentioned. In each of the corners there is a pillar cut from the tufa, plastered and painted to simulate marble. At the entrance from Gallery H and at the exit to Room L, the pillars support archways. On the other four sides they support a semi-spherical vault. The vaulting cells rest on the arches and on the semi-spherical vaults.

Cubiculum *a*, to the left, was left unfinished and without plastering. It was never used for burials. It is on the same level as Hall I, roofed with a six-celled vault, the cells meeting in a central tondo, 11 feet (3.35 metres) from the floor.

Fig. 26: Looking along the catacomb from Hall I to Cubiculum O.

g. 27: The left-hand arcosolium of Cubiculum N, and, on the right, Cubiculum O.

Two steps lead up to the entrance to Cubiculum *b*, on the right, 25½ inches (65cm) higher than I. It is roofed with a cross vault, eight and a half feet (2.58 metres) high, plastered overall but without painted decoration. There is only one burial place, in the farther arcosolium, and this has not in fact been used.

The tombs associated with Hall I are to be found only in the two deep arcosolium units, including *c*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *g*, and *h*. These arcosolia are stepped, with screens, 23½-inch (60cm) high, at the entrance. They are likely to have been provided with little gates. In front of the right-hand unit there was a marble floor.

Figure 24 gives a section of the left-hand, western unit. The sill of the innermost

section, *e*, is decorated with a marble slab, 21½ inches (55cm) high and one and a half inches (3.5cm) deep, in the form of a sarcophagus front with a wavy decoration. A tablet, 15½ x 12 inches (39 x 31cm), in the centre of the slab is without an inscription. The masonry over the tomb below was covered by a thin marble slab, of which a fragment remains on the left-hand side. The front edge of sepulchre *d* was clad with a peperite slab 17½ inches (45cm) wide and 4½ inches (11cm) deep. The farthermost grave *h* in the arcosolium on the right was covered just like *d*, but was not as high. There is a fine piece of the upper marble slab preserved on the left-hand side. The nearest grave, *g*, was completely walled in, like *e*.

The plasterwork of the arch over the farthermost arcosolium *e* had been broken to emplace a slab, 43½ inches (110cm) long and six inches (15cm) high, from which to hang lamps, as occurred in arcosolium Oa. This slab has been removed, leaving only traces in the wall. There are, however, three pieces of a small column 36 inches (91cm) high and with a diameter ranging from four to three inches (10 to 8cm) in Hymettian marble. With a base and capital, this would have underpinned the slab at approximately 47 inches (120cm) above the edge of the arcosolium.

A pagan stone, 14 x 25 x 2 inches (36 x 64 x 5cm), had also been used, with the lettering inwards, to cover a burial. For another tomb a two-footed stone had been used. We found half of this, with Dressel number 1622, as already discovered in Cubiculum E.

An arched doorway, seven feet three inches (2.20 metres) high, leads from Hall I to Room L, which was not used for burials but acts as the vestibule to Cubiculum M. It is roofed with a barrel vault eight feet ten inches (2.70 metres) high. The entrance to Cubiculum M is decorated with two pillars cut from the tufa, which support the vaulted roof. They are plastered to resemble marble. The archway was closed by a marble screen, 23½ inches (60cm) high, which presumably had a two-barred gate in the middle.

Cubiculum M is no wider than Room L—it is, in fact, slightly narrower, which is most unusual. It is roofed with a barrel vault eight feet ten inches (2.70 metres) high and has two normal arcosolia for burials. The whole rear area has suffered severely from the pile emplacement, with two piles in the left-hand loculus and one at the edge of the right-hand loculus. The piles have detached large pieces of plastered rock and destroyed much of them.

A doorway, six feet four inches (1.94 metres) high with a lintel but no sign of a closing structure, leads into Cubiculum N, which is one of the most singular in the whole catacomb (fig. 123). It is square, with the four corners decorated by four columns, cut in the usual way from the living tufa but with the addition of special Ionic capitals in Greek marble (of which the largest two have been removed) and marble bases and socles. Each capital supports two dados which carry triangular pediments. Three large corbels support the base of the pediment. Above the tympana and the dados rises the cross vault, the four ribs ending in a central tondo 10 feet three inches (3.12 metres) high (fig. 27).

The sides are taken up by two deep arcosolia (figs. 123, 124, 127). Figure 25 shows the section of the left-hand one. It should be noted that, for the burial in the space at the back, the body had been first covered with crosswise brickwork on top of which was built up a mass of concrete. This was then faced with marble slabs, many of which remain. One of the slabs has a three and a half-inch (9cm) hole in which a glass carafe was secured with mortar. The front edge of the loculus was reinforced with a peperite bar, but this failed to keep out the vandals, seeking who knows what dreamed-of treasures as they smashed their way through. Two tiles removed by them from the tombs, Dressel numbers 754 and 1075, still lie within the cubiculum.

The passageway to Cubiculum O is through a large arch, five feet one and a half inches (1.58 metres) wide and seven feet three inches (2.20 metres) high (figs. 26, 27). This was closed by a marble screen, 23½ inches (60cm) high, inserted by breaking into the wall of Cubiculum N. There was probably a gate in the screen. We found important parts of the screen still in place, and many fragments smashed by sledgehammers were scattered throughout the room.

Cubiculum O is square, roofed with a barrel vault eight feet nine inches (2.70 metres) high (fig. 133). Two wide niches at the sides were for decoration, but loculi were then installed, one on the right and three on the left, breaking up the plasterwork and the decoration (figs. 134, 137). High up in the left-hand niche, beside the figure of the prophet, is a three-inch (7cm) graffito monogram of the name of Christ.

Our excavation involved only the one tomb in the rear arcosolium, *a*, clearly modelled on the Cubiculum C arcosolium shown in figure 12. We wish only to make the following comments.

The grave, which is entirely cut from the tufa, is 21½ inches (55cm) wide. It had been totally looted. It is faced with a bardiglio slab, 21½ inches (55cm) high, which had been the front of a sarcophagus. A space for an inscription had been prepared in the centre of the slab, but the inscription itself has now been completely erased. This part of the slab was flanked by two Corinthian pilasters, followed by two rectangles with strigils and closed by a Corinthian column at the corners. The left-hand part of the slab had been broken through by grave robbers. The grave itself had been covered by a heavy marble slab which we found had been removed and thrown down with other debris towards the right-hand loculus.

The step up to the arcosolium is 11 inches (28cm) high and had been faced with marble. An area of 33½ inches (85cm) of the floor in front of the arcosolium is also paved in marble. Brutally implanted in the arch is the marble slab which we have had occasion to mention in the description of Ca. This is the attic of a sarcophagus lid, 51 inches (130cm) long and seven inches (18cm) wide. The sculpted face is upwards. The first 23½ inches (60cm) from the left are blank. Then there are three seated men feasting at an S-shaped table, and beside this is a portrait of the dead man, backed by drapery. The lower face (fig. 133) bears the rusty remains of four iron hooks which had been plastered into the marble. These were to hold the lamps which burned in front of the tomb to the young girl portrayed at the top of the vault.

On the right, above the step, the wall of the large arch had been repaired in ancient times with lime and pieces of brick, breaking the original plasterwork. It is my belief that this repair was made necessary because the tufa had split.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION OF THE PAINTINGS

What struck us most, when this catacomb was first discovered, was not so much its imposing architecture, in itself so impressive, but the enormous number of paintings which decorated it, literally covering all the rooms and cubicula. In particular, proceeding from Room D to the end of the catacomb, one passes from one scene to another, as in a well-stocked art gallery (fig. 26). In fact, even to the casual visitor to the catacomb, the dominant impression is that of walking through the rooms of a fourth-century Christian picture gallery.

To the quantity of paintings has to be added the novelty and the truly artistic quality of many of these scenes. The comparatively few traditional topics of funerary paintings tend to be repeated in an offhand manner, without any real artistic value. The new topics, on the other hand, or those treated in a new manner, are much more numerous and are generally of a far superior quality, both in composition and execution.

These paintings completely cover all the cubicula and rooms or vestibules, with the exception of Cubicula 2a, A', Ia and Ib. As regards Ia, excavation there was never completed, and Ib, although finished and plastered, was never used as a burial chamber. More astonishing was the fact that Cubicula 2a and A', so near the entrance, were never decorated. All the more so as A' is situated directly opposite A, which is so richly decorated.

None of the galleries used for loculi burials (that is, 2, 3, 4, and 6) was painted, and neither was Entrance Hall 1 nor the stairway leading to the air shaft, although it was carefully plastered throughout. It may be that the original design was to cover it with a general decoration similar to that found in the large Gallery H.

All the paintings appear to have been applied with the fresco technique, that is, with mineral pigments mixed with pure water and applied while the plaster was still fresh. However, this was not always done carefully enough. For this, and other reasons dealt with later on, the present state of some of the paintings leaves much to be desired.

It may have been, in some cases, that the plaster was not mixed correctly or that, because of local conditions, it did not set properly, or it degenerated following water seepage. Here and there the plaster is so pasty and soft that it detaches from the rock face at a mere touch, and with it whatever fresco that still survives. It also appears that in some cases the colours were applied to a plaster surface that was either too weak or already too dry, so that they did not bond and become indelible. The result is that, in many places, the colours come away when touched with a damp finger.

It may also be that paintings which were already dry were subsequently generously retouched to define the contours of a scene and to revive the colours. It is obvious that this second coating of paint would long survive the dissolving action of the natural dampness of the catacomb, especially where water and mud penetrated in great quantity. As a result, many paintings have slipped, producing a mixture of the various colours and so losing the sharpness of shades and the precision of design, as if there had been a general coat of glazing. Where excessive damp was followed by rapid drying out, the surface of the plasterwork altered so as to produce a fine descaling which removed the colour. In other places, the damp has generated a dense layer of dark purple mould on the painted surface, as particularly observable in many cubicula in the Peter and Marcellinus catacomb. In that case, the paint cannot be cleaned, but at least it is solid and intact

under its dark covering. In the Via Latina catacomb, however, it is very difficult to clean the walls of mud and other incrustations that have formed on the paintings, for fear of removing the colours as well, or of making them slip farther. These difficulties were particularly acute in Cubicula A, B and C, which were flooded by muddy water, and in Room L and Cubiculum M, which were filled with wet cement and covered with splashes of mud during the drilling and emplacement of the foundation piles for the modern building above.

In the large Gallery H there has been even greater damage caused by the infiltration of water from the topsoil. As the water contains lime, it has produced incrustations on the painted surface, firstly by covering it with a white film which subsequently, owing to the difference in tension, has caused the fine crust of the plaster to crack, disintegrating the paint as well. In many other instances, the calcareous incrustations are not as damaging as here, but they have covered the colours of the paintings with a fine film.

All the paintings, as is usual in catacombs, were executed on a double layer of plaster. First of all a strong mixture of lime and pozzolan was applied directly on to the rock face. Then a thin layer of between one and three millimetres of plaster or white stucco was applied, roughly smoothed, and finally the surface was painted. It is obvious that the stability of the painting depends upon the plasterwork underneath.

Our work on the paintings has been limited and cautious. First we used plaster to reattach the edges of those sections of fresco which had cracked and were at risk of coming away from the rock face. We then proceeded to clean the earth and mud off the painted surfaces as delicately as possible, using mechanical tools only. Where this was not enough, and where the state of preservation of the paintings allowed us to, we washed them with a fine spray, thus almost totally removing the mud and earth. Some of the paintings which were covered by a calcareous film were also washed with a solution of water and hydrochloric acid, with satisfactory and permanent results.

This introductory account was thought necessary so that the state of the paintings will be understood when we come to describe them in detail. We should add, so as not to repeat it every time, that each painting is framed first by a fine red line, and, at a little distance from it, by a second thicker one, like a band, also red, as can be seen in many of the illustrations. An exception to this are the panels painted to resemble marble, which adorn the lower part of many walls and which are enclosed by a single red line, approximately half an inch (one cm) wide. The inside band is often connected to the outer one by a series of small strokes, representing palmettes, usually placed on the upper part of the scene.

The colours employed are mainly red, almost always in dark, earthy shades, rarely in light, bright shades. From red, the colour passes to brown with purple shading, rarely becoming black. The lighter shades of red are often ochre or orange, and sometimes even yellow in lighter places. In general, the dominant colours are reddish and brick red, in their various shades.

Green and dark green are also much used for plants and grasses, and pale blue, especially for clothes in shade, for clouds and architectural backgrounds. Little use is made of simple pale grey, although *The angel standing in Balaam's way* (fig. 55) is a notable example, and indigo and white are employed even less. It is impossible to define the colours of the many multicoloured birds, always in the shade, and always in rather dark tones.

The exact measurements of the finer inner framing line of the painted scenes are given in metric sizes within brackets, with the size in inches or feet to the nearest half inch. Height is given before width. Where a panel is not perfectly rectangular, an average dimension is given, or specific mention is made. When reference is made to the right-hand or left-hand, with no other specification, this is intended as being from the observer's point of view.

CUBICULUM A

Entrance – On the left-hand lower wall, in a panel 19 x 30½ inches (48 x 77cm), is a painting of the sea monster which usually appears in scenes with Jonah. Dark green in colour, here it is on its own. It stretches its tail upwards to the right, and opens its mouth wide to the left, accentuating the curve of its long neck.

Above it, in a panel 49 x 31½ inches (125 x 80cm), I thought I could make out the outline of a person sitting on an outcrop, facing right. But the painting, done only in shades of red, is very faded as well as slightly damaged above the head. We have therefore not illustrated it here.

The right-hand wall of the entrance was also

Fig. 28: The Adoration of the Magi.

completely painted, but it is now badly damaged by cracks in the plasterwork, and it is possible to see only traces of red here and there, without being able to discern a panel, let alone a scene within it. Above, on the vault of the entrance, there is a single flower with eight petals of a greenish colour.

Vault – In the centre is an octagon, 25 inches (63cm) wide, enclosed by three bands of red of varying widths, making a total width of 38 inches (97cm). Within the octagon is a painting of *The Good Shepherd*, in sleeveless tunic, dressed in the manner characteristic of these figures. With his left hand he holds to his breast the legs of the lamb he carries on his shoulders (its head on his right shoulder), and he has his right arm extended, holding panpipes. At his feet are two lambs facing away from him, but with their heads turned back to look at him. A piece of the octagon is missing on the left, having fallen with the plaster and removed the outline band. The figures are intact, but we have not reproduced the painting here because of its very poor condition, due both to white incrustations and to darkening caused by the dampness which affected the whole vault. It was painted in various shades of red and orange, like all the other paintings in the vault.

On the four main sides of the octagon (left and right, front and rear) are four panels each with a different scene. The left-hand one has completely disappeared with the plasterwork; the right-hand one, 23½ x 35½ inches (60 x 90cm), shows *The Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 28), according to Matthew 2:11. Mary is seated in a chair, the back of which is clearly visible. Her head is uncovered and she wears a tunic with wide sleeves decorated with transverse bands. Her right hand is stretched towards the first of the kings. They are standing still and upright, as if they have just arrived, wearing knee-length tunics and cloaks. They hold the usual gifts in their hands. The third king carries grains of incense, the middle one the bottle of myrrh; the painting of the first king is badly damaged. The head of the Infant Jesus, in the arms of the Virgin Mary, can be seen clearly and is particularly fine.

Fig. 29: Seated veiled woman.

About one-third of the plasterwork of the front scene, 23 x 21 inches (59 x 53cm), has fallen on the right-hand side. Probably it contained a portrait of Job, with his wife handing him bread (Job 2:7-10). On the left can be seen a seated man, his legs towards us and his head facing to the right. He must be scantily dressed, as he appears to be naked, at least from the knees down. His wife probably stood on the right, but here the paint has in part fallen with the plasterwork and in part totally disappeared.

In the rear panel, 21 x 26½ inches (53 x 67cm), is a rather mysterious scene (fig. 29). On the right, a veiled woman is seated in a chair, the contours of which can be made out. Her left hand is placed on the armrest, her right hand is raised and extended. In front of her is the standing figure of a man who seems to hold his left hand raised, grasping a stick, while his right is extended towards the woman. At first we thought this may have represented *The Annunciation*, but we soon realized that behind the first man there appeared to be another one who would have occupied the space up to the left-hand edge of the panel. The Reverend P. Fasola has drawn our attention to *The meeting of Judah and his shepherd with Tamar* (Genesis 38:12-18), and this may be a good suggestion, taking into account that the same Old Testament episode is found in the mosaics of San Aquilino in Milan.[1] Unfortunately, this painting is also severely damaged, and the white incrustations and the general darkening of the plasterwork have caused the colours to disappear almost completely.

In the spaces between the scenes described above were four plaques with handles, nine and a half inches (24cm) square (externally 12½ inches [32cm]), each containing the stylized head of a man, as in a portrait of a purely ornamental character. The two left-hand plaques fell with the plasterwork. Above and below the plaques, among spirals of green leaves, there is an unidentifiable object (possibly a vase of flowers or a crowned herma, or head of Hermes), eight inches (20cm) high and red in colour. The uppermost one is between two lambs, their heads turned backwards towards it.

Entrance wall – To the left of the entrance is an upper panel, 31½ x 23½ inches (80 x 60cm), with a scene of *The fall of Adam and Eve* (Genesis 3), in the usual manner (fig. 30). The figures are looking at each other and cover themselves with their left hands only. Adam stretches out his right hand towards Eve, as though accusing her. She draws hers back, in a gesture of denial. The colours include many shades of brown. The tree and the snake are dark green. The same composition appears in the rear panel of Cubiculum C*a* (figs. 65, 71). Below the above scene is a goat kid jumping towards the left, in a panel measuring 37½ x 30 inches (95 x 76cm). It is very badly faded and damaged, and is not illustrated.

Fig. 30: The fall of Adam and Eve.

Fig. 31: Daniel in the lions' den.

Fig. 32: The drunkenness of Noah.

To the upper right of the entrance is a painting showing *Daniel in the lions' den* (fig. 31), 33½ x 26 inches (85 x 66cm), in the attitude described in the Book of Daniel 6:16-22 and 14:30-39. The lions are represented on their hind legs, attacking him. There are various shades of reddish brown.

Below this scene is another panel, 35½ x 32½ inches (90 x 83cm), representing *The drunkenness of Noah* (fig. 32), according to Genesis 9:20-21. Unfortunately, the colours, which vary from red to yellow, are badly faded, and some of the details are difficult to discern. The patriarch is shown wearing a tunic and seated on a greenish seat. He leans his left elbow on an upright barrel, and in his hand is a small amphora. His right hand is extended, and in it he holds a wide, almost hemispherical cup. To the left of the painting is a large conically shaped vase with a wide handle, which, because of false perspective, appears to be suspended in a void. Above, in the centre, are two garlands.

Left-hand wall (fig. 36) – Above and to the left is a panel, 30 x 19½ inches (76 x 50cm), showing *Jonah cast into the sea* (fig. 34), according to The Book of Jonah 1:11 and 2:1. The ship's spars and sails have almost disappeared, as well as the upper part of the three sailors who throw the prophet into the sea and the head of the monster that swallows him. All this is depicted in a greenish shade, while the rest is in various tones of red. It appears that the water was not represented.

On the opposite side, to the right, is *Jonah disgorged by the monster* (Jonah 2:11) in a panel 27½ x 21½ inches (70 x 55cm). The prophet is being projected upwards, arms extended forward and head backward. The colours are a faded red and dark green for the monster. Here, too, there is no representation of water. The symbols used in these two scenes of Jonah differ in their treatment in Cubiculum C (figs 72, 73).

Between the two panels and above the opening to the arcosolium, is a scene, 7-10 x 34 inches (18-25 x 86cm), showing a cup on a stem among spirals of greenery. These are a dark green colour, the remaining being a faded red.

To the left and the right of the arcosolium, below the scenes with Jonah, is a panel, 16 inches square (40cm), of a large vase full of flowers or fruit in the middle of greenery. The whole painting is in dark green.

Below the arcosolium, the wall is divided into two rectangular areas. On the centre-left, measuring

18½ x 54½ inches (46.5 x 139cm), is a green herma crowned with flowers, and opposite, two large birds that appear to be held with a garland by two genii. To the left is a green stem with flowers surmounted by a cup. The right-hand rectangle, 18½ x 49 inches (46.5 x 124cm), shows a bird in front of a majestic peacock, set in a countryside rich in plants and trees. The birds are painted in green, red and brown.

Rear wall – Above and around the curve of the arcosolium is a representation, 27 inches (68cm high) in the centre and 110 inches (280cm) wide, of *Christ among the apostles* (fig. 33). They are all seated, Christ on a chair of which the contours can be seen fairly clearly, the apostles on a covered bench of which the two ends and the high back can be made out well. The upper part of the last apostle to the right has disappeared with the plasterwork. With their right hands, they all indicate that they are talking, and with their left they appear to hold books to their chests. At the feet of Christ and to his right is a basket full of scrolls. The colours include various shades of red and yellow, particularly faded in the centre of the painting. At each side of the arcosolium, below the last apostle, is a panel, 12 x 15½ inches (31 x 39cm), representing a large stylized flower with eight petals of a greenish colour.

Below, under the opening to the arcosolium, the

Fig. 34: Jonah cast into the sea.

Fig. 33: Christ among the apostles.

wall is divided into two rectangular panels, 18½ x 50½ inches (47 x 128cm) and 18½ x 52 inches (47 x 132cm). In the centre of each is painted in green a cup above a stem with leaves, surrounded by sprays, possibly representing a fountain. On the sides, in the left-hand panel, are two cupids with red and green wings in a country setting, while in the right-hand one are two brown lambs walking outwards, their heads turned backwards and facing the centre. Red festoons hang from the top. The colours are very faded.

Right-hand wall – Above, on the left, is *Jonah angry* (fig. 35), in a panel 32 x 19½ inches (81 x 50cm), and to the right is *Jonah resting* (fig. 37), seated rather than lying under a pergola (Jonah 4:5-11) in a panel 34 x 23½ inches (87 x 60cm). In the former he supports his chin on his right hand, in the latter he has as a couch a rocky outcrop of greenish colour with red outlines. The pergola is also green, with small gourds hanging from it, but the leaves are barely visible as the colours are badly damaged.

Between the two scenes, at the top, is a panel, 8 x 30½ inches (20 x 78cm), with a red cup above a flowering stem in the midst of vegetation with green spirals. Below, to the right and left, are scenes, 16

Fig. 37: Jonah resting.

Left, Fig. 35: Jonah angry.
Below, Fig. 36: The left-hand wall and arcosolium of Cubiculum A, showing Isaac's meal *in the lunette.*

inches (40cm) square, with vases of flowers in the midst of vegetation and garlands, all painted in a greenish shade, as on the left-hand wall.[2]

Below again, against the plinth of the arcosolium, the space is divided into two rectangular panels, 17½ x 48 inches (44 x 122) and 17½ x 54 (44 x 137cm). In the left-hand one is a green country scene with three green stands with red flowers. Two large green and red birds face each other on the middle stand. In the right-hand one is a vase above a flowered stem with two gryphons facing it, all in dark green.

Left-hand arcosolium (figs. 36, 150) – The lunette is completely taken up by a scene, 39½ x 65½ inches (100 x 166cm), illustrating *Isaac's meal* (Genesis 27:1-22). The colours are various shades of red and yellow with touches of pale blue in the decorations of the clothes and in the folds of the mattress, all very faded and damaged by water. A loculus has destroyed the lower part. Isaac is lying on a four-legged couch with an S-shaped back. He wears a tunic and cloak. From the left, Jacob approaches, also wearing a tunic, holding a round dish of food in both hands. Rebecca pushes him forward, a youthful figure dressed in a tunic with brown borders. It looks as though her hair is gathered in a bonnet. To the right of the couch is a standing figure, very faded, wearing a long tunic and looking towards the centre of the scene. We would expect here to have the figure of Esau, going to or coming back from hunting venison. It is a new scene in funerary art, and is found again in Cubiculum B (fig. 54).

In the arch, to the lower left and right, are two panels, 16 x 45½ inches (40 x 116cm). In the left-hand one are two large birds, in green and red, facing a chalice full of flowers and fruit. In the other panel are two large wading birds in green. Garlands hang from above. The remainder of the underside of the arch has two tall vases with ribbons, resting on the panels, and from them emerge branches in red and green which meet at the top of the arch in a white tondo that looks like a ribbon. There are green flowers here and there. The painting is badly damaged and faded.

Rear arcosolium – In the lunette is a scene (fig. 38), 36½ x 69½ inches (93 x 176cm), representing *Susanna and the elders*, according to The History of Susanna in the Apocrypha. The painting has been half-destroyed by a large loculus. Below the loculus are the feet of the three figures; above are the heads, Susanna veiled, the two elders beardless and

Fig. 38: Susanna and the elders.

Fig. 39: Moses drawing water from the rock.
Fig. 40: The Sermon on the Mount.

Fig. 41: The three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.

wearing tunics. The green trees visible at the two sides of the composition and the angry look on the faces of the men, especially of the one on the right, preclude a scene of *introductio*. The figures' hands cannot be seen.

To the right and the left of the lower part of the arch are two scenes, 19 x 44 inches (48 x 112cm). They show a cup on top of a stem with leaves, possibly a fantastic fountain, towards which a sheep and a goat are walking in a marshy landscape. The animals are dark red, the rest is green. In the left-hand scene, the cup is red and one of the animals seems to have a beak. In the remainder of the arch some climbing plants with tendrils, all in green, can barely be distinguished.

Right-hand arcosolium – In the lunette is a pastoral scene, 41½ x 72 inches (106 x 183cm), ruined by two secondary loculi. At the sides two lambs, looking towards the centre, can just be made out, then two tall green canes with leaves. Unfortunately there is nothing to be seen in the middle.

On the lower right-hand side of the arch is a representation (fig. 39), 34 x 32½ inches (87 x 83 cm), of *Moses drawing water from the rock*, according to Exodus 17:5-6. Moses has a short beard and thick hair. An Israelite bends to collect the water that spurts in red lines; another is behind him, pointing with his right hand. They are bare-headed, dressed in tunics and mantles flowing out behind them. The shadows of the rocks are in green lines. This subject also appears in Cubiculum C (fig. 63).

Below and to the left is a panel (fig. 40), 31½ x 47 inches (83 x 120cm), showing *The Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5:1-12). Christ is on the right, standing on a brown rock, his arm outstretched as he speaks. Twelve disciples can be seen below; a subsequent burial has destroyed their feet. The colours include various shades of red, but the clothes of the disciples standing in the shade are greenish. This is a new scene in funerary art.

The remainder of the underside of the arch (fig. 41), 32½ x 49 inches (83 x 125cm), is taken up by the scene of *The three Hebrews in the fiery furnace* in Babylon (Daniel 3:19-23 and 3:46). The colours have almost completely disappeared, so that while the two officials who tend the fire can still be seen fairly well, the three furnace mouths and above them the

three young Hebrews, in an attitude of supplication, can barely be made out. The clothes are green.

CUBICULUM B

In the doorway, below and to the right, is a panel, 39½ x 35½ inches (100 x 90cm), with green canes at the sides and, in the middle, what looks like a red chalice on a square stand. Above it, in a panel 31½ x 34½ (80 x 88cm), are green plants and in the middle two cupids at play, naked and winged. A corner of their cloaks hangs from their shoulders. The left-hand side is similarly decorated, but two loculi have badly damaged the lower painting. All the surface plaster of the arch has fallen.

Vault – Part of the plasterwork has completely disappeared. What is left has suffered from general darkening and white spots caused by the break-up of the surface layer. The painted surface is divided by the ribs and the central tondo into four trapezoidal panels of similar size.

The front one, 25 x 27½ inches (64 x 70cm), has a scene showing *Rahab saving the Israelite spies* (fig. 42), according to Joshua 2:15. Rahab is leaning out of a window, and the two Israelites are being lowered down a rope into a basket. About half the left-hand side of the panel has disintegrated because of a fall of the plasterwork. On the right remains a tree, indicating a landscape. The same scene is also represented on the walls of Santa Maria Maggiore, but in a very different way.[3]

Fig. 42: Rahab saving the Israelite spies.

The rear panel, of the same size, has lost half its right side. What remains is partly darkened and partly flaking. Barely discernable are, on the left, a woman standing and, on the right, a man holding her hand. Because of its bad condition, it is not illustrated here.

In the left-hand panel, 23½ x 27½ inches (60 x 70cm), is *Absalom hanged from the oak tree* (2 Samuel 18:9). He wears a tunic and holds a star-shaped shield with a boss in his left hand. On the right, his mule is running away, its saddle empty. The oak tree is dark green; the tree to the right and everything else is of a reddish colour. This is a new scene in funerary art.

In the right-hand panel, of the same size, was painted *Samson slaying the lion* (Judges 14:5-9). The plasterwork has almost completely fallen. On what has been preserved can be seen, to the left, Samson's feet, bending towards the beast, and, to the right, the hind legs and the tail of the beast attacking him. The same scene, complete, can be seen in Room L (fig. 114). Here, the dead lion with the bees issuing from its mouth does not appear to have been depicted. This is a new scene in funerary art.

Beside each of the above panels, to the left and the right of the rib, is a triangle, 24½ x 24½ inches (62 x 62cm), in which is painted a multicoloured bird in flight.

Entrance wall – To the right of the entrance and above is a painting, 33½ x 26½ inches (85 x 67cm), depicting *Phinehas who has stabbed Zimri and Cozbi* (fig. 43), according to the Book of Numbers 25:7-15 and rabbinical legends on this episode.[4] Phinehas is dressed as a Roman officer, with greaves, cuirass, cloak and tunic. In his left hand, at the height of his lower ribs, he holds a spear which rests against his left shoulder, continues upwards and diagonally past his head, spearing two horizontal bodies (the first one with its right arm dangling). Below and to the left is the bed, red with blood, from where Phinehas has thrust the pair through. The bodies hoisted on his spear, he carries them outside to show the Israelites their punishment. This is a new scene in funerary art.

Fig. 43: Phinehas who has stabbed Zimri and Cozbi.

Below this is another painting, 41½ x 26½ inches (105 x 67cm), of a fountain. The water gushes high from a vase placed on a square base. Two tall palm trees on either side bend their branches towards it, green with red fruit. The fountain is yellow and dark red, with touches of white on the yellow.

On the opposite side, to the left of the entrance, is a representation of *Tobias with the fish* (Apocrypha: Tobit 6:2-4) in a panel measuring 34 x 18 inches (87 x 46cm). Tobias is shown as a young man with a hat on his head, standing and facing to the left. In his right hand he is holding a large fish by its head, while in his left hand he holds a basket. He is naked, with only a loincloth around his hips, but it appears that a corner of a cloak hangs from his left shoulder. The surface of the wall has mostly flaked and cracked; the colours, in various shades of red, are faded. Below this scene is a similar fountain to that on the left.

The pediment above the architrave was also painted, like the other walls, but the plasterwork has disappeared.

Left and right-hand walls – The four columns at the corners are painted all over to resemble red breccia marble (fig. 44).

Above, on the pediments, are triangular panels, circa 12 x 51 inches (30 x 130cm), featuring a large bird in a landscape, red in colour.

The faces of the corbels, 12 x 8 inches (30 x 20cm), are painted with rough red palmettes which have almost completely flaked away. The left one on the right-hand wall, however, had scrolls of applied stucco. These also decorated the side faces of each corbel. Between the corbels are panels, 14 x 16½ inches (36 x 42cm), showing a large bird in a landscape, red in colour.

In the top corners on each wall are two figurines representing Victory, holding a crown in the right hand and ample flowing veils in the left. The figurines have pale blue wings, like butterflies, and tunics held tight at the waist, with wide flounces (figure 45 shows the one in the south corner, 14 inches [36cm] high). From the top hangs a garland.

Under each figurine, near the openings to the

Fig. 44: The left-hand wall and arcosolium of Cubiculum B, showing Jacob bringing the children of Israel into Egypt.

Right, Fig. 45: Figurine of Victory.

Fig. 46: Looking towards Cubiculum C from Cubiculum B.

arcosolia, are palm trees, full of fruit, in panels circa 35½ x 12 inches (90 x 30cm).

There are rectangular painted panels on the plinths under the openings to the arcosolia. The right-hand panel, 17 x 78½ inches (43 x 200cm), shows two seated bovines. Everywhere are green trees (the middle part of the wall has been dismantled by treasure seekers). The scene on the left-hand plinth, 20½ x 78½ inches (52 x 200cm), shows three lambs and a goat against a country background; in the middle is a bucket beside a green tree.

The decoration on the end wall, which leads into Cubiculum C, is the same (fig. 46). Unfortunately, the corbel in the middle has fallen, taking with it part of the adjacent panels. On the tympanum, the surface has largely flaked away, and the remains of a scene that it is difficult to interpret, possibly *Noah in his ark*, can barely be seen.

Right-hand arcosolium (fig. 47) – In the first section *c* arch, below and to the right, is a panel (fig. 48), 33 x 39½ inches (84 x 100cm), of *Jacob's ladder* (Genesis 28:10-13). A bearded Jacob lies on a mound of stones, open-eyed. The countryside is shown by a number of trees all around him. The angels are young, beardless men, in tunics and cloaks. God, at the top of the ladder, is missing. New scene in funerary art.

Above this panel is a band, five inches (13cm) wide, of stylized flowers, then, in a panel 38 x 37 inches (96 x 94cm), *The vision at Mamre* (fig. 49), the story of Abraham's meeting with the angels (Genesis 18:1-8). Abraham is represented as being old, he is out in the open, as shown by trees, and his tent cannot be seen; next to him is the *vitulus optimus*. The three guests are slightly higher up, as if on a ledge, outlined in green, and are depicted as normal men in tunics, mantles and sandals. The colours are yellow and ochre; the trees are green. New scene in funerary art.

Below, to the left, a panel (fig. 50), 30½ x 38½ inches (77 x 98cm), shows Jacob blessing Ephraim

Fig. 47: The right-hand wall and arcosolium of Cubiculum B, showing The chariot of fire *in the lunette.*

Fig. 48: Jacob's ladder.

Fig. 49: The vision at Mamre.

Fig. 50: The blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh.

and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph (Genesis 48). Jacob is an old bearded man, in tunic and mantle as in *The vision at Mamre* (fig. 49). He lies on a couch in the open countryside, represented by various trees, and crosses his arms over the heads of his grandsons, who are talking. The colours are various shades of red and yellow. New scene in funerary art.

Immediately above this is a representation of *Joseph's dream* (fig. 51), 36 x 41½ inches (92 x 106 cm), according to the Book of Genesis 37:5-10. At the bottom, left and right, Joseph sleeps on his bed, his eyes wide open, in the countryside (there are green trees around him). Above and to the right are six yellow sheaves of corn lying on the ground and three upright ones, and to the left the face of the sun projecting its rays and that of a three-quarter moon facing to the left with a crescent moon on her head (very dark, difficult to see), above green clouds. New scenes in funerary art.

In inner section *d* (fig. 52), the plinth of the burial has a panel, 16 x 67 inches (40 x 170 cm), on which is painted a country landscape with flowers and two

Fig. 51: Joseph's Dream.

large birds (red, green and yellow) facing a vase of greenery. The border around the opening to the arcosolium, seven inches (18cm) wide, is decorated with geometric motifs.

The lunette consists of a panel, 30½ x 65 inches (78 x 165cm), of *The chariot of fire*, according to 2 Kings 2:9-14. The scene takes place in a country landscape with trees to the right, shrubs, a pair of oxen ploughing, and a farmer sitting on a rock near his plough. To the extreme left the River Jordan gushes from a rocky cavern from the top of which grows a red, twisted tree. Elisha is old, although not bald, dressed in the "hairy" mantle of the prophets. Elijah, in tunic and pallium, throws him his prophet's mantle with his left hand, while with his right hand he holds the chariot reins. The clouds in the sky, the plants and the cave are a greenish blue, while the rest is in various tones of red.

To left and right within the arch are birds in the countryside in panels 13 x 42 inches (33 x 107cm). The vegetation is green, the birds green, brown and yellow.

Above and to the right, in a panel 32½ x 42 inches (83 x 107cm), is a scene illustrating *Isaac's meal* (fig. 54). The painting shows a country landscape with trees and green grasses. Isaac lies on his couch; to the left, Jacob, dressed in tunic and cloak, has caught a lively goat kid; to the right is Esau, dressed in a short tunic, shoulder mantle and greaves, on his way to the hunt, carrying bow and stick (Genesis 27:1-22). The iconography is very different from the painting of the same scene in Cubiculum A (figs. 36, 150).

Opposite and to the left, measuring 34½ x 42 inches (88 x 107cm), is a panel (fig. 55) showing *The angel standing in Balaam's way* (Numbers 22:21-23). We are in open countryside with trees and tall green grasses. Balaam raises his staff and smites the donkey, the angel raises his sword; both figures have a beard and a moustache, and are coloured brown and faded red. The same scene reappears in Cubiculum F (fig. 82); and while it is new in funerary painting it had previously appeared in sculpture.[5]

Fig. 52: Section d of the right-hand arcosolium of Cubiculum B, with The chariot of fire *and two birds.*

Left-hand arcosolium – In the arch of first section *a*, above and to the right, is a panel (fig. 53), 40 x 39 inches (102 x 99cm), showing *The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden* (Genesis 3:21-23). Particularly noteworthy are the tall trees of the garden, in dark green, yellow and red. God is represented as an old bearded man; with his right hand he pushes Adam and Eve away (touching Eve on her shoulder), through a doorway, *ad opus quadratum*, "towards hard work." Adam and Eve are already in *tunicis pelliceis,* "coat of skins". New scene in funerary art.

Below this scene is another (fig. 56) showing *Adam and Eve in melancholy pose and Cain and Abel with their offerings to God* (Genesis 4:3-4). The panel measures 30 x 40½ inches (76 x 103cm). The landscape is a country one, with grasses and shrubs above. Adam and Eve, dressed as before and indicating suffering (right hand to the chin), are seated on a rocky knoll, with lower contours thickly drawn, as if to represent a serpent. Cain carries a sheaf of corn (he is in a short tunic with a cloak hanging from his left shoulder). Abel carries a lamb and is dressed in tunic and mantle. They both look as though they are walking towards Adam and Eve. New scene in funerary art, although the latter part resembles scenes found on sarcophagi.

Fig. 54: Isaac's meal.
Fig. 55: The angel standing in Balaam's way.

Fig. 53: The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden.

Fig. 56: Adam and Eve in melancholy pose and Cain and Abel with their offerings.
Fig. 57: The finding of Moses.

Fig. 58: Joseph talking with his brothers in Egypt.

Fig. 60: Two peacocks.

On the lower left-hand side of the arch is a representation of *The finding of Moses* (Exodus 2:1-6) in a panel (fig. 57) measuring 30½ x 35 inches (78 x 89cm). To the left, hidden in the reeds, is the large figure of Moses' sister, completely hidden in her mantle. Pharaoh's daughter, dressed in an embroidered tunic, precedes two maidservants clothed in dalmatics. At her feet, the child is hidden in a sort of cradle at the waterside. The right-hand and lower parts of the painting are damaged by dark stains caused by damp. New scene in funerary art.

Above the painting of the infant Moses is a panel (fig. 58), 36½ x 35½ inches (93 x 90cm). To the left, in the midst of a landscape of brown palm trees with yellow and red leaves, a beardless youth sits on a podium. With his right hand he indicates that he is talking. In front of him, slightly lower and of a smaller size, are five youths dressed in loose tunics and long mantles. They are all talking, their right hands extended forward. I believe this to be *Joseph talking with his brothers in Egypt* (Genesis 42:6-8), a new scene in funerary art. On the back of the chair what appears to be a goblet is a mark caused by damp. The colours vary from deep red to orange.

In the inner section *b* of the arcosolium, in the lunette, is *Jacob bringing the children of Israel into Egypt* (Genesis 46:5-27) in a panel (fig. 59) 31½ x 66 inches (80 x 168cm). Three two-wheeled carts are drawn by oxen; the drivers hold sticks in their right hands. In the middle cart, the patriarch Jacob stands between two sons, holding the reins in his left hand and indicating with his right that he is speaking. The seven individuals on the three carts symbolize the seventy who entered Egypt, in the same way as, below, the three foxes stand for the three hundred that Samson sent into the standing corn of the Philistines. To the right is a walled Egyptian city with a gateway; in front flows the River Nile, full of large fish. The colours include various shades of red. The bank of the Nile is yellow, and there is a little green in the vegetation and on the walls in shadow. New scene in funerary art.[6]

In the arch, on the bottom left, a panel (fig. 60), 15 x 40½ inches (38 x 103cm), shows two magnificent peacocks of various colours facing each other in a landscape full of red flowers and green vegetation.

Above the peacocks, *Samson driving three hundred foxes into the fields of the Philistines* (Judges 15:4-5) is depicted in a panel (fig. 61) 32½ x 40 inches (82 x 101cm). The hero is a bearded man, in tunic and mantle, chasing the foxes with a stick. The field is represented by a green hut of reeds on the right and

Fig. 59: Jacob bringing the children of Israel into Egypt.

Fig. 61: Samson drives three hundred foxes into the fields of the Philistines.

by a tree, now badly faded. The dark shadows of the three animals, representing three hundred, are noteworthy. The colours are yellow and red, in various shades. New scene in funerary art.

Below and on the right are the same peacocks as on the left (fig. 60), in a panel 16 x 45½ inches (40 x 116cm). Above is represented *Lot fleeing from Sodom* (Genesis 19:15-26) in a painting (fig. 62) 33½ x 45½ inches (85 x 115cm). On the left-hand side Lot, shown as an old bearded man dressed in tunic and mantle, is running away while holding the hands of his daughters, who are wearing dalmatics. Above, to the left, is a green rock and in the middle trees and shrubs in yellow and red. To the right, flames are seen issuing from the walls of Sodom. In front of the city is his wife, who has turned into a pillar of salt, a small figure turned slightly to the right, in a dalmatic robe. Her right hand makes a gesture of disappointment. The colours are various shades of red and yellow. New scene in funerary painting but not sculpture.[7]

CUBICULUM C

From the architectural point of view this is something of a continuation of the Cubiculum B. Because, however, of the importance of its paintings, we have decided to describe them separately, although they constitute almost a natural progression from those in B. There the Old Testament dominates completely; here the New Testament plays an important role. No single scene is repeated.

Entrance arch – On the right-hand wall (fig. 63) is *Moses drawing water from the rock* (Exodus 17:5-6), the same subject as already seen in Cubiculum A (fig. 39). Here, in a panel 32 x 18½ inches (81 x 47cm), it is shown in the usual manner. The colours are green and red, with some brown lines.

On the left-hand wall, in a panel (fig. 64) 32½ x 15½ inches (82 x 39 cm), is a youth in tunic and mantle, holding in his right hand a scroll, which he rests on his hip. The colours are as above.

Fig. 62: Lot fleeing from Sodom.
Fig. 63: Moses drawing water from the rock.

Fig. 64: Youth in tunic and mantle.

Beneath this scene is painted a fountain from which pale blue water gushes high from a large red basin, tumbling over its rim (fig. 65). The panel measures 22½ x 15½ inches (57 x 39cm). The same scene is painted on the right, below the figure of Moses (fig.63), in a panel 20 x 18½ inches (51 x 47cm), the only difference being that here the basin is two-handled and no water falls from its rim.

Above are two panels 16 inches (41cm) wide (their height cannot be determined as the underarch is damaged at the top). These show a pair of *putti* with green wings, their mantles flying across them. The *putto* on the right holds a basket full of flowers on his left arm, while the one on the left carries the basket with both hands. The colours are various shades of red and yellow, with vegetation in green, pale blue and red.

Vault – In the centre, in a panel 30 x 32½ inches (76 x 83cm), is *Christ teaching in his chair*. On his left, he holds open a yellow book placed on a stool, while on his right, on the ground, is a basket full of grey scrolls, the lid placed against a chest. The figure of Christ has been almost destroyed by a vertical crack and fall of the plasterwork. Clearly seen is his right hand, held high as if talking, and his knees, wide apart; his head is completely lost. The colours of the chair and Christ's clothes are green and grey.

All around is a border 12 inches (30cm) wide. In the middle of each side of the square is a peacock showing off its plumage within an encircling garland of flowers with spirals. At the corners, a naked genie with a band on his head and wings stretched upwards, pulls at garlands of flowers from the right and from the left which are held in the beak of a large, multicoloured bird in flight. The colours are yellow, red, brown, green and pale blue.

Right-hand niche – On the back wall is *The crossing of the Red Sea* (Exodus 14:15-31) in a panel (fig. 66) 42 x 53 inches (107 x 134cm). The Egyptians (there are 16 of them) are all on horseback, dressed like Roman soldiers, armed with shields and spears, and with helmets on their heads. In front is Pharaoh's chariot with his shield bearer (only three horses can be seen) already fallen into the sea, represented by horizontal greenish lines.[8] Moses extends his wand over the waters. He wears a tunic, cloak and sandals, while the crowd of Israelites (28 can be counted) are barefoot and wearing only short tunics. The Egyptian army continues, with a further 16 soldiers, on the left-hand side of the niche in a

Fig. 66: The crossing of the Red Sea.

Previous pages, Fig. 65: The left-hand niche and rear arcosolium of Cubiculum C.

panel 26 x 16 inches (66 x 40cm), the Israelites, with 22 more in a panel 25 x 17 inches (64 x 43cm) on the right. The colours must have been many and very bright (dark red in various shades for the figures, with yellow added for the Israelites, green for the shields and the ground, pale blue for the helmets and the water, as well as certain parts in shadow), but they were badly damaged by the water which completely filled the cubiculum. The surface of the plasterwork also suffered, with many circular grey marks caused by lime. This is a new scene in funerary art.

At the base of a band 15 inches (38cm) wide, on the arch of the niche, are painted vases full of fruit from which rise sheaves of corn held by garlands, which meet, in the centre of the arch, with the head of a *putto*. The colours are many.

Between the niche and the vault of the cubiculum, on the right and left, are triangles, 12 x 14 inches (30 x 35cm), each containing a multicoloured bird in flight.

Left-hand niche – On the back wall is painted a scene of *The raising of Lazarus from the dead* (John 11:1-44) in a panel (fig. 67) measuring 45½ x 52½ inches (116 x 133cm). To the right is Lazarus' tomb, built like a small temple *in antis* on a podium, with steps in front of the doorway and windows in the side wall, and above the pediment an acroter in the shape of a flower. The figure of Lazarus is not seen. Christ, in tunic, cloak and sandals, extends his right hand in which he holds a long wand. Behind him are his disciples, barefoot and in short tunics, with their mantles pulled to one side. The crowd of disciples continues to the left of the niche, in a panel measuring 31 x 17 inches (79 x 43cm). About 80 individuals can be counted.

Above this scene, in the same panel to the right,

Fig. 67: The raising of Lazarus from the dead, with The pillar of fire and Moses receiving the Commandments.

Opposite, Fig. 68: The sacrifice of Isaac.

is a *Pillar of fire* in the shape of a column (Exodus 13:21-22). It is pale blue in colour, as is the flame on top of it. New scene in funerary art.

To the left is *Moses receiving the Commandments* (Exodus 24:12-18). He is shown climbing a green mountain with red tinges, holding his right hand high. One can barely make out the hand of God, in red, handing him something from green clouds. New scene in funerary art.

To the right of the niche is *The sacrifice of Isaac* (Genesis 22:1-14), in a panel (figs 65, 68) 30½ x 16 inches (78 x 41cm). The sacrificial altar has wood burning on top of it; to the left is the ram. Above, to the left, would have been the hand of God, but now there are only softer, pale blue clouds to be seen. Abraham has a sword in his hand, and he is listening to God's words. Before him is Isaac, kneeling, with his hands tied behind his back. Below is a servant, dressed only in a short tunic, standing with the donkey at the foot of the mountain. The figure of the donkey was originally painted overlong and subsequently corrected; the long hind legs before

Fig. 69: Job and his wife.

Fig. 70: Moses putting off his shoes.

Fig. 71: Lunette and under-arch niche of Cubiculum C.

correction can still be seen. This detail of the servant with the donkey is new in funerary painting but not sculpture.[9]

In the lower part of the niche, below these figures, the wall is white and undecorated, as is also the case in the right-hand niche.

Above, in the arch, is a band 14 inches (35cm) wide. On each side is a vase containing flowering branches in many colours, from which two garlands emerge, meeting in the middle of the arch where two small winged genii, green and pale blue in colour, hold wreaths of red flowers. Farther up the arch still, between the niches and the vault of the cubiculum roof, two lateral triangles are pleasingly decorated, like those on the right-hand wall, with two birds.

Rear arcosolium *a* (figs 12, 46, 65) – The border of the face of the under-arch is decorated with a simple Greek fret, or geometrical pattern. On the arch above there are hanging garlands, brownish coloured. The underside of the arch has large round garlands, also red. The left-hand side of the same

Fig. 72: Jonah disgorged by the monster.

arch has a scene (fig. 69) *Job and his wife* (Job 2:7-10 and 19:17) in a panel 23½ x 8½ inches (60 x 21cm). He sits on a rocky ledge, in front of which grasses grow. The wounds on his left leg are clearly visible. His wife, standing behind him and wearing a tunic only, hands him some bread on the end of a stick, but she does not close her nostrils with her other hand, as she does in another version of this subject in Hall I (fig. 110).

On the other side, to the right, is *Moses putting off his shoes* (Exodus 3:1-6) in a panel (fig. 70), 26 x 11 inches (66 x 28cm). Above him to the left, on a red background, was the hand of God holding a scroll, as is also painted, lower down, in the version in arcosolium *c* in Hall I (fig. 109), which has the same decoration. Here, the painting has partly fallen with the plasterwork. The colours are various shades of deep red and pale blue.

Below the two panels just described there is no decoration. On the narrow front of the arcosolium is a border circa four inches (10cm) wide with a geometrical Greek fret at the bottom and a wavy line above, in red.

In the niche in the lunette (figs 65, 71) is a peacock showing off its plumage, surrounded by a circle in a panel 17½ x 18½ inches (45 x 47cm). The sides of the niche have a large flower with eight petals. To the left of the niche is a painting of *The fall of Adam and Eve*, 13 inches (33cm) high, executed in the same manner as on the entrance wall in Cubiculum A (fig. 30). To the right of the niche is a woman praying, 13½ inches (34cm) high, dressed in dalmatic and veil.

In the middle of the under-arch of the arcosolium is a tondo, 24½ inches (62cm) in diameter, with a painting of a shepherd (fig. 71). He is very young, and is shown wearing a cape. His body is twisted to his left, but his face is turned to look behind him. In his left hand he holds a crook and in his right his pipes. To his left is a ram, and to his right a lamb looking towards him; a second lamb is lying on the ground on the right. The tondo is surrounded by a large red wreath of flowers, from which hang many equally large garlands. The colours include various shades of deep red, with yellow for the cape, the pipes, the wool of the sheep, and the ground.

Fig. 73: Jonah resting.

On the left side of the under-arch (fig. 72) is *Jonah disgorged by the monster* (Jonah 2:10) in a panel, 16½ x 34 inches (42 x 87cm), which is surrounded by a large garland of flowers. To the right, in a similar panel (fig. 73), is *Jonah resting* (Jonah 4:5-11), lying on the ground under the pergola, his eyes wide open. The presence of grasses shows that this is in the countryside. The colours are red for Jonah and green, more or less dark, for the rest. The iconography is different from the same scenes in Cubiculum A (figs. 34, 36).

ROOM D

All the panels in Room D (except the two arches) are defined by a single red line, and the colours of the decoration include various tones of red, brown, yellow and dark green.

On the external facade, facing Gallery 4, is a painting of *A grave digger* in a panel (fig. 74) 23 x 26½ inches (58 x 67cm), partly fallen to the right and at the bottom. The *fossor*, who also acted as

Fig. 74: A grave digger.

Fig. 75: Room D entrance wall.

guardian of the catacomb, is dressed in a short tunic and cloak, and on his left shoulder he carries a basket, presumably full of earth; in his right hand he carries a lit lamp, hanging from a chain. From above hangs a garland. The colours are red and brown.

The entrance is an arched area, 86½ inches (220cm) high and 65½ inches (167cm) long, which was entirely decorated by simple borders of a single red line surrounding a large panel of imitation marble; the vault seems to have been decorated with polygons with a central flower, but almost all the plasterwork has fallen.

Vault – At the imposts is a bush from which two vines grow in tendrils meeting at the top. Birds pick at the grapes. At the base of each web is a small cupid with a ladder, picking grapes (there remain the feet of the cupid and the first steps of the ladder in the west web). The colours are green for the leaves and the fruit, and various shades of red and yellow for the rest.

Entrance wall (fig. 75) – Above the doorway is a panel, 16 x 21½ inches (41 x 54cm), showing a young woman dressed in a sleeveless tunic, tight under the breasts. She has bracelets on her wrists and arms and a medallion around her neck. In her extended left hand she holds a dish, in her right what appears to be a crown. Two ribbons with flowers start from the top line of the border, ending in bows on the sides. The colours are red and brown.

On either side of this painting are two triangular panels circa 16 inches (41 x 41cm) square, in which we find a multicoloured bird in flight, holding a green branch in its claws.

Rectangular panels of simple red and brown lines separate these three compositions and cover the lower part of the wall, where they take the form of sheets of imitation marble.

The surface under the large arch resting on the columns, 17 inches (43cm) wide, has large lozenges flanked by small triangles. There is a three-petalled flower in each of the triangles and an eight-petalled

Fig. 76: Room D left-hand wall.

one in the lozenges. The face is 12 inches (30cm) in height, decorated with a seven-inch (17cm) band. In each corner is a bush from which grows a garland that climbs up in spirals: at the top of the arch is a vase of flowers. The colours are green, red and brown.

Left-hand wall – Here the decoration is similar to that of the entrance wall, with a few variants (fig. 76). In the central panel is a youth walking to his right, and indicating that direction with his right hand. In his left hand he holds a bow and arrow. He wears boots on his feet and a simple mantle over his shoulders, which leaves him almost naked. A quiver appears from behind his shoulder.

The lateral triangles are decorated with garlands hanging from above; in the left-hand one is a bird perched on a dish full of grapes; in the right-hand one a bird on a low leafy tree trunk. Here and there, lines fill empty spaces and decorate corners, ending in one or two flower buds.

On the two sides, underneath the main arch, are two vases with two profusely flowering branches which meet in the middle.

The front of the arch supporting the vault of Room G has a painting of a single garland stretched from one end to the other. Underneath the arch is a line of four oval shields decorated on the outside with spirals, and in the middle with a flower; these alternate with eight-pointed flowers. The colours are, as usual, red and brown.

Under this arch, a lower one leads to Room G; its decoration is no longer visible. This applies to the right-hand wall as well.

CUBICULUM E

In the doorway, 81 inches (206cm) high, the arch is divided into panels, eight and a half inches (22cm) square, with a four-petalled lily flower in the middle. On the walls, panels are marked out by a single red

Fig. 78: Left-hand wall of Cubiculum E.

line, to look like sheets of imitation Hymettian marble. The same motif is present on the lower part of the walls of the cubiculm, up to a height of four and a half feet (1.38 metres).

Vault (fig. 77) – In the centre, in a 19½-inch (50cm) tondo, is a gorgon surrounded by a circle of festoons and geometric motifs (fig. 80). The serpents of the gorgon's head have been rubbed off. Around the tondo are eight panels. The one towards the rear, 14 x 12 inches (35 x 31cm), has a bird within spirals, and that towards the entrance, 12 x 12 inches (30 x 30cm), a similar bird pecking at a branch held between its claws. In the left- and the right-hand panels, 17½ x 19 inches (45 x 49cm) and 12 x 19½ inches (30 x 50cm) respectively, is a hanging cup decorated with spirals of greenery.

In the four corner panels are goat kids in green and lambs in red, jumping over spirals of greenery. Behind each one (apart from the one on the right near the entrance) is a thyrsus, or staff, with ribbons at the top. These panels measure, from the left, 25 x 16 inches (63 x 40cm), 26 x 14½ inches (66 x 37cm), 18½ x 21½ inches (47 x 55cm), and 16 x 14½ inches (40 x 37cm).

Entrance wall – Painted above the doorway in a panel 10½ x 71½ inches (26 x 182cm) is a large reddish brown seashell decorated with a Greek fret and flowers.

To the right, in a panel 30½ x 12½ inches (77 x 32cm), is a bird in flight with a branch in its claws, surrounded by spirals; garlands hang from above. On the left-hand side there is a similar panel 29½ x 16

Fig. 77: Cubiculum E showing vault, left-hand wall and rear wall with arcosolium.

Fig. 79: Figure of Tellus.

inches (75 x 40cm). The facade and the underside of the arch are decorated with rows of reddish brown flowers.

Right-hand wall – Above the panels of imitation Hymettian marble, that is above four and a half feet (1.38 metres), the space has been divided into three rectangles, separated by a border, six inches (15cm) wide, full of rows of fantastic red and green flowers. In the first and third rectangles, 29 x 18½ inches (74 x 47cm) and 31½ x 13 inches (80 x 33 cm) respectively, is the painting of a *Winged victory,* her wings meeting above her head. She wears a necklace and two bracelets on each arm, and she holds a garland in one hand; her tunic is sleeveless, held tight below the breasts, with a wide flounce. There are different hairstyles. In the middle panel, 33 x 14 inches (84 x 35cm), there is a dancer, similarly dressed. With both hands she holds her veil arched high above her head. The colours are shades of yellow, red and brown.

Above the rectangles, in the lunette between each corbel, are seashells in the shape of a red umbrella, in panels 11½ x 21½ inches (29 x 54cm). In the arch above the lunette, six inches (15cm) deep, is a long garland of green flowers. The front of the corbels, now mostly destroyed, must have had the same decoration as on the left-hand wall.

Left-hand wall (figs 77, 78) – The paintings have the same subjects as those on the right-hand wall, but there are some quite noticeable variations in the sizes of the panels.

The corbelled arches under the vault, which are well preserved on this side, are painted with a bird perched on a low tree trunk, pecking at the leaves; from above hang garlands of flowers.

In the central panel, the dancer holds high in her right hand a dish full of something, and in her left is a crown. Her green veil flutters about her.

Rear wall (fig. 77) – This is flanked on either side by two marbled columns, painted to imitate red breccia, which support the arch. On the front of the arch, to the right and left, are two birds perched on a leafy tree trunk, holding in their beaks strings of flowers. In the middle these join up with garlands from above to surround a cup with a lid. The underside of the

Fig. 80: A gorgon.

Fig. 81: Right-hand wall of Cubiculum F.

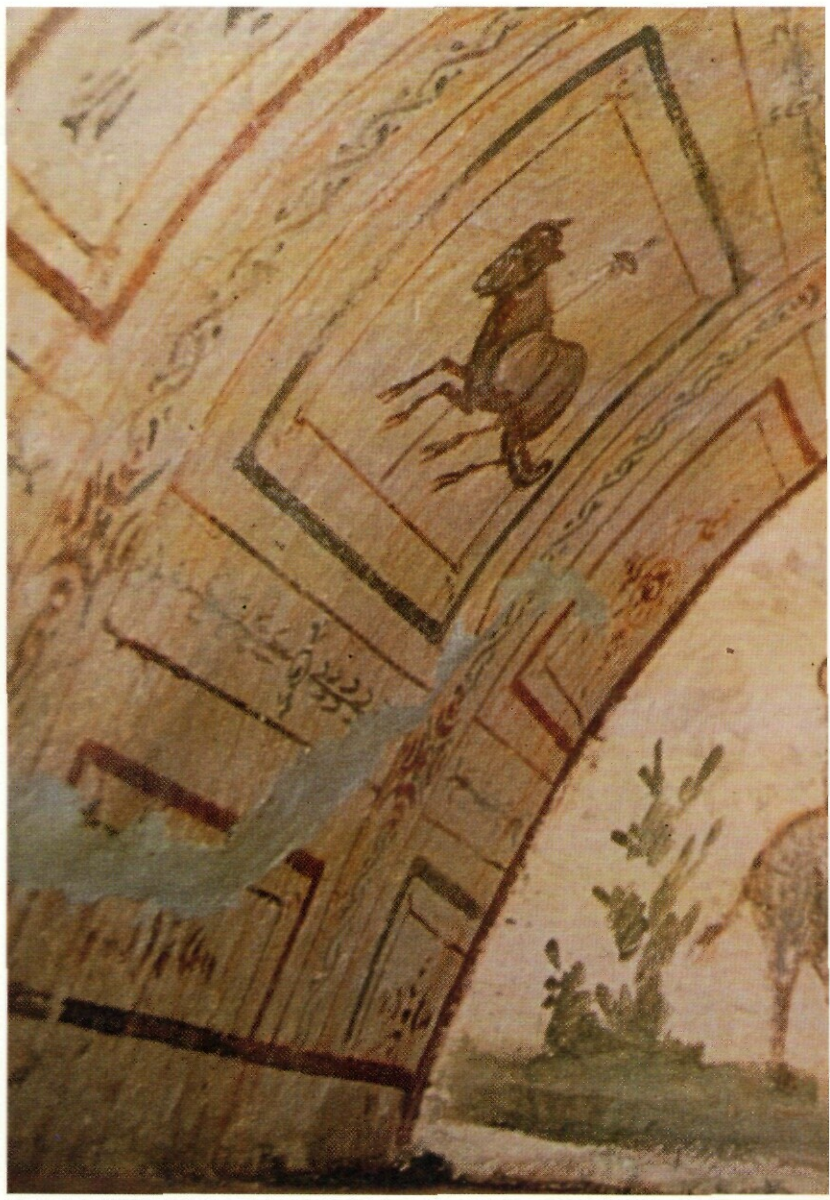


Fig. 82: The angel standing in Balaam's way.

arch, 11½ inches (29cm) wide, has a rich flowering branch ending in a mask at the top.

The plinth of the arcosolium is decorated with panels of imitation Hymettian marble. Above its opening, in a panel 31½ x 66 inches (80 x 168cm), are two enormous peacocks facing a cup full of flowers, which fall to the right and left to form a garland. Red garlands hang from the top. The peacocks are purple-brown.

Arcosolium – It is 43½ inches (110cm) deep. Its arch is entirely painted in panels eight and a half inches (21cm) square, with stylized flowers (fig. 79). Each square is represented half in shadow, from

the top right-hand corner to the bottom left-hand corner.

The edge of the lunette is decorated with two branches of palm leaves, starting at the sides and meeting in the middle. The main panel is 23½ x 52½ inches (60 x 133cm) and is decorated with what seems to be the figure of Tellus, the Roman goddess of the earth. She is represented as a woman lying on the ground, her left elbow leaning on a basket full of flowers. Her wrap, which covers only the lower part of her body, extends around her elbow. She wears a necklace and two bracelets and has a halo around her head. Her right hand, with palm wide open, is extended forward to where she is gazing. An asp is wound around her left arm, its body crawling on the ground and its fangs open towards her right breast. All around is a garden full of rosebuds and yellow plants; to her right is, possibly, a herma, and above her is an arch of greyish clouds.[10]

CUBICULUM F

The entrance arch is decorated with square panels showing a flower, whereas the walls are divided into imitation Hymettian marble panels, as in the entrance to E.

The vault was probably completely painted, as

Fig. 83: Winged cupid.

1						1		
9	3	7	3	8	3	6	3	9
2						2		
9	3	5	3	4	3	5	3	9
2						2		
9	3	8	3	7	3	7	3	9

Fig. 84: Plan of the right-hand arcosolium of Cubiculum F.

Fig. 85: Two deer facing a fountain.

can now only be seen by a few fragments of colour on the ribs, but it has been completely lost.

The cornice which supported the vault is decorated, in a border 7½ inches (19cm) high, by a long green branch twisting in flowering spirals. Its underside, four and a half inches (12cm) wide, has a red plait between each corbel and capital (figs 81, 86).

The faces of the corbels are painted with acanthus spirals in imitation of capitals. They are eight and a half inches (22cm) in height.

The columns—at the front painted to imitate red marble, in the middle cipolin, and at the back yellow breccia—have capitals eight and a half inches (22cm) high, which are painted very roughly in Corinthian style.

Right-hand arcosolium – In the lunette (fig. 82) is *The angel standing in Balaam's way* (Numbers 22:21-23), in a panel 32½ x 60 inches (83 x 153 cm), as in Cubiculum B (fig. 52), but with very different detail and greater variety of colour: indigo, light blue, green, dark red, grey. Here, Balaam and the angel look towards us, their eyes wide open. The sword brandished by the angel looks like a large dagger; only the angel is bearded.

A plan of the decoration of the underside of the arch is given in figure 84. There is a band (No. 1), three inches (8cm) wide, with two branches of palm leaves meeting at the top; next is a band 13½ inches (34cm) wide with five rectangular panels in which there are paintings of fantastic flowers in Nos. 8 and 9, a flowering branch in No. 7, and a cup full of flowers in No. 6; there is then a panel 18½ inches (47cm) wide. In the centre of No. 4 is an ornamental male head on a green background, 12 x 14½ inches (31 x 37cm); beside it is a lamb similar to those in Cubiculum E (fig. 77), in a panel 13 x 12 inches (33 x 31cm); below, in No. 9, are another two panels with red flowers. This is followed by an eight and a half-inch (22cm) band with five large square panels,

Fig. 87: Samson smites the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass.

four and a half inches (12cm) wide, with fantastic flowers in Nos. 8 and 9, and a flowering branch in No. 7. The same motifs are repeated in No. 3, in the intervals between one painting and the next, while between the three bands, in No. 2, are horizontal plaited garlands. The columns are red and brown.

To the left-hand side of the corbel, the face of the arcosolium is painted with a scene showing two birds on a stool, pecking at a basket full of fruit 8½ x 18½ inches (21 x 47cm). To the right-hand side, in a panel 9 x 19 inches (23 x 48cm), a large bird is feeding in a bush full of blossom. In both, garlands hang from above. The colours are green and red.

Lower down, next to the opening of the arcosolium, to the right in a large panel, 27½ x 53 inches (70 x 134cm), a winged cupid carries a basket full of flowers above a bunch of roses (fig. 83); to the left a flying cupid holds a garland. Festoons of flowers hang from above. The colours are red and green.

Below, on the plinth of the arcosolium (fig. 85), in a panel 30½ x 57½ inches (77 x 146cm), are two deer facing a fountain where water gushes from a large vase. The background is a country landscape full of richly flowering vegetation. The colours are red, green and brown. The same scene is repeated in Room L (page 127) and Cubiculum M (fig. 116).

Rear arcosolium – In the lunette (figs 86, 87), *Samson smites the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass* (Judges 15:14-16) is painted in a panel 42½ x 88½ inches (108 x 225cm). To the left, the Philistines are fleeing. They are dressed only in short tunics. Nine are already dead and are lying in their blood on the ground, five are losing blood from the head, and the tops of the heads of six others can be made out in the background. Samson, in tunic and cloak, stands still, contemplating the massacre and holding a scroll in his left hand. To the right is a rectangular temple on a high podium, with a stairway in front.

Fig. 86: Rear arcosolium of Cubiculum F.

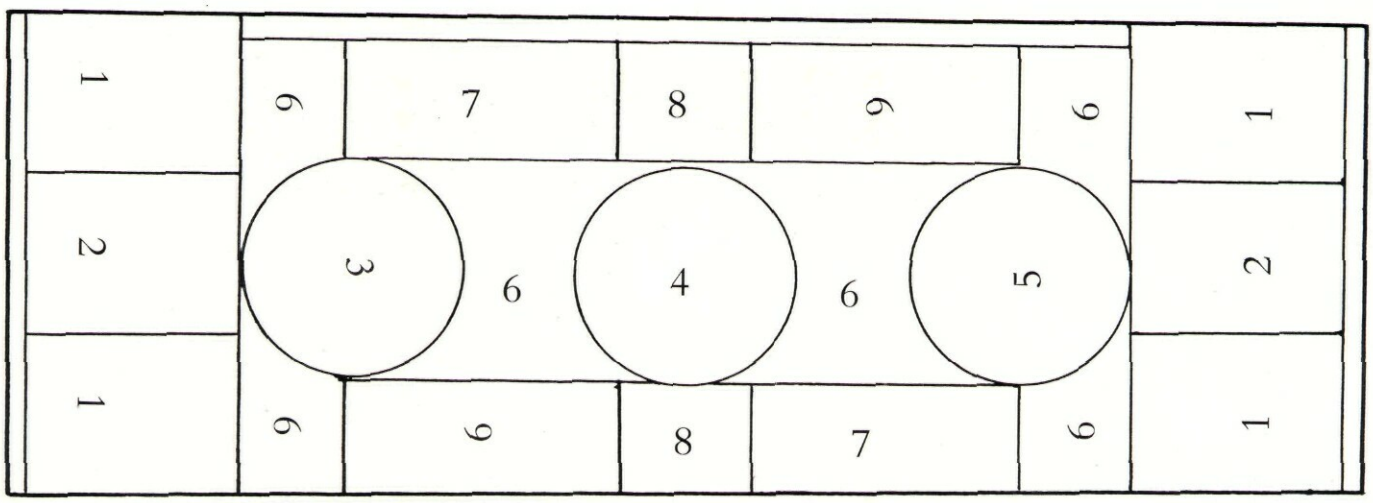


Fig. 88: Plan of the arch of the rear arcosolium of Cubiculum F.

The entrance is flanked by two columns from which hangs a pale blue curtain drawn to the right. This could be the temple mentioned later in Judges 16:22-30, which collapsed, killing both Samson and the Philistines. From their transparent appearance and the lightness of their frames, the windows appear to be glazed. They are half in shadow, with the light coming from the top right-hand corner, and they are divided by a thick pilaster that juts out. New scene in funerary art.

Figure 88 shows the plan of the arch. In the middle are three tondi, circa 16/17½ inches (40/44cm) in diameter. In the left-hand one, No. 3, is a small genie, totally naked, gathering a large bunch of grapes in his left hand, while with his right he places a bunch in a basket that is already full. In the right-hand one, No. 5 (illustrated in figure 89), a similar genie, facing left, gathers a hanging bunch with both hands; behind him is a round basket, already full, lying on the ground next to an upright crook. In the

Fig. 89: The arch of the rear arcosolium showing tondo no. 5 and panels 1,2 and 6.

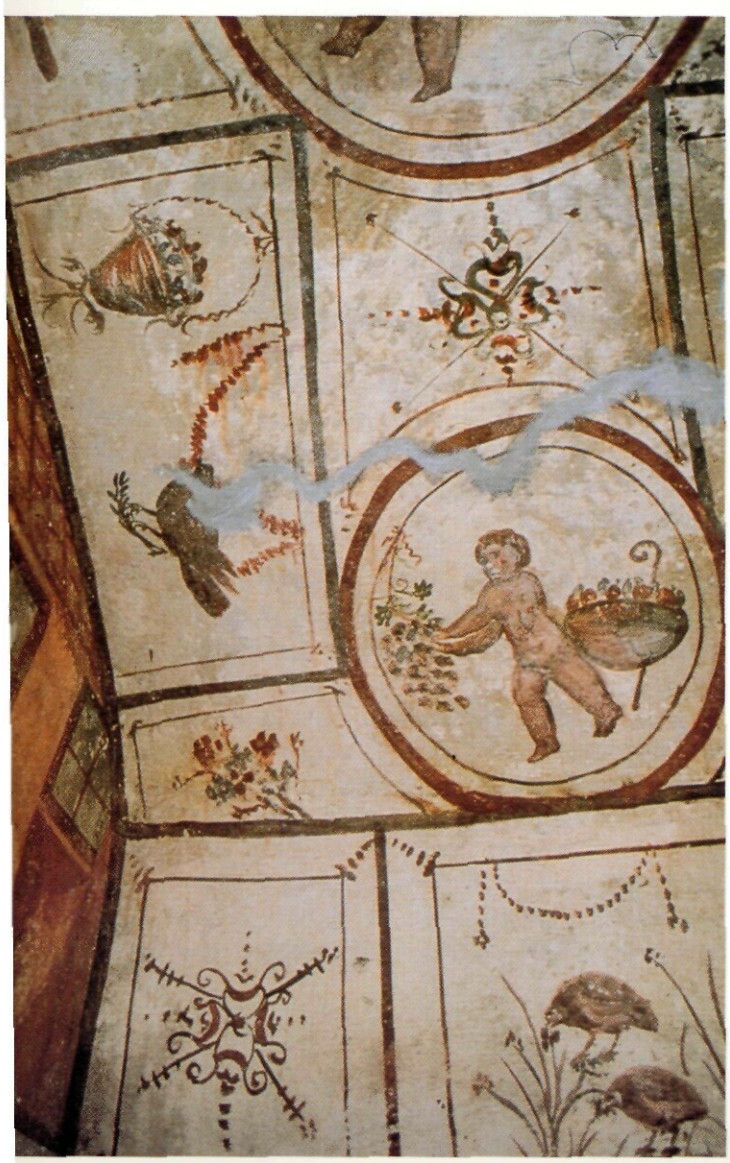


Fig. 90: Panels of peacocks on the rear arcosolium face.

Fig. 91: The figure of a Shepherd.

middle one, No. 4, is a third genie flying, holding in his right hand a small whip and in his left a dish full of something. The colours are red and brown, with tinges of purple for the skin.

The three tondi are separated by two panels, No. 6, 15 x 10½ inches (38 x 26cm), containing large fantastic flowers with eight petals; the left-hand one has fallen with the plasterwork. Similar panels with flowers, 13½ x 14 inches (34 x 35cm), are in No. 1, in the lower corners of the vault (fig. 89), and between them in No. 2 a similar panel (fig. 89) with two birds feeding in the middle of bushes; from above hangs a garland. The colours are red and brown.

Above the side panels, No. 1, there are in No. 6 four panels, 5½ x 23½ inches (14 x 60cm), with a large flowering branch lying on the ground. In the middle of the arch, on either side of the central tondo, one panel (No. 8), 9 x 11 inches (23 x 28cm), contains a bird pecking at the branch on which he stands, and the other, No. 8', a large fantastic flower. Diagonally to the central tondo are four large panels, 21½ x 12 inches (54 x 30cm); in No. 9 is a goat kid jumping crosswise with a thyrsus, or staff, adorned above with a crown and ribbons; in No. 7 is a bird with a branch in its claws in front of a garlanded cup full of flowers or fruit, and, hanging from above, a festoon of flowers. Colours as above.

On the face of the arcosolium (fig. 90), on either

Fig. 92: The left-hand arcosolium.

inches (80 x 73cm) contains a large peacock facing, on the left, an overturned basket full of flowers and fruit, and, on the right, a large cup also full of flowers and fruit. From above hang festoons of flowers. The peacocks are green, brown and black, the vase is dark green, and the flowers are red.

Below, on the face of the plinth of the arcosolium (fig. 91), in a large panel 36 x 105 inches (92 x 266cm), is a shepherd clad in a short tunic with sleeves, leggings, bootees with studs, and a cape. He is walking towards his right, pulling a lamb by a rope and holding a crooked staff in his right hand. In front of him a large sheep lies on the ground. All around is countryside full of grasses, with two large trees; from the right-hand tree hangs the shepherd's bagpipe. At the sides are garlands of flowers. The colours are green, red and brown.

Left-hand arcosolium (fig. 92) – In the lunette is a painting of *Christ and the woman of Samaria at the well* (John 4:5-26) in a panel (figs 92, 93) measuring 35½ x 55 inches (90 x 140cm). The woman is fairly

Fig. 93: Lunette and arch of the left-hand arcosolium, showing Christ and the woman of Samaria at the well, *and above, the gorgon tondo.*

35½ x 55 inches (90 x 140cm). The woman is fairly young, and she is represented wearing a rather short, high-waisted tunic; she has a pair of earrings and wears shoes. With her left hand she holds the rope of the well, from which hangs an amphora (it is impossible to tell whether she has already filled it and is pulling it out of the well, or whether she is just about to do so). With her right hand she indicates that she is talking, pointing at the well. The well is in the shape of a very large jar. Above it is a frame with a cylindrical pulley, around which the rope has been wound a number of times. On the other side of the well stands a very young Christ, in tunic and mantle. He indicates speech with his right hand and with his left he holds the folds of his cloak. The countryside is represented by large trees behind the two figures and between Christ and the well.

The arch contains only ornamental motifs (fig. 93). In the centre is a 17½-inch (45cm) tondo within two wide red lines. In the middle is a crown of flowers shaped like flames of fire, containing a decorative female bust surrounded by a circle: elegant volutes, or spirals, emerge from its head and shoulders. Around the crown are small triangles containing fantastic flowers, within a serrated pseudo-rectangle with similar flowers. The colours are black, red and brown.

The lower part of the arch has twelve panels eight inches (20cm) square, all similar. They are surrounded by two borders: the outer one with lily-shaped corners, the inner one with broken lines; in the middle is a fantastic flower. The colours are dark red and grey.

On the face of the arcosolium, above and to the left of the corbel (fig. 92), is a panel 8½ x 17½ inches (21 x 44cm) containing a multicoloured bird perched on a branch, pecking at red berries (from the top hangs a garland of red flowers). On the right-hand side is a bird flying, with garlands, in a panel 8 x 18 inches (20 x 46cm). The panels are joined at the top by little pyramids, or stylized palmettes, outlined in red.

Below the corbel is a large panel, 23½ x 53 inches (60 x 135cm), with, to the left, a naked winged cupid pulling a bird with a string of intertwined flowers. Behind is another bird, and finally a low basket full of flowers, above which a cup appears to be hanging. From the top hang garlands of flowers. The colours are red and brown.

Below, the plinth has one large scene, 28½ x 58½ inches (72 x 149cm). Against a country landscape full of grasses and trees is a painting of a fountain from which two cows drink. Water gushes from the vase and falls into a polygonal bowl placed on top of a fluted column. On the left, the cow drinks water from the rim of the bowl; on the right, the second cow is drinking water which springs out of the ground. New scene in funerary art. The colours are green for the vegetation, red for the earth, red and brown for the rest.

Walls – On the right-hand wall, between two columns (fig. 81) a panel, 51½ inches (131cm) wide, contains a painting of two men, wearing tunics and cloaks, who enter hurriedly into a room. In front of them are the two leaves of a doorway and four descending steps (a door impost has been wrongly drawn). At the back, a curtain hanging from above can be faintly discerned. This is a new scene in funerary art.

Above and to the left of the corbel is a panel 9 x 17½ inches (23 x 45cm) with a painting of a billy-goat in a country landscape with trees. To the right, a similar panel, 9 x 16½ inches (23 x 42cm), contains a hanging basket in the middle of greenery.

Fig. 95: The vault of Gallery H.

Fig. 94: Figure walking out.

Fig. 96: The vault of Hall I.

The same motifs are found on the left-hand wall, although instead of the billy-goat there is a kid jumping beside a thyrsus in the midst of spirals, and in the doorway the back of a figure walking through it (fig. 94). The colours are green for the vegetation, red and brown for the rest.

ROOM G AND GALLERY H

Room G – The two columns were painted to imitate grey marble but they are now badly damaged. The walls were decorated with simple square panels surrounded by a single red line. Possibly they were meant to represent sheets of imitation marble.

The three half-vaults opening from the light-well area towards Galleries 5, 6 and H (fig. 14) are decorated with a large red shell, which has been badly damaged.

Gallery H (fig. 95) – The vault, eight feet four inches (2.54 metres) high, is subdivided into panels 11 inches (28cm) square, imitating a panelled ceiling. In the middle of each square is a lily with four petals, and the double border consists of a chevron pattern joined at the corners to the external border by stylized palmettes.

The walls are all large imitation Hymettian marble panels.

The entrance from Gallery H to Hall I is eight feet (2.43 metres) high and is decorated with geometric shapes in red. On the vault, a small quadrangular panel is surrounded by four trapezoids, each with a flower in the middle.

HALL I

Vault (fig. 96) – The vault is made up of six webs separated by palm branches. They meet in the middle in an 31½-inch (80cm) tondo (fig. 97) containing the bust of a beardless youth dressed in a low-girded green and light blue cloak, holding a scroll close to his chest with both hands. Above and to the left of the bust, which is complete apart from the upper part of the head, is a closed book with its seals. It appears to be lying on a draped bookstand.

In the rear web, towards Room L, in a triangle 55 x

Fig. 97: Beardless youth (Hall I vault tondo).

Fig. 98: Bust of a youth (above f).

31 inches (140 x 79cm), is a basket full of scrolls, painted red where in full light and pale blue in shadow.

In the web to the right of this, above arcosolium *fgh*, a panel, 38½ x 45½ inches (98 x 116cm), contains the almost totally preserved painting of the bust of a youth (fig. 98), similar to the one in the tondo. With his left hand, which is covered, he holds his cloak close to his chest, and with his right he indicates speech. A rolled-up scroll hangs over his right shoulder, and there is a garland of flowers above his head.

In the web to the left, above arcosolium *cde* (fig. 99), in a triangle 47 x 45½ inches (120 x 116cm) is another bust of a youth, this time wearing a short-sleeved tunic and cloak (again in green and light blue). He has his left hand against his chest, and in his right hand he holds an open book with many pages. The run of the lines shows that the book was read like a scroll. Above his head is a garland of flowers.

Still farther to the left, above the opening to arcosolium *a*, there remains about half of a similar web in which there was probably a painting of another youth, similar to the one above arcosolium

Fig. 99: Bust of a youth (above c).

Fig. 100: Ornamental head.

fgh. Only his left elbow remains, and part of a closed book with its seals.

Of the two webs that are completely destroyed, the one above the entrance to Gallery H probably contained books or scrolls, the other a bust, as above arcosolium *cde*.

Central area – Below each web is a panel of straight and curved lines decorated with a bunch of flowers and, to the sides, a bird pecking at something above arcosolium *a*, a kid skipping among spirals above *b*, baskets of corn above *cde*, and roses above *fgh*.

Below these panels and above the six entrances are four arches above the openings to arcosolia *a*, *b*, *cde*, and *fgh*—19 inches (48 cm) deep over *a* and 16½ inches (42cm) over *cde*—and semi-vaults, 31½ x 71 inches (80 x 180cm), over the entrance from Gallery H and the exit to Room L. The latter are painted with a large seashell decorated transversely by a garland and a Greek key (the exit to Room L can be seen in figure 96). On the underside of the arches there is in the centre an ornamental head, representing one of the four seasons (the one above *fgh* has fallen), and to the sides are lozenges and rectangles with a stylized flower in the middle (figs. 96, 100).

Below the arch of arcosolium *a* is a lunette,

Fig. 101: Old man.

Fig. 102: A youth (left-hand entrance).

Fig. 103: A youth (right-hand entrance).

23½ x 67½ inches (60 x 172cm), and below that of *b* a similar one, 26 x 78 inches (66 x 198cm). In the centre of each is the painting of a vase with a flowering shrub of a conical shape; in both is a fountain gushing from a vase set in a country landscape, and at either side is a large multicoloured bird. The colours are green, red and brown.

The columns are painted to simulate red marble. At either side of the entrance to arcosolium *a* is an old man (fig. 101) in tunic and cloak, holding a scroll with both hands and facing towards the entrance.In both paintings the man has a moustache and a short beard; the one to the left of the entrance is 39½ inches (100cm) tall, the one to the right is 36 inches (92cm).

At either side of the entrance to arcosolium *b* is a youth in tunic and mantle, 36 inches (92cm) tall, facing the entrance. The one on the left holds a scroll in both hands (fig. 102), while the one on the right holds with his left hand a fold of his cloak and with his right a scroll resting on his hip (fig. 103). Here and there cracks in the white background allow a layer of red paint to be seen, mainly on the face and the chest of the youth in figure 102.

Beside the entrance area are two vertical borders, nine and a half inches (24cm) wide, decorated with a series of oval shields with a flower in the centre, each in between fantastic flowers with eight petals. The colour is red.

Around the left side of the opening to arcosolium *cde* is a border, eight inches (20cm) wide, with a row of red stylized flowers; above and to the right runs a palm.

On the sides at the exit towards Room L is a vertical palm-tree branch, and above a garland with two birds at each end; on another offset of the wall is a vine climbing in yellow spirals, and in a third offset a thin row of small red flowers.

All these simple decorative paintings, which cover every bit of available wall, show little imagination, with the same motifs repeated over and over again, and little symmetry. Symmetry would have been the more welcome in the decoration since it is here so lacking in the architecture itself.

Left arcosolium *cde* (fig. 104) – In the lunette at the rear (fig. 105), 51 x 59 inches (130 x 150cm), is a scene showing *Christ between Saint Peter and Saint Paul*. Christ is seated on a covered chair placed on a podium (neither armrests nor back are visible). He has a short beard and a complete halo around his head. He holds an open scroll in his left hand, and with his right hand he indicates speech. Paul is

Fig. 104: Left arcosolium cde of Hall I.

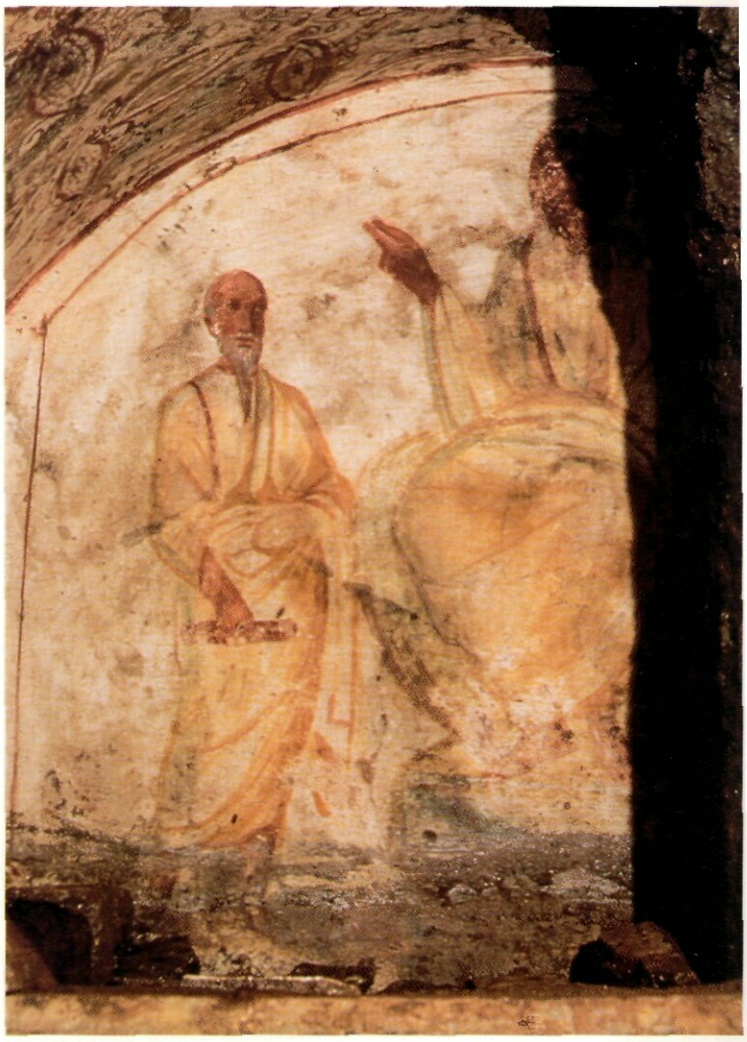


Fig. 105: Christ between St Peter and St Paul.
Fig. 106: Arch of section c of Hall I.

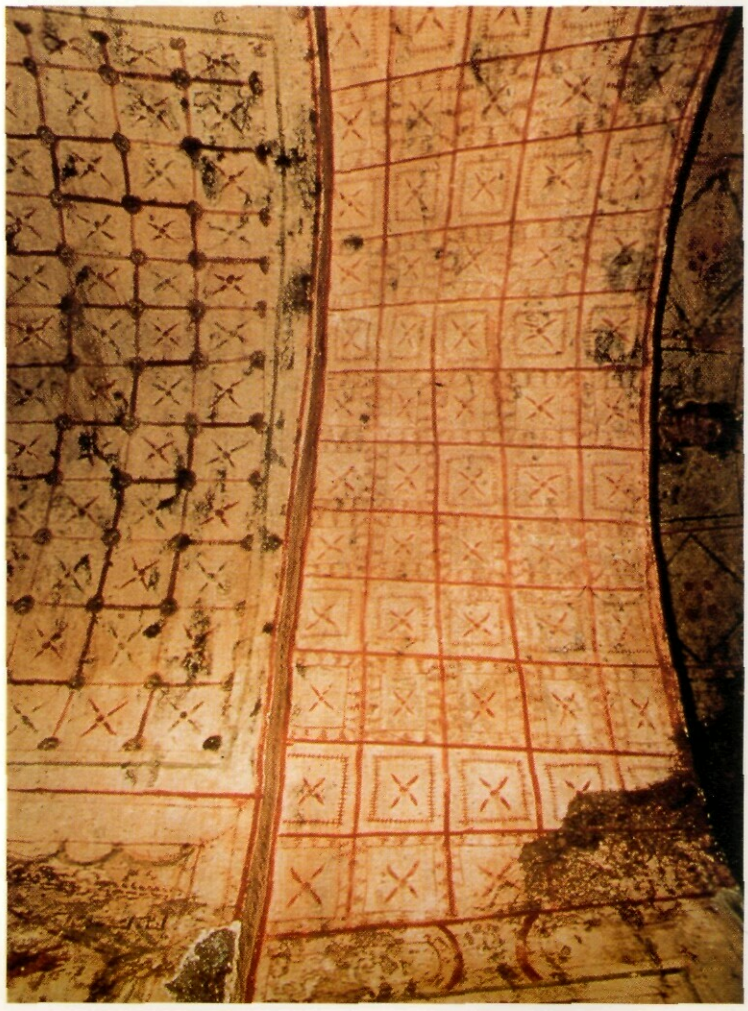


Fig. 107: Figure praying (left-hand side).

Fig. 109: Moses putting off his shoes.

Fig. 108: Figure praying (right-hand side)

Fig. 110: Job and his wife.

standing, also dressed in a tunic and a mantle which he holds to his chest with his left hand. In his right hand, lower down, he holds a scroll. Particularly noteworthy are his bald head and his long pointed beard.[11] Peter is completely hidden by the reinforced concrete pile, which almost touches the painting. He is dressed like Paul and also holds a scroll in his right hand.

On the bottom left wall of the arch of section *e*, in front of the lunette, is a panel, 25 x 29 inches (64 x 74cm), of a large bird pecking at a bunch of greenery; from above hang one green and one red garland of flowers; to the right there is a similar panel. The underside of the arch itself has large star-shaped flowers joined together, and in between them small birds, goat kids and bunches of flowers. The colours are red and green.

In section *d* the underside of the arch is painted overall with square panels joined by knots at the corners (fig. 106); in the centre of each panel is a flower with four petals. Below the decoration, in a panel to the left (fig. 107), 39½ x 29 inches (100 x 74cm), is a praying figure, dressed in tunic and mantle, standing in a doorway between curtains which are pulled back and tied to the door posts. The curtains are decorated crosswise with a palm and a Greek key motif. On the opposite, right-hand side, a panel (fig. 108), 39½ x 32½ inches (100 x 82cm), contains another praying figure wearing a dalmatic with a veil on her head, against the same arrangement of curtains. The colours are red, yellow and brown; pale blue is reserved for the clothing in shadow.

In the front section *c*, the underside of the arch (fig. 106) is divided into squarish panels, 7 x 8½ inches (18 x 21cm), with smaller squares containing a small flower with four petals in the centre. The inner squares alternate between having sawtoothed sides and palmettes that link the inner section to the outer edges.

Below, on the left-hand side of the arch, is a panel (fig. 109) measuring 26 x 17½ inches (66 x 45cm) with a painting of *Moses putting off his shoes* (Exodus 3:1-2). To the right there is desert vegetation in green; above, to the left, the hand of God in red appears from behind pale blue clouds, holding a scroll. Moses looks back towards it. Each corner of the panel is joined by curved lines to an outer border. The same subject also appears in Cubiculum C (fig. 69).

On the opposite right side, and also in Cubiculum C*a* (fig. 69), is *Job and his wife* (Job 2:7-10 and 19:17) in a panel (fig. 110) measuring 27 x 19½ inches (68 x 50cm). The colours (various tones of red and yellow) are extremely faded and the figures' features have almost totally disappeared. Job is seated on the right, wearing only a short tunic and showing his legs covered with sores. He is opening his arms wide with hands spread, in a gesture of despair. His wife, in tunic and mantle, stands in front of him, turning her face away in disgust, and with her right hand she hands him a loaf of bread from the end of a stick, while holding her nose with her left hand. The two borders are joined together as above.

Below the scenes with Job and Moses, the walls on both sides are painted as large panels with red spots placed diagonally, possibly to imitate marble.

Right arcosolium *fgh* – In the lunette at the rear, 61 x 82½-inch (155 x 210cm), is *A lesson in medicine* (fig. 111). In the centre of the scene is seated a physician, dressed only in a cloak, his chest naked. He is an old man with a short beard who looks to the left and appears to point downwards to something with his extended right hand. Around him are three youths on the left and three on the right, all dressed in tunics and mantles and seated on the same bench, which is covered by a multicoloured blanket, evident at either end of the bench. Like their master, they all wear sandals. The first and the third on the left are pointing downwards with their right hands (the latter passing his hand under the right arm of the physician). The first and the third on the right are engaged in animated conversation; the figure between them, who is bearded like the first one, holds in his right hand a long fine stick which reaches out to touch the left arm of the naked figure of a man lying on the ground, his arms against his body, head and knees slightly up. There is an open wound in his abdomen.

Behind the pupils on the left-hand side are the complete heads of another three, and the top of a fourth; on the right, behind, are three complete heads and the top of another two. None is looking downwards, but like the teacher they look upwards. The whole scene is surrounded by a wide curved border in pale green.[12]

The arch of this section, *h*, is divided into many panels, 8½ x 9½ inches (22 x 24cm), each containing a flower with four petals alternately in red and green. The side walls have a panel 30 x 22 inches (76 x 56cm): in the one on the left wall is a painting of a naked winged cupid scattering flowers from a basket, with another full basket beneath him; in the one

on the right is a Victory, dressed in the usual manner, holding a grey cup up in her left hand and handing a garland with her right hand; from above, hang festoons of flowers. The adjoining panels are connected together by curved lines. The colour is brick red, except for the details described.

The ceiling of the arch in section *g* is divided into a large number of red circles, 16 inches (40cm) in diameter, joined together by green knots. In the centre is a bird or a flower. There are flowers also in the quadrangular panels between the circles.

On the left-hand side, in a panel 40 x 21½ inches (101 x 55cm), is a painting in yellow and ochre of a lamb jumping towards the left. Behind it is a green thyrsus, or staff decorated at the top. From above hang red garlands. On the right-hand side is a similar panel, 41½ x 23½ inches (106 x 60cm), with a painting of a goat kid instead of a lamb.

The arch of the front section, *f*, was almost completely destroyed by the emplacement of a foundation pile. On the right is a panel measuring 38 x 23½ inches (96 x 60cm) depicting water being poured

Fig. 112: The vault of room L.

into a round jar; from above hang garlands. The colours are green and pale blue. The same scene is to be found on the left-hand side, although it is partly damaged by a foundation pile.

The lower part of the side walls in *f*, as well as the two plinths of the arches in *g* and *h*, are decorated with simple panels without any figures.

Fig. 111: A lesson in medicine.

Fig. 113: The sacrifice of Isaac (Room L).

Fig. 114: Samson slaying the lion (Room L).

Fig. 115: The vault of Cubiculum M showing the tondo.

ROOM L

From Hall I one enters Room L through an arched doorway seven feet three inches (2.20 metres) high. On either side are large Hymettian marble panels. On the arch is an 11-inch (28cm) central tondo of a green wading bird eating yellow fruit; on the four sides are four trapezoids either with a kid surrounded by spirals or a vase full of flowers. At the four corners are panels with a vine shoot laden with bunches of grapes or a vase with a pyramid of flowers. The colours are green, yellow and red. The columns are painted red.

At the foot of both entrance walls are panels, 23 x 15 inches (59 x 38cm), of a turtle in a marshy landscape. Above these, in two large panels, are green hanging garlands. The architrave and the pediment above the doorway are covered with flowers and green spirals.

Vault (fig. 112) – It is a cross vault, divided into four trapezoids, 19 x 59 inches (48 x 150cm), joining into a centre quadrangle, 8 x 10 inches (20 x 25cm). It

Fig. 116: The right-hand wall and arcosolium of Cubiculum M with The fall of Adam and Eve.

contains a stylized flower with four petals; in each trapezoid is either a kid or a lamb, in green or red, jumping towards the left in the midst of spirals of greenery sprouting from two baskets placed at the corners. The kid nearest to the entrance and the exit have a thyrsus behind them, with floral or other decoration at the tip.

Left-hand wall (fig. 113) – In the centre is a panel 46½ x 36½ inches (118 x 93cm) with *The sacrifice of Isaac* (Genesis 22:1-13). It has been very badly damaged by looters who got into the catacomb in 1954 and tried to remove it. Abraham is wearing a short tunic, which leaves his left leg bare, and a mantle, and he is bearded on his cheeks only. With his right hand he brandishes a large sword and with his left he presumably held Isaac, leaning against him, dressed in short tunic and sandals. To the left is the altar with pieces of wood burning on it, from behind which one can see the ram among small bushes. Above, to the left, the hand of God appears from red clouds. The colours include many shades of yellow, orange, red and brown. The same scene appears in Cubiculum C, with a different iconography (fig. 68). On either side of *The sacrifice of Isaac* is a rectangle, 46½ x 7 inches (118 x 18cm), with a row of red and brown decorative motifs.

Above is a lunette, 16 x 45 inches (40 x 114cm), with two multicoloured birds perched on small leafy branches and facing each other. From above hang thick garlands of red flowers.

The front of the arch supporting the vault is decorated with a row of red flowers, and the lower face has a series of oval shields with a central flower, intermingled with fantastic flowers with eight petals. This same decoration continues on the underside of the architrave above the entrance doorway.

Beneath *The sacrifice of Isaac*, in a panel 27½ x 67½ inches (70 x 172cm), are two large deer drinking from a fountain, with water spurting from a round jar. The background is a landscape full of red flowers. This subject reappears twice, in Cubiculum F (fig. 85) and Cubiculum M (fig. 116).

Right-hand wall – In the middle of a panel (fig. 114) measuring 44½ x 42 inches (113 x 107cm) is a

Fig. 117: The fall of Adam and Eve.

painting of *Samson slaying the lion* (Judges 14:5-9). Samson is dressed in a tunic and cloak. Below is the lion, already dead, with bees making honey in its mouth. The black spots are mud stains caused by the pile driver. The same scene is also found in Cubiculum B (page 72), although drawn in a simpler manner. The rest is painted like the left-hand wall.

CUBICULUM M

Vault – It is a barrel vault. In the centre a tondo, 21½ inches (55cm) in diameter, contains the figure of a young shepherd (fig. 115). He wears a short tunic, red cape and leggings; in his left hand he holds a staff and in his extended right hand is his bagpipe. Two sheep are lying at his feet, heads turned backwards to face him. There are trees and vegetation in the background. All around the tondo are large birds in flight in the midst of dense foliage covered in flowers.

At the sides are half-tondi, 12 x 23½ inches (30 x 60cm), but the one on the left has vanished. The surviving paintings are of two birds feeding in the midst of vegetation. In the one at the back is a bird perched on a vase of flowers, with another two birds beside it. The whole surface has been damaged by cement and mud following the pile emplacement. The colours are red, brown and green. The colours of the birds are extremely varied.

Right-hand wall and arcosolium – In the lunette (figs. 116, 117) is a panel, 41½ x 73 inches (105 x 185cm), with the scene of *The fall of Adam and Eve* (Genesis 3), already present in Cubiculum A (fig. 30). Here it is represented in a different way. In this case, Adam covers himself with both hands and Eve only with the left, while with her right hand she seems to be talking to the serpent. Noteworthy are the tree laden with apples and the serpent bending towards Eve, its mouth wide open and its tongue protruding towards her. The inner contour line is joined to the outer one by a series of stylized

Fig. 118: Jonah cast into the sea.

Fig. 119: The soldiers casting lots for Christ's clothes.

palmettes. Colours are green and grey for the vegetation, with the rest reddish.

Under the arch, 38½ inches (98cm) wide, are three whole tondi and six half-tondi (fig. 116), each one surrounded by a green palm branch with, in the centre, a red flower with four petals. The tondi are connected to each other by short green columns standing laterally on one tondo and holding up the next one. Tondi and columns enclose irregular octagons containing a large flower with four petals. The colours are green and red.

On the right-hand side of the arch (fig. 118), in a panel measuring 30 x 37 inches (76 x 94cm), is a painting of *Jonah cast into the sea* (Jonah 1:15 and 2:1). The only visible part of the great fish is its head, with its mouth wide open, swallowing the extended arms of the prophet. There are only two sailors: one throws Jonah overboard, his round, youthful face staring at us; the other sailor holds his right hand above his head in a gesture of fear. The colours are yellow for the sea and grey for the great fish; the rest is brick red. All around the panel is a green palm branch. The scene tells the same story as in

Fig. 120: Jonah resting.

Fig. 121: Jonah angry.

Fig. 122: The vault of Cubiculum N.

Cubiculum A (fig. 34), but it is here represented in a different way.

On the left-hand side of the arch in a panel of similar size was *Jonah disgorged by the monster*, but it has been almost completely demolished by the foundation piles (fig. 116). The same subject also appears in Cubiculum C (fig. 72).

The entrance to the arcosolium is surrounded by the spirals of a vine; beside it are two panels, 28 x 16 inches (71 x 40cm), in which a Victory bears a red and green garland.

Below, the plinth of the arcosolium is entirely taken up by a rectangular panel (fig. 116), 29½ x 84½ inches (75 x 215cm), with the same scene of deer at a fountain as already found in the skirting of the walls in Room L (page 127) and the right-hand arcosolium of Cubiculum F (fig. 85).

Left-hand wall and arcosolium – In the lunette of the arcosolium, in a panel measuring 43½ x 75 inches (110 x 190cm), is a painting of *The soldiers casting lots for Christ's clothes* (John 19:23-24). In the background is Christ's sepulchre, built—like that of Lazarus in Cubicula C and O (figs 67, 137)—to resemble a small temple on a podium with stairs in front of the entrance and side walls with several windows. At the front are two Roman soldiers, in short tunics and breastplates, wearing shoes and cylindrical helmets. The one on the right holds both their spears (fig. 119); to the side, their large shields hang from supports. Between them is the means by which they gamble: a small coffer with two vertical supports and a horizontal bar around which turns a large jar. From its narrow mouth discs as large as coins are falling out, one green and one pink. One of the soldiers turns the jar with his right hand, the other appears to point at the discs as they come out and make his comment. The colours are red, yellow and grey. Figure 119 shows the poor condition of the painting caused by looters who tried to remove the left-hand soldier, and by the unhappy work of the pile-driver. A foundation pile is now standing just in front of the soldiers' game.[13]

The top of the arch of the arcosolium was completely destroyed by a pile; below, on the left-hand side, there is still some plaster, 31½ inches (80cm) high (fig. 120), with a painting of *Jonah resting* under the pergola with the gourd (Jonah 4:5-6). This has been painted over an earlier scene of *Jonah angry*, where his legs are still clearly visible.

On the left is a panel (fig. 121), 33½ x 27 inches (85 x 69cm), of *Jonah angry* (Jonah 4:7-11). The prophet is resting upon a rocky outcrop, his left hand under his head (his eyes appear to be shut), and he complains with his right hand, looking almost as though he was about to get up from his resting place. In the first scene the gourds can be seen clearly to have green leaves, whereas in the second one they are leafless. The panels are linked to the arch by stylized palmettes. The colours are brick red and yellow, with green for the plants. These two scenes are already present in Cubiculum A (figs 35, 37), although represented very differently in the colours, the shape of the pergola, and the physical attitude of the prophet.

The outer face of the arcosolium has the same decorative motifs above and below as on the right-hand wall, although they have been partly destroyed or badly damaged by the pile driver.

In the lower part of the end wall, also badly damaged by the foundation piles, is a panel of imitation marble. Above it is a painting measuring 28 x 16 inches (71 x 40cm), representing a dancing cupid holding up a thyrsus, his cloak fluttering across him; from the top hang green festoons.

The doorway leading to Cubiculum N has a flat ceiling, which is badly damaged at the front. In the centre is a 12-inch (30cm) tondo with a kid jumping towards the left, with a thyrsus behind it. Around the tondo is a crown with a palm in its centre. At the sides are four trapezoids containing a cup full of flowers; between them are quadrilateral panels with a bird. The colours are red and dark green.

At each side of the doorway, in the middle, is a large panel of Hymettian marble, with two vertical borders on either side decorated with a series of stylized flowers. There are other marble panels above and below.

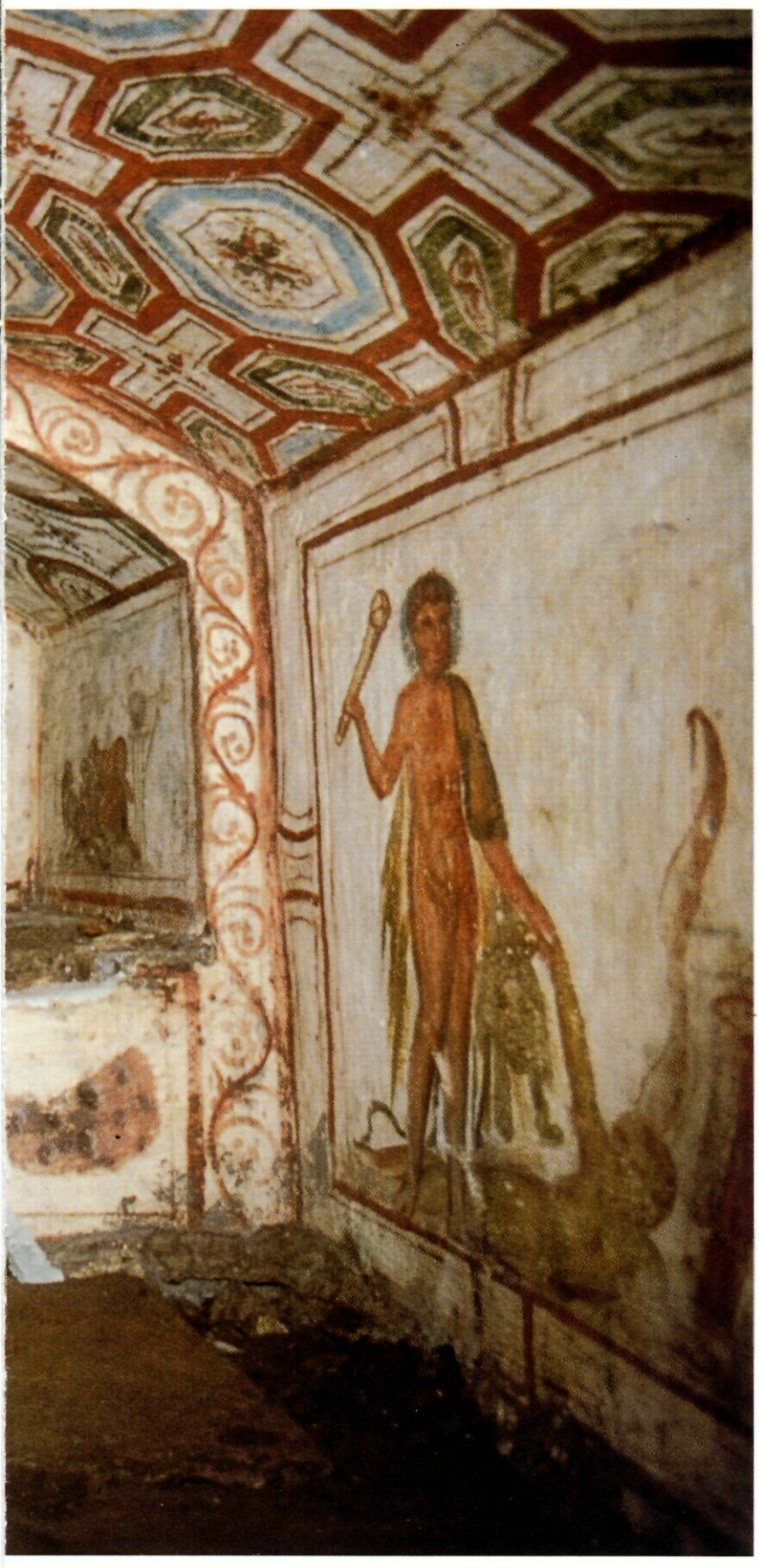
CUBICULUM N

Vault (fig. 122) – It is a cross-vault, each web forming a trapezoid, 44 x 102 inches (112 x 259cm), the apexes meeting in the centre in a tondo 14 inches (36cm) in diameter. This is surrounded by a wide crown of ears of corn, with knots of alternating large red and black flowers. Similar rows of ears of corn surround each trapezoid. In the central tondo, a winged cupid in a field of corn holds in his left arm a bundle of corn and in his right hand a sickle. He has a band around his head.

In the centre of each trapezoid is a similar tondo, 12 inches (31cm) in diameter. In the side panels is a

Fig. 123: The left-hand and end walls of Cubiculum N.

Fig. 124: The left-hand arcosolium of Cubiculum N.



cupid reaping the corn. In the front and rear panels he holds a bundle of corn in his arms, raising his sickle in his right hand. From the base of each trapezoid two spirals of ears of corn rise to fill the corners of the panels.

Walls (fig. 123) – The columns are painted to resemble red marble, with the corbels under the architrave simulating Hymettian. Between the corbels are painted red volutes of Corinthian capitals, now badly faded. The architraves are decorated underneath with red flowers, and on the front with a row of stylized oval motifs continuing on to the two sides of the tympanum. In the centre of the tympanum is a large red shell, 15 x 71 inches (38 x 180cm), with a Greek key motif and dotted lines. Around it is a row of flowers.

The lower parts of the walls have simple panels of imitation Hymettian marble.

On the side walls near the arcosolia are two rectangular panels edged with black, measuring 20 x 10 inches (51 x 25cm) on the left and 23½ x 4½ inches (60 x 12cm) on the right, full of stylized red flowers, and above are a further two panels, 14 x 23½ inches (36 x 60cm), with a flying genie holding a crown. The colour is red.

On the entrance wall to the left and right, in black panels measuring 32 x 20 inches (81 x 51) and 28½ x 16½ inches (73 x 42cm), is a winged cupid in red holding out a crown with his right hand. In his left is a palm branch. From above hangs a garland of flowers. The cupid on the left holds his cloak to his hips with his left hand. The colours are yellow, grey, brown and red.

Above the two panels and the doorway is a rectangle, 7½ inches (19cm) high, with a garland of red flowers in festoons.

The end wall, towards Cubiculum O (on the right in figure 123), has on either side two black-edged rectangular panels, 21½ x 4½ inches (54 x 12cm). In the left-hand one red and black flowers intertwine to resemble a millipede, and in the right-hand one are three large flowers with eight petals, also in black and red.

Above these rectangles are two triangular panels, 14½ x 23½ inches (37 x 60cm), with a large bird in a country landscape; the bird on the left pecks at a flowering frond (fig. 123), while the one on the right stands on a tree trunk with branches; from above hangs a garland.

Below the rectangles is a panel measuring 6 x 11 inches (15 x 28cm) with a festooned black garland.

Fig. 125: The choice of Hercules.

Left-hand arcosolium (fig. 124) – In the lunette, in a panel 29½ x 63 inches (75 x 160cm), is a scene of *Admetus dying*. The king lies in a bed which looks like a couch on four legs. Around him is his family of seven, five men and two veiled women. One of the women is at one side, arms extended as if praying, the other bends over the sick man and is probably Alcestis, his wife, offering her life in place of his. On either side of the scene are yellow curtains which are open and tied to one side. Most of the colours are faded because of the peeling of the surface. The colours are green, red and brown.

On the under-arch are 16-inch (40cm) tondi joined together by knots, and between them octagonal

Fig. 126: Hercules kills an enemy.

panels decorated with straight and curved lines, with garlands of flowers at the sides. In the side tondi are kids leaping; in the middle one is a gorgon; in the octagons a bird pecks at the branch on which it perches. The colours are green, red and brown.

At the left below the arch is a panel, 18½ x 30½ inches (47 x 77cm), with two sheep facing a goblet and surrounded by spirals of vegetation; on the right, in a panel 17½ x 34 inches (45 x 86cm), are two sheep and a ram resting near a tripod on which a shepherd's bucket is placed. The colours are green, red and brown.

The face of this inner section of the arcosolium is decorated with a large vine shoot with tendrils;

Fig. 127: The right-hand arcosolium of Cubiculum N.

below, on the plinth, in a panel 12½ x 58 inches (32 x 148cm), are two large peacocks facing a vase full of flowers and fruit (as in the right-hand arcosolium), but the centre of the scene has been destroyed by looters.

The ceiling of the front part of the arcosolium, 52½ inches (133cm) deep, is painted with hexagonal and octagonal panels linked by equilateral crosses. In the middle of these panels is a flower with two, four or eight petals. The colours are pale blue, green and red.

On the left-hand side, in a panel measuring 35½ x 33½ inches (90 x 85cm), is *The choice of Hercules* (fig. 125). The god has chosen Virtue in the form of Minverva, and they hold each other by the hand. They are both surrounded by a pale blue halo which has partly fallen. Hercules has a short beard and a lion skin across his shoulder. With his left hand he holds his club which rests vertically on a rise in the ground. Note that his right foot seems to be forked. The goddess Minerva wears a purple sleeveless but full-length tunic and a yellow cloak, and carries weapons, a shield and spear, as well as a helmet. The sides of the painting are joined to the neighbouring panels by curved segments. The colours are red, yellow, purple and pale blue.

Fig. 128: Hercules leads Alcestis from the underworld.

Opposite, on the right-hand side, in a panel 33 x 33 inches (84 x 84cm), *Hercules kills an enemy* (fig. 126). Here, also, the hero is bearded and has a halo. There is a lion skin over his left shoulder, in his right

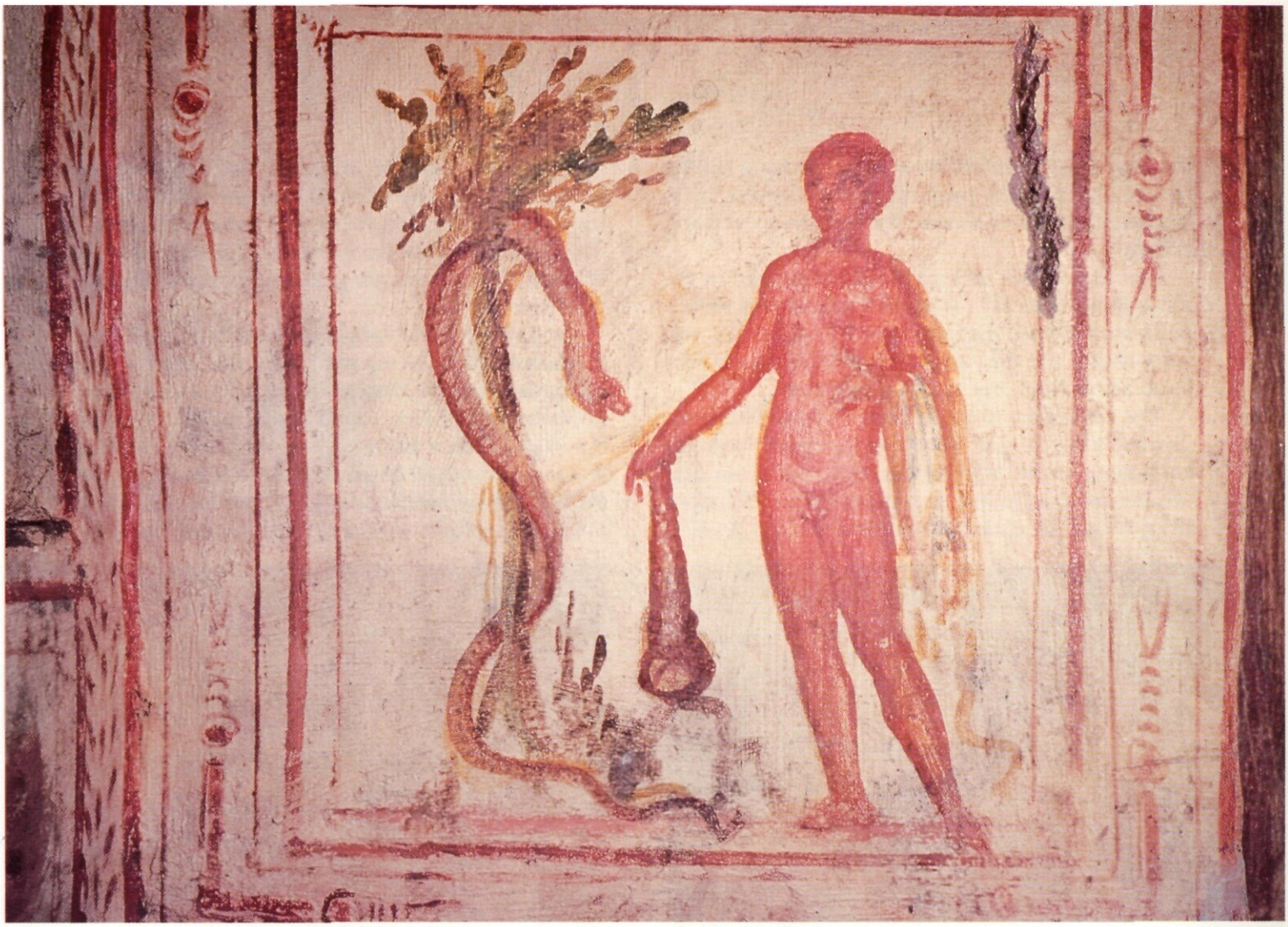


Fig. 130: Hercules stealing the golden apples of the Hesperides.

hand he holds his club, and with his left he holds the arm of his fallen enemy, who lies naked on the ground. To one side lean a bow and a quiver full of arrows. This scene is joined to its neighbour in the same way as the preceding one. The colours are the same, with the addition of black.

Right-hand arcosolium (fig. 127) – In the lunette, in a panel 25½ x 49 inches (65 x 125cm), *Hercules leads Alcestis from the underworld* (fig. 128). On the right, in yellow, is the doorway to the house of Admetus, with curtains drawn to the sides. In front of it, King Admetus sits on a rock, with a cloak across his body and a spear in his right hand. Hercules, here also with a halo and a lion skin hanging from his shoulders, uses his left hand to hold his club to his shoulder and to hold the three-headed dog Cerberus (in grey and purple) on a leash; with his right hand he touches the shoulder of Alcestis, bringing her forward towards her husband, Admetus. She is dressed in tunic and mantle and is veiled. Her right hand is extended forward. Behind her, on the left, is the dark entrance to Hades, the underworld. This portrayal is not exactly according to the legend as the rescue of Alcestis from Hades has been put together with the separate legend of the capture of Cerberus.

The arch above the lunette has a 12½-inch (32cm) central tondo containing a ram jumping towards the left, a decorated thyrsus behind it. To the left and right of the tondo are two 7-inch (17.5cm) square panels angled within another panel. In the centres of the squares is a bird, in one in flight holding a frond, in the other pecking at fruit. From above hang garlands of flowers. The triangles on the sides of the main panel, the spaces with straight and curved lines between the squares and the central tondo, and the edges of the arch are decorated with flowers and vases of flowers. Here, too, the inner sides of the squares are joined to the outer borders by palmettes drawn in broken lines, one above the other.

On either side of the arch are panels measuring 16½ x 23 inches (42 x 58cm); in the left-hand panel is a large bird feeding, perched upon a tree trunk; in

Fig. 129: Hercules kills the hydra.

the right-hand one are two birds perching on the handles of a vase, pecking at the flowers in it. Garlands hang from above. The colours are red and brown.

The face of the arch of the inner section of the arcosolium (fig. 127) is entirely decorated with a palm-tree frond. Below, on the plinth of the arcosolium, are the same peacocks as in the left-hand arcosolium, but in this case intact.

The arch of the front section of the arcosolium is divided into six and a half inch (16cm) squares containing a large lily-shaped flower with four petals. Below, on the left, in a panel 33½ x 30 inches (85 x 76cm), *Hercules kills the hydra* (fig. 129). The hero has put aside his lion skin, and, holding the head of the hydra with his left hand, he strikes it with his club. Like the next scene, this panel is framed at the corners by a decorative right-angle tipped with flowers. The colours are yellow, red, brown, and a little pale blue.

Opposite, on the right-hand wall, is a panel 33 x 29 inches (84 x 74cm) with *Hercules stealing the golden apples of the Hesperides* (fig. 130). In this scene he has a youthful face, round and beardless, while in the other scenes he is shown with hard, square features and a short beard. With his left arm he holds the lion skin and with his right hand he holds his club in balance upright on a knoll. The serpent, Ladon, is

Fig. 131: Figure of a woman (right-hand entrance arch).

Fig. 132: Figure of a woman (left-hand entrance arch).

Fig. 133: The vault of Cubiculum O.

wound around the fruit tree it is guarding, and it leans forward, its mouth reaching towards the hero's hand. The composition is similar to the tree and serpent in *The fall of Adam and Eve* (figs 30, 71). The colours are green, pale blue, yellow, red and brown. Above and to the right can still be seen traces of where treasure hunters tried to remove the painting.

As is evident from the two scenes painted in the lunettes of the arcosolia, the main theme in the decoration of Cubiculum N is the legend of Alcestis, symbolizing the love and faithfulness of the ideal wife; the other deeds of Hercules are of secondary importance and act merely as a framework. All these scenes are, of course, new to early Christian art.

Fig. 134: The crossing of the Red Sea.

CUBICULUM O

Entrance – The entrance is an arch seven feet 3 inches (2.20 metres) high and 37½ inches (95cm) deep, with the doorway originally closed by a transenna with a small gate (fig. 27).

On the right-hand wall, in a panel 29½ x 25½ inches (75 x 65cm), is the figure of a woman (fig. 131) wearing a sleeveless, high-waisted tunic and a cloak, with a transparent veil arranged like a halo around her head. In her right hand, held low, she holds a bundle of corn, and in her left a torch held upright. On her left, two amphorae are leaning against something, and on her right is what appears to be a basket of corn. She represents a cross between Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture, and Abundance.

Opposite, on the left, a similar panel, 26½ x 23½ inches (67 x 60cm), contains a similar female figure, but without a veil and wearing a purple tunic with sleeves and a pearl necklace (fig. 132). Her arms are opened wide, and in each hand she holds a bundle of corn, held downwards. The background is a field of yellow corn. The colours include yellow, purple, red and brown. Below these two figures are panels of imitation Hymettian marble.

The surface under the arch, 37½ inches (95cm wide), consists of a series of superimposed semicircles, producing the effect of fish scales. In each semicircle is a small bunch of flowers. The colours are red, grey and dark green.

Vault (fig. 133) – It is a barrel vault, nearly nine feet (2.70 metres) high. Its corners are decorated with the head of a *putto*, surrounded by spirals, the whole enclosed within a dense wreath of multicoloured flowers and yellow corn ears. Between them, on the left and right-hand sides, is a double-handled vase containing a tall flowering plant in the shape of a pyramid.

Nearest the entrance, in a green panel measuring 22 x 21 inches (56 x 53cm), is a woman seated in an armchair, facing left. She wears a high-waisted, sleeveless tunic and a mantle which falls forward from her left shoulder. In her right hand she holds out a bundle of corn, and with her left she gathers her cloak and holds up a long thyrsus.

On the opposite side, in a similar panel 22 x 23½ inches (56 x 60cm), is another female figure, seated on a stool, holding in her right hand a large bunch of grapes. These are new motifs in funerary art, and in conjunction with the ears of corn encircling them as

Fig. 135: Egyptian soldier.

Fig. 136: Israelite soldier.

well as those to be found in the entrance arch, give an overall impression of a single concept of agricultural abundance. The colours are red, white, brown, green and yellow.

Right-hand wall – In the lunette of the niche is a large panel (fig. 134), 37½ x 69 inches (95 x 175cm), of *The crossing of the Red Sea* (Exodus 14:15-31), its lower part unfortunately damaged by the opening of a secondary burial. Above, an eight-sided star shines in a pink sky. To the right are fourteen Israelites wearing fairly long tunics, marching hurriedly, their hands held forward. Two are turning backwards, and with their hands they seem to comment on the miracle that has taken place. The Egyptians are all on horseback, armed with two spears, round shields and helmets, their chain mail covered by cloaks. The two front horses have already fallen over with their riders in a pool of blood, three other men are toppling over, and a further nine are still on horseback in the background (although their horses are not visible). The front ones have been struck by the waves of the sea (painted in wide, grey, horizontal brush strokes).[14]

The scene is similar to that in Cubiculum C (fig. 66); it is different in that here there is no army of Egyptians or crowd of Israelites in the side niches. In the left-hand one (fig. 135) there is only one Egyptian solder, 17 inches (43cm) high, and in the right-hand one (fig. 136) only one Israelite, 17½ x 12½ inches (45 x 32cm).

The Egyptian soldier is armed exactly like those in the niche, with the addition of a sword held in his right hand and a quiver hanging from his left hip. He

Fig. 137: The raising of Lazarus from the dead.

wears a short tunic with sleeves, which seems to be knitted, fastened on to his chest with fibulae, like a jacket, and held to his hips with the cingulum; on top of it he wears a cloak which hangs down behind his shoulders. His footwear is not clearly visible. The figure stands out from the panel, the corners of which are joined to two outer borders by stylized palmettes. The colours are black and brick red.

The other figure is exactly like that of the Israelite in the niche, bare-headed, with an unbelted, shortish tunic with sleeves, with vertical bands on the breast, and disc-shaped decorations on the shoulders and at the knees. With his right hand held upright, he also appears to be pointing to the miracle. To the extreme right is a deep gash in the corner of the wall, probably done while attempting to remove this painting and the adjoining one of Ceres (fig. 131).

The lower parts of the walls are painted to imitate panels of Hymettian or cipolin marble. Above, the arch of the niche has a panel, 12½ x 65½ inches (32 x 166cm), decorated on the outside by a continuous geometric motif. Inside is a luxuriant multicoloured wreath of plaited corn ears, large red and light blue flowers, and other smaller flowers. The wreath rises from two baskets full of the same flowers.

The top face of the niche is a long panel with curved and straight lines. In it lies a plaited garland interspersed with large flowers. The colours are yellow, red, green and pale blue.

Left-hand wall (fig. 137) – The lunette of the niche, 38 x 7 inches (96 x 170cm), has a large scene representing *The raising of Lazarus from the dead* (John 11) as in Cubiculum C (fig. 67); it has unfortu-

Fig. 138: Beardless figure (Balaam?).

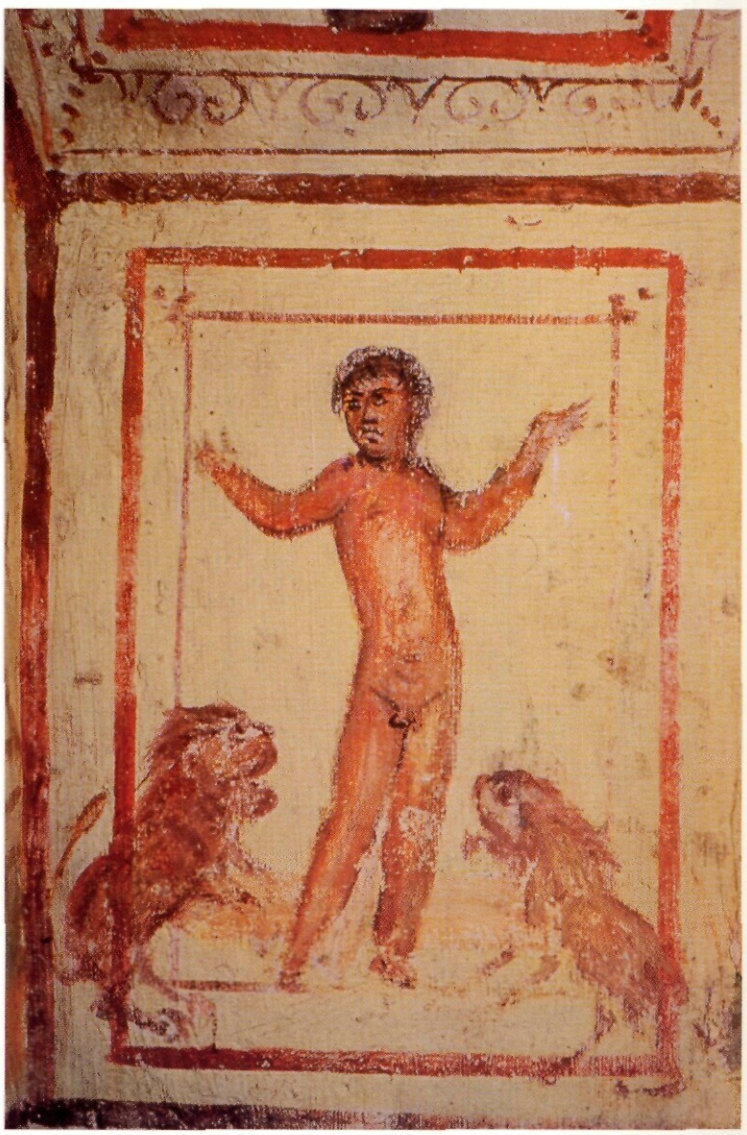


Fig. 139: Daniel in the lions' den.

nately been severely damaged by a large secondary burial.

The tomb on the right is similar to the one in figure 67, but it has a much longer front stair and smaller, more widely spaced side windows. In the background, grey trees indicate a country landscape. Here we can see the mummy of Lazarus appearing in the doorway, being touched on the forehead by Christ's rod.[15] At right angles to Lazarus' tomb is another one, its pediment resting upon two columns. It has three much lower side windows and a white rectangular doorway. To the left is Christ, wearing tunic, mantle and sandals, and behind him

Fig. 140: Figure praying in a garden.

Fig. 141: The arch in front of arcosolium a of Cubiculum O.

Fig. 142: Noah in the ark.

fourteen disciples—the same number as there are Israelites in the painting opposite (fig. 134)—in short, loose tunics. Their feet are bare, and here appear to be forked. Some are bearded. The colours are yellow, grey, red and brown.

Above, as in figure 67, is the column of fire and Moses receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exodus 13:21-22 and 24:12-18). Here the column has a more visible base (the painter has detached the column from its base and has given it a second one as an afterthought), and the flames are clearly visible on the capital. Moses is bearded, wearing tunic and mantle. The hand of God giving him the two tablets can be clearly seen. Dark green shadows indicate the mountain.

Here, however, the scene does not continue on to the side walls of the niche, even symbolically, as had been done for *The crossing of the Red Sea.* On the left, in a panel 22 x 15 inches (56 x 38cm) that is very similar to that of the Egyptian soldier, is what appears to be a beardless figure, dressed in tunic and mantle, holding his mantle with his left hand and possibly holding a scroll to his hip (fig. 138). With his right hand he points to an eight-sided star. This may be Balaam, according to Numbers 24:17 and Apocrypha 22:16. The colours are yellow, ochre and brown.

On the right wall, in a similar panel 19½ x 13 inches (50 x 33cm), is *Daniel in the lions' den* (fig. 139). The beasts appear to be attacking him (Daniel 6:16-22 and 14:30-39); note how much the lions stand out of the border. We have already found the same scene in Cubiculum A, but painted in a very different manner (fig. 31). The colours are yellow, ochre and black.

The wall above the niche has the same decoration as on the right-hand wall.

Arch in front of Oa – The upper face has the same plaited decoration as found on the corresponding part of the right-hand wall (fig. 141).

Beneath the arch, 23 inches (58cm) wide, is a series of square panels (two enclosed in a lozenge) with large flowers with eight or four petals, and a flowering stem.

On the right-hand wall is a panel, 25½ x 16½ inches (65 x 42cm), of a figure praying in a garden (fig. 140). She wears a large dalmatic and has a very light veil on her head. The vegetation is green; the rest is red and brown.

Opposite, on the left-hand wall, in a panel 25½ x 16½ inches (65 x 42cm), is *Noah in the ark* (Genesis

Fig. 143: Bust of a young woman.

Fig. 144: The three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.
Fig. 145: The feeding of the five thousand.

8:13) in the act of praying (fig. 142). Noah is bearded and dressed in a dalmatic. The dove is missing. The ark has an open lid and a place for the lock on its front. The waves on which it floats are very vaguely depicted in horizontal wavy lines. The colours are yellow, brown and black.

The lower part of the wall is decorated with panels of imitation Hymettian marble.

woman (fig. 143). She is dressed in a tunic, with a coif on her head, her hair curling around her face and held back on her neck in a bun. She has a large full halo. I believe it to be a portrait of the deceased buried in the tomb below.

This tondo is in the centre of a panel, 39½ x 78½ inches (100 x 200cm), decorated with large wreaths of flowers hanging from the tondo itself and, like it,

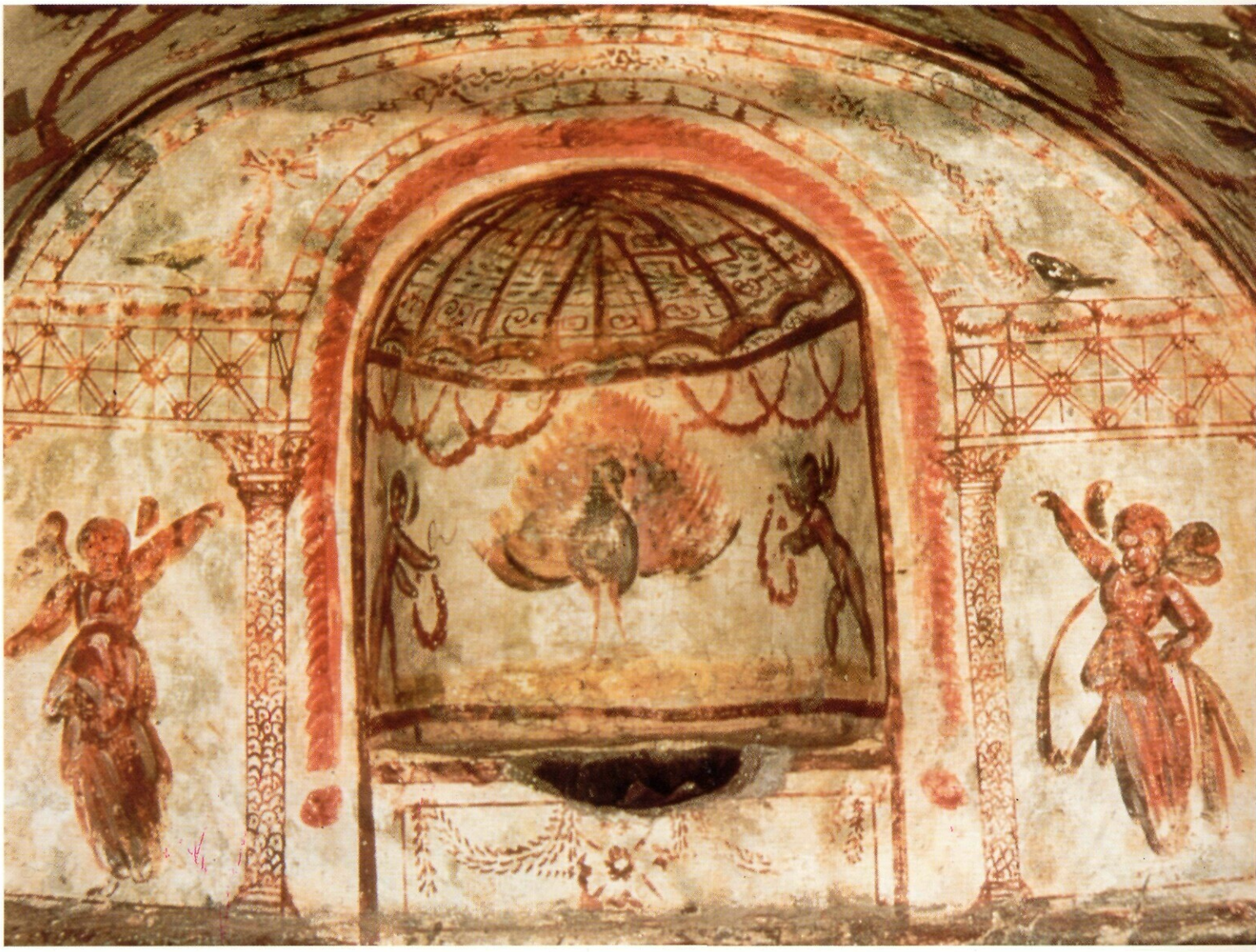


Fig. 146: Lunette and niche of the arcosolium in Cubiculum O.

Arcosolium (fig. 141) – The face is narrow and is decorated with a long row of small flowers mixed with large dark green flowers, and, at the sides, with a palm leaf. The under-arch has a tondo, 19½ inches (50cm) in diameter at its centre, made up of a large crown of flowers containing the bust of a young

decorated with many ribbons. Birds flutter in the centre or peck at flowers. Four winged cupids are tying a festooned garland to the hanging wreaths. The colours are grey, pale blue, red and brown.

On the right of the under-arch is a panel, 24½ x 38½ inches (62 x 98cm), of *The three Hebrews in the*

fiery furnace of Babylon (fig. 144) from Daniel 3:19-23. This scene is also painted in Cubiculum A (fig. 41), but in a very different manner. Noteworthy is the marked presentation of the grey furnace, with copious red flames above and below. The youths are bare-headed and dressed like the Victories. The colours are red, yellow and pale blue.

To the left, in a panel 41½ inches (105cm) wide, is the scene of *The feeding of the five thousand* (Matthew 15:32-38) in the manner common to funerary painting (fig. 145). The edge of Christ's cloak is marked with a swastika, as is that of Moses on the opposite wall (fig. 134). As there was no room within the border for the head of Christ (who is 65cm tall) and for his full, pale blue halo, the painter has had to plan it outside the contours of the panel. The scene takes place before a portico with apses, which has a side doorway. The colours are red, yellow and pale blue.

The lunette of the arcosolium (fig. 146) is 48½ inches (123cm) high and 73½ inches (187cm) wide. In it is a niche with apses, 29 x 25 inches (74 x 64cm), with a large peacock displaying in the background and, on either side, two naked, winged genii holding a garland of flowers in both hands. The half-vault is completely decorated by a large shell with intersecting lines and strokes. Beneath it hang festoons of flowers. The colours are red, black, dark green and purple. The base of the niche is decorated with a heavy wreath of flowers.

On either side of the niche is a pergola with Corinthian columns, one fluted and the other decorated with scales. They are covered with a wooden trellis, drawn to look like a transenna. Beneath each pergola is a Winged Victory dressed in a high-waisted tunic with wide flounces. In one hand she holds the veil which blows across her, and with the other she appears to be calling out towards the centre, but more probably the artist forgot to paint the crown in her hand, just as he forgot the veil of the Victory on the left.

There is a bird on each pergola, and they seem to peck at a garland of flowers which follows the curve of the arch over the niche and appears to hang out in front of them. The garland is enclosed above and below by two double lines, each decorated with many pyramid-shaped palmettes as a connecting device. The colours are brown, red and black.

CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS AND CONCLUSIONS

The first problem is the dating of the paintings. To what period are they to be attributed? It is fairly easy to establish a *terminus ad quem* and a *terminus a quo*. Since the paintings clearly have a funerary purpose, they must have been carried out before the very last of the burials took place in the catacomb, about 410 AD. They must, in fact, be much older than this if they predated the burials and if, in the most recent of the cubicula, O, there had been time to dig extra loculi which had not been planned when the cubiculum was originally built and decorated. There had been time to break into the arched recess at the rear in order to install a slab to hang lamps from. There had been time for cracks to develop in the recess itself and for these to have been filled up and repaired. All this leads one to suppose that a considerable period elapsed between the construction and decoration of the Cubiculum O, the latest, and the year 410.

On the other hand, the paintings can be no earlier than about 300 AD. The large scale of the architecture, the forms of which closely resemble those of the western area of the Callistus catacomb (which G.B. de Rossi calls San Sotere), the large number of pagan stones used for the burials, and the generally very heavy architectural and pictorial decoration—these are all factors pointing to the fourth century. In addition, we see that many of the themes are those typical of the period: *Christ among the apostles*, *Moses putting off his shoes*, the hand of God stretching from the clouds, *Job and his wife*, the swastika motif on clothing. And there are many more besides, all to be found for the first time on the sarcophagi of this age of peace. It is to this same period that we date the mixture of Christian and pagan motifs, such as is found on a large scale in the central and subsequent parts of the catacomb.

The only noteworthy grave goods are the large number of lamps, which are all of the rounded, pearl type, typical of the fourth century. Among the many inscriptions, the fairly frequent dedication *d(is) M(anibus)* on Christian stones takes us unquestionably to the same century, as does the Constantine monogram found in the *Victor* inscription in Gallery 6 and scratched on the wall of Cubiculum O.

Otherwise, the inscriptions are largely of the type which came into use in the second half of the third century: *ille* (or *illi*) *qui vixit tantum, dep. tunc (in pace)*. Several are on an even older model, of classical simplicity: *illi ille* or *ille tunc (in pace)*. Only the *Peregrinus* inscription in Gallery 6 is in a form of words which is unequivocally of the fourth century. All this fits in with the frequent use of the *duo nomina*, of which there are six examples, and the one example of three names: *M. Valerius Pudentianus*. The symbols found on these inscriptions—the dove, with or without the olive branch, the barrel, and the Constantine monogram which we have already mentioned—also fit it.

On the other hand, it would be fruitless to search for the formulations and symbols which are typical of the second half of the fourth century and later, such as *quiescit, iacet, positus est, requiescit*, especially preceded by an initial *hic* or other reference to the burial and its preparation. From this point of view the catacomb shows no evidence of late date, and can usefully be contrasted with the Commodilla complex in general, and particularly the most recently discovered part. The homogeneous nature of the latter's inscriptions, together with the wealth of palms, monograms and monogrammed crosses (with and without A and O) inscribed around its loculi, indicate that it belongs to the second half of the fourth century.[1]

This evidence leads us to the conclusion that the Via Latina catacomb was dug entirely in the first half of the fourth century, and that the bulk of the burials took place before approximately 360 AD. After that date the catacomb was used only sporadically for inhumation.

For a fuller understanding of the question we should now also look at what the paintings tell us.

They can be divided into four groups, to be attributed to different dates and hands. First we have Cubiculum A, from which B and C have to be distinguished on account of the different treatment of *Isaac's meal*, the *Jonah* scenes, *Moses drawing water from the rock*, and the overall decoration in general.

Then comes the grouping of Cubicula D, E and F. It is not only that *The angel standing in Balaam's way* is painted quite differently here compared with Cubiculum B, but, even more importantly, because the decoration deals with subjects and compositions which are totally new.

Even if only out of respect for the topography, the group of cubicula, I to O, has to be distinguished from the previous ones. Here there is evident imitation of Cubicula B and C in the themes (*The crossing of the Red Sea, The raising of Lazarus* and scenes connected with the event, *Samson slaying the lion*), but they are treated in very different ways. No real dependence on D, E and F can be established: rather, we notice many differences in the decoration.

It is noteworthy that this subdivision corresponds to a comparable (if not larger) number of groups of noble families who used the catacomb to prepare their burials. Each would have chosen their own painter, and there is no reason for us to suppose that we are actually looking at the work of four distinct generations of artists.

Such a supposition would indeed be excluded by the common characteristics which the paintings display. These point to no very great distance between their dates of composition. As already mentioned, they were all executed on two layers of plaster and almost all with the same type of framing. The same colours predominate in all the paintings, although dark green is sometimes used in the place of red, for no apparent reason. As we saw in the previous descriptions, the same decorative motifs and the same architectural forms are repeated over and over again. Both in the D, C and F and the I to O groups of cubicula we find areas with profane, that is, non-sacred and even outright pagan, decoration. These alternate with others which are filled with Biblical scenes. Throughout, there is a taste for scenes new to funerary painting, and where traditional scenes are handled there is a tendency to break with accepted forms and to allow new sources of inspiration to lead to compositional enlargement and experiment. All these factors contribute to a certain uniformity of taste in artists and clients alike, a uniformity which would indicate that the period over which the catacomb was excavated and decorated must have been relatively short.

The catacomb does, however, cover a fair area of ground and contains a good number of burials. My calculation is that some 1,000 cubic yards (800 cubic metres) of rock must have been dug out, often in difficult conditions, such as when digging

Fig. 147: Cubiculum O.

tombs and light wells. If transport to the dumping area is also taken into consideration, this figure can be doubled.[2]

To this must be added the period during which burials were actually carried out. An approximate calculation gives a number of some 400 persons buried in 325 tombs. The time span required for this process would be a minimum, let us say, of fifty years.

We have to suppose that the various parts of the catacomb were not all excavated and decorated at the same time, but rather in successive phases as the necessity arose, sometimes over considerable periods of time, therefore. This was the practice generally followed in all the catacombs. In our case, in particular, proof comes from what we have already noticed concerning the digging of Galleries 2 and 3. But we do not know how large a population the catacomb was intended to serve, and without this essential information, it is not possible to make a proper estimate of the length of time it was in use.

We can apparently exclude, first of all, the supposition that the catacomb belonged to the whole community of the faithful, or even to some parish of the *urbe* as its own official burial area. Usually such catacombs developed around the tomb of a martyr, and they were all of considerable extent. Such characteristics certainly do not apply to our catacomb.

We know about these larger catacombs largely from ancient liturgical texts and from the accounts of pilgrims of the early Middle Ages. None of these refers to the Via Latina catacomb. A careful survey by Professor Josi of all the information relative to Roman cemeteries shows that it was forgotten right from the end of ancient times—not long, that is, after it had ceased to be used for burials.

It is therefore a private catacomb for a restricted circle of families. This private character seems to me to explain the singular mixture of the sacred and the profane found in its decoration. It is difficult to believe that if the catacomb had belonged to the whole community and was therefore subject to ecclesiastical authority, paintings such as *The figure of Tellus* in Cubiculum E or the scenes with Hercules in Cubiculum N would have been tolerated. Furthermore, in none of the large public catacombs of the fourth century does one find so many empty spaces and walls without burials as in this one. This confirms that it was not a burial place open to all but was reserved for the members of privileged families. Space could therefore be wasted rather than exploited.

Unfortunately, it is no longer possible to know how many families used the catacomb, nor who they were. The most important inscriptions, marking the tombs in the arcosolia, have disappeared. The ones remaining are those of loculi burials, which bear various names and do not allow a clear reconstruction of family groupings to be made. These may well have belonged to *humiliores*, who were permitted to be buried near their patrons only because they had been clients. Among them we find a number of *Herrii, Aurelii* (two stelae), *Aelii, Tullii, Valerii*, and *Vibii*.

Nor does an analysis of the various component parts of the catacomb provide more precise data. Cubicula 2a, A and A' each contains a distinct family. The two cubicula B and C form a single unit, as can be seen from the architecture and the decoration, which must have been commissioned by a single client. If I venture to say that the three rooms D, E and F appear to me to have been commissioned by a single client for a single family, a few eyebrows may be raised. But one should bear in mind that D cannot be separated from E, not only because it is E's antechamber but also because its decoration was conceived on the same criteria and with the same taste, and that F is also dependent on antechamber D and has in common with E the same scenes showing large peacocks in front of a vase (figs 77, 86) and the same manner of diagonally shading the windows of the small temple and the light wells of the ceiling. Finally, only

the owner of the three arcosolia in F could have planned just one tomb in E and none in D. A similar scheme can be found in the large Hall I, where the decoration of the right-hand arcosolium is exclusively profane and matches perfectly that in the central room, while the left-hand arcosolium is full of scenes of a Christian character.

What the legal status of Galleries 2, 3, 4 and 6 was is difficult to say. They were probably of common ownership, to be used at will, as the shaft in Gallery 5 certainly was.

The rooms following, from H to O, also seem to form a single unit, or, as de Rossi would have said, a single large quadruple cubiculum. The transennas between L and M and N and O are no obstacle to this thinking, as they exist also between B and C, which certainly form a single unit. It is also obvious that Cubiculum O, with its single tomb, must have formed part of a single unit together with N in order to accommodate a family, however modest. In addition, N and O are copies of B and C, both in architecture and in decoration, and this would not have been so if there had been more than one owner.

We have seen that there are no two rooms more diametrically opposed in their pictorial decoration than these are: one totally pagan, the other openly Christian, more or less as in Hall I, where the right-hand arcosolium is completely profane, and the left-hand one is completely Christian. This provides further confirmation of what we have said already about the D-F complex. It was possible for a single client to commission such dissimilar decoration for two different rooms.

I do not hold with the objection that the complex of rooms I-O was too large for a single family. First of all, it could have been a large and wealthy family, as is proved by the architecture and the richness of the decoration. Furthermore, if we count the number of tombs available in all these rooms, we find that there were comparatively few: four in I, two in M, four in N and one in Oa; eleven in total. Not too many for a large family, even if we take into account that some of these tombs might have contained a double burial.

The same can be said about the choice of scenes. These develop naturally, and are distributed throughout the five rooms with perfect variety, without a single topic being repeated, except for the *Woman praying* in I*d*, who returns in Oa. This, however, is of little importance, as it is purely an idealized representation of the deceased, which each artist could repeat at will on each tomb as a filler between scenes. More remarkable is the matching of the smallest, purely decorative motifs. As with the scenes themselves, the ornamental human and animal figures are never repetitive, with the exception of leaping kids or goats and certain large birds feeding, which are very similar.

A characteristic of these rooms is the use of the palmette, which is reduced to a schematic drawing, that is, an isosceles triangle formed by four or five horizontal dashes. Its use to connect the two sides of a frame, either at the top or at the sides, is also unusual.

Both in Hall I and Cubiculum N, panels often seem to be connected to a supporting frame by two curved lines on each side. The outside corners of these paintings sometimes appear to be reinforced by L-shaped panels ending in drop-shaped flowers. Elsewhere we sometimes find finely serrated contour lines, a feature which also appears in Gallery H, which is one unit with I.

On the walls of L and N there are rectangles full of peculiar geometric floral motifs, which are repeated (figs. 113, 123). On the walls of I and the vaults of O there are vases containing conically shaped plants in bloom (fig. 133); on the walls of M and in the niches in O are the same series of geometric designs; and both in the lacunars of H and on the pediment of N there is an oval-shaped motif which does not occur anywhere else.

All these particular coincidences of small detail seem to me to support the thesis that all the rooms from H to O form a single unit, both from the architectural and the decorative points of view, and that they therefore belonged to a single client, that is, to one family alone.[3]

The nature of the work itself points to this conclusion. One would not decorate a series of rooms with such care and refinement before completion of the whole complex, otherwise the work of the plasterers and painters would be dirtied or damaged by the coming and going of barrows and workmen, laden with baskets full of earth, and we would have found traces of related retouching and repairs, which do not appear anywhere.

Having decided that all the paintings in the catacomb can be placed into not more than four groups, and therefore that they were painted during four periods of time, and supposing that the excavation of the catacomb started at the beginning of the age of peace and had reached Cubiculum A around 320, we can conclude that by about 350 the last chamber, Cubiculum O, had also been completed and decorated. The majority of the burials therefore took place between circa 315 and 360. After this date there were probably fewer and fewer burials, especially in the outlying parts of the catacomb. It is also symptomatic that none of the sixteen surviving funerary inscriptions bears any date, a sure sign of their considerable antiquity, at least in relative terms.

Let us therefore assume that all these paintings were carried out between 320 and 350. I believe that this period of mass conversion to Christianity represents a plausible explanation for the presence of so many pagan scenes in our catacomb. I refer specifically to Cubiculum N, which I have called the room of Hercules, and to Cubiculum E of the Tellus figure, not to mention antechamber Room D and the passageway to O. It is a substantially new element in catacomb history, which slightly disconcerted us from the beginning and has given rise to a great variety of opinions, even on the part of the most well-informed observers.

To begin with, some thought that we had found a heretical burial chamber. I do not believe, however, that this would explain much. By definition, heretics were Christians, and we do not know of any who worshipped Hercules or Tellus, nor of any other deities hidden under their guise, least of all the sects present in Rome during the fourth century, such as the Donatists, Novatianists, Arians, Montanists and Manicheans. This suggestion has already been used to explain away new elements otherwise difficult to account for, especially as regards the Hypogeum of the Aurelii on the Via Labicana in Rome. Of how little value it is can be seen when one attempts to attribute a particular reason to each new element.

In the same way, it has been suggested that it is a syncretistic burial chamber. The term is very vague,[4] and if it means only that in this catacomb there are both Christian and pagan paintings, then it does not explain anything. If, on the other hand, it means that the clients who commissioned these paintings were people who put all religions together, reducing Christianity, Judaism and the various forms of paganism to one and the same polymorphic religion, it is a concept which needs further proof—all the more so as such ideological positions were essentially philosophical and abstract, and it does not seem to us that they ever filtered into the practice of everyday life, apart from the normal contacts or borrowings which have always existed between cults being followed at the same time and in the same place. What is more, in the hundred or more paintings which decorate the catacomb we did not find anything which may be called truly syncretistic: the scenes are either entirely pagan or inspired by the most orthodox form of Christianity, without any mixture of the two. It is difficult to say whether the crosses found in the decoration of the arch of the left-hand arcosolium in Cubiculum N were intentional.

A further explanation could be to suggest that by the fourth century the myths of Alcestis and Hercules and the figure of Tellus had been given an acceptable interpretation for Christians as allegories of conjugal love, of virtue resisting vice, of fortitude and patriotism. They would then be considered more suitable for Christian tombs than the representations of Orpheus, or Mecury, or of Love and Psyche, or of Helios on his chariot, or the tales of Ulysses and the Phoenix. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient information to substantiate such an important hypothesis, either from the artistic or the literary point of view, and we therefore prefer not to support this solution.[5]

We believe rather that the owners were large families, some of whose members had in part already converted to Christianity, while others had remained pagan, each having his cubiculum decorated according to his beliefs. And there were no ecclesiastical laws forbidding burial with one's relatives, even if some of them were pagans.

It is possible in the same way to explain the pagan paintings and inscriptions in the Vibia catacomb and the apparently pagan burials found in a number of tomb chambers recently discovered in the Vigna Cassia catacomb in Syracuse, next to others that are certainly Christian.

Let us now deal with what has been the most striking feature of these paintings from the beginning: the fact that so many of the topics are new, either to paleochristian art as a whole, or to funerary painting in particular, as has been noted after the description of each scene. On this subject, we must make the following remarks.

Generally, the scenes already known to funerary art faithfully repeat traditional patterns with, at the most, some slight modifications introduced during the fourth century. It is noticeable that in *The sacrifice of Isaac*, the taking up of Elijah in *The chariot of fire*, and *The three Hebrews in the fiery furnace*, there are elements which are typical of sarcophogus art. The only exception is *The raising of Lazarus*, which is treated completely differently from either the painting or the sarcophagus tradition.

On the contrary, subjects new to funerary painting and known up to now from funerary reliefs alone, are treated in a completely different way. There is no literal imitation, there is much greater freedom in the composition of scenes, figures and landscape. It should be added that these scenes, which had been introduced to Christian iconography relatively recently, had not yet adopted a fixed canon in the minds of the artists, who treated them with a certain freedom, in accordance with their personal tastes and abilities, although they still drew some inspiration from their predecessors. And of course it must be pointed out that the mere change of medium from a sarcophagus to the walls of a catacomb does in itself require considerable adaptation of treatment for any scene.

Such are *The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden*, *Lot fleeing from Sodom*, *The blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh*, *The crossing of the Red Sea*, *The pillar of fire*, *Moses receiving the Commandments*, and *The angel standing in Balaam's way*. We can add to these *The Sermon on the Mount*, even if it is commonly thought to be represented in the famous, though completely different, painting in the Hypogeum of the Aurelii.

There is a third group of scenes new to the whole of funerary iconography and otherwise found only outside it, especially in churches and in miniatures. They include *Rahab saving the Israelite spies*, *The drunkenness of Noah*, *The vision at Mamre*, *Isaac's meal*, *Joseph's dream* and *Joseph talking with his brothers in Egypt*, *The meeting of Judah with Tamar* (if this is in fact the subject of figure 29), *Jacob bringing the children of Israel into Egypt*, *The finding of Moses*, *Phinehas who has stabbed Zimri and Cozbi*, the scenes of Samson slaying the lion, chasing the foxes into the Philistines' fields, and killing the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass, *The soldiers casting lots for Christ's*

clothes, and the complex of scenes showing Adam and Eve contrite and Cain and Abel making their offerings. Perhaps only one decorative theme deserves to be added to this list, that of the deer and oxen at the spring.

The majority of these scenes had already been painted in churches dating from the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth, as can be seen from the *Dittochaeon* of Prudentius, from the *Tituli historiarum* of St Ambrosius, and from St Paulinus of Nola,[6] but unfortunately how the scenes were presented is unknown, as the paintings are now lost.

On the walls of the Dura Europo synagogue is *The finding of Moses*; in the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore, and in other monuments of the end of the fourth century and later, there are many other examples of these scenes,[7] but they are always of a much later period and very different in their manner of representation. The only exception regarding period is the scene in Dura Europo, and regarding composition, possibly Samson slaying the lion and chasing the foxes in a fragmentary mosaic recently discovered at Mopsuestia.[8]

Finally, a number of other scenes, to my knowledge, were known only from illuminated codices of the scriptures dating from the sixth century and later, such as the scenes of Phinehas and the arrival of Jacob in Egypt, which we have already mentioned.[9] But in these cases not only is the time interval much greater: there is usually a much greater diversity of paintings, if only from a purely iconographical point of view.

Moreover, if we compare even the scenes from the first two groups with the examples remaining in the churches mentioned (Santa Maria Maggiore, St Paul's in Rome, San Aquilino in Milan, the Baptistry in Naples, the churches of Ravenna, not to mention Dura Europo and the gates of Santa Sabina), we find that the differences between the former and the latter are just as great.[10]

Having said this, we must ask why the painters of our catacomb took to this new fashion, and from what models they drew their inspiration—supposing, of course, that they really needed models, and not giving them credit for any innovative ability of their own. The hypothesis of model and source cannot be held as an absolute axiom, otherwise it would lead us to a *processus in infinitum*, and we would be faced with the absurd situation of having a multitude of artistic and literary facts which were not invented by anybody and where everything was copied from somebody else.

Even if we choose to be hard on our artists and suppose that all, or nearly all, the innovations in their paintings were not due to them but only copies of existing models, where should we look for those models?

As the scenes deal mainly with Biblical stories, it has been suggested that we should look at illuminated codices of either the Old or the New Testaments, or, even better, at illustrated anthologies of Biblical stories. The models for our painters would have been miniatures. This type of explanation is very convenient, and very sweeping, because, since no Biblical miniatures of that period are known to survive, we can refer to them in all certainty and without fear of contradiction any time we encounter a new artistic theme. We have a master key to open every door we find closed in front of us. The problem is that by opening the door in this way we find ourselves in a darkened room, and it can be questioned whether it is good practice to seek the explanation of something obscure in something even more obscure, not to say completely unknown.

In fact, we know of Biblical paintings dating back to the second century, and of sculptures of the third century, but not of contemporary miniatures nor of any dating to the following two hundred years, apart from the few pages from the so-called *Itala* of Quedlimburg. Indeed, we do not even know that contemporary miniatures ever

Fig. 148: Looking from the central area of Hall I into the left-hand arcosolium cde

Fig. 149: The right-hand wall and niche of Cubiculum C.
Fig. 150: Isaac's Meal *in the left-hand arcosolium lunette of Cubiculum A.*

existed. It is true that it has been claimed that the paintings in the Dura Europo synagogue suggest the existence of illustrated Hebrew Bibles, which must be considered the primary source of inspiration for the first Biblical painters, both Jewish and Christian, at least where the Old Testament is concerned, because the scenes from the New Testament would have been derived from illuminated Christian codices. These are abstract hypotheses, however, not backed by any positive, demonstrable facts.

Furthermore, if the Jews of Dura used illustrated Bibles, these must have been Hebrew texts, and it is known that there is an enormous difference, *chaos magnum*, between a Hebrew Bible and a Greek Bible, as used by Christians. It is difficult to understand why, if the first illustrators of Bibles could invent a certain iconography, the first painters of catacombs could not. There is a further point which, to my mind, is fundamental, and that is that the most ancient Biblical miniatures we know of are very much later in date and they generally present a totally different iconography for the same stories. How is it possible to rely on an iconology which looks for artistic sources which are of a much later date and of very different character?

If we limit ourselves to the case in point, we find that the painters of our catacomb often repeat scenes traditional to catacomb painting, in others they are closer to sarcophagus art, in others again they draw inspiration directly from church paintings, but in none do we find any clear reminiscence of illustrated books. The entire decorative framework of the panels is alien to that, as is the composition, which is wide and airy in the distribution of its elements, closely resembling architectural styles. Together with the total absence of titling, all this in no way favours the hypothesis. Also absent are any real continuous stories, such as are typical of illuminated codices. The only true cycle is that of Jonah, which evidently follows other catacomb paintings and the four episodes of which exist rather because of architectural necessity than from any desire to tell a complete story.

I do not believe, therefore, that it is possible to explain the innovative iconography of our catacomb by looking for models in unknown Biblical illustrations.

On the contrary, it is safer to look for a source in sarcophagus and basilica art, as there is fairly ample information about both of these for the period in which our catacomb was being decorated.

The influence of church art on fourth-century catacomb painting is freely admitted, mainly in regard to certain scenes which by their nature seem to have been created for the apses of churches. The recently discovered cubiculum in the Commodilla catacomb has clearly shown how, in the second half of the fourth century, catacomb painters often drew inspiration for scenes and motifs not only from basilica art but also from sarcophagus art.[11]

As we proceeded through our catacomb, we noted large numbers of scenes that had appeared on earlier sarcophagi. Other scenes that are unknown to contemporary funerary art may not be alien to it at all: the examples may simply have disappeared. However, we did find most of them on the walls of basilicas of slightly later date.

Concerning works that are now lost, we unfortunately know nothing of the exact iconography of the scenes and up to what point they were similar to those in our catacomb. There are still a certain number extant, such as—among the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore—*The vision at Mamre*, *Isaac's meal*, and *Rahab saving the Israelite spies*, and—at Dura Europo—*The finding of Moses*, but their iconography is so different that it bears no resemblance to that in our catacomb. One subject in particular, that of *The crossing of the Red Sea*, recurs at Dura, on the doors of Santa Sabina, and on the mosaics of Santa Maria Maggiore, as well as on sarcophagi. When they are compared, it can be seen that, while the scene in our catacomb is in itself

profoundly original, it is closer in panel composition and in detail to the sarcophagi than to the church paintings. The same conclusion is reached when comparing other scenes in the catacomb with the forms they take in the basilicas and at Dura, and then with the sarcophogi forms. The similarity of the compositions is always closer to the contemporary art of sarcophagi than it is either to the older art of Dura, or the more recent art of the Roman basilicas.

These remarks should be enough to convince us that the painters of our catacomb drew inspiration from sarcophagus art rather than from that of the basilicas, and that they sought to apply the former rather than the latter to the walls of the catacomb. However, as the surviving examples of church art of the fourth and fifth centuries are so rare, and since many of the scenes from our catacomb have, up to now at least, found no parallel in sarcophagus art, any clear-cut judgement on our part appears premature. We must be satisfied to conclude with the same words as we used regarding the new cubiculum in the Commodilla catacomb.

Without underestimating the originality of the painters who had such talent, and who were better able to create works of art than we might suspect, we can state that in general they borrowed much from the contemporary art of the sarcophagi and basilicas, as well as from the forms of traditional funerary painting. This is a very important discovery. Until now, the influence of sarcophagus and basilica art on funerary painting had not been recognized nor could it have been verified on this scale. Initially, funerary art had contributed much to both the others, and now, in exchange, it was freely borrowing back the majority of their characteristics—their topics, method of presentation, and general significance.

I believe it is all a matter of fashion. The tastes of fourth-century Christians, used to the triumphs of the Church and the magnificence of its organization and its cult, had changed rapidly. Even on their tombs they were no longer content with the simple and austere traditional scenes, but preferred to enlarge on the well-known compositions and to introduce others to mirror the new ones shining in the basilicas or proudly decorating grand sarcophagi.

However, if this were a fashion, as it were, of the fourth century, why are there hardly any traces of it in the great catacombs of Callistus, of Domitilla, of Peter and Marcellinus, where, during that same century, there were many burials and where many walls were painted? The answer is not an easy one. Perhaps in those catacombs, which were under complete ecclesiastical authority, the groups of *fossores*—the grave diggers and artists—could not shift too far away from the old traditions. Perhaps rich people were needed, like the *Leo officialis annonae* of Commodilla and the owners of our catacomb, to engage artists who could distance themselves from the traditional schemes and bring new scenes and new methods of composition to the walls of catacombs. That this was something which occurred very infrequently can be inferred not only from the few examples that have survived, but also from the freshness and freedom of the new scenes, painted as though they had not yet been mummified by repetition and convention.

Some have already found the key to the mystery in the Eastern tradition, Syriac, Alexandrine, or other. If oriental artists were at work here, then no wonder they produced works so original and so different from those of painters faithful to Roman traditions. Unfortunately, however, the presence of these oriental artists can only be a hypothesis, as we know nothing about a fourth-century school of paleochristian painting in the East (the paintings of Baqawat and Bawit are later and of a different genre from ours), and even less about art apprentices from the East being sent to work in Roman catacombs. Once again it would be like taking a spent candle to light a dark corner.

The remarks made concerning the Biblical scenes should also be applied to some specific decorative motifs, and especially to the pagan and profane scenes in Cubicula D, E and I and in Hall I, but we believe this is better done by specialists in Hellenistic-Roman funerary painting, all the more so as we have seen that they were probably introduced into our catacomb as an alien form, purely because of family connections with the Christian owners. But it would be interesting if here, too, we were able to discover a dual source of inspiration in non-funerary paintings (for Cubiculum E and Hall I) and in sarcophagus sculpture (for example, the stories of Hercules).

There remains the question as to what general meaning these paintings could have had, or whether, indeed, there was one at all, at least for each individual group. Let us take as an example the Cubicula B-C complex. There are thirty-five Biblical scenes, mostly from Genesis and Exodus, and about half of them are new to funerary art. Will it be possible to find a specific allegorical meaning for each of them? I believe it will be, but only on a purely hypothetical basis—without proof, for the majority of them at least, that a given meaning was intended by the artist or the client.

It would be more difficult, and I believe futile, to attempt to encompass all these specific scenes in a single, general meaning, including them all and reducing them to an integral work of art, so that there would be a plausible reason for the location of each painting in a particular place in a particular room. I would not even hazard to state with any certainty that such a unifying concept (for example, a general idea of salvation or of eternal beatitude) could really have existed in the mind of client or artist.

It may be that it was all simply due to a general desire for religious decoration. The painters who took the most singular Biblical stories from church walls and transferred them to the catacombs would have been unlikely to want to give them a new meaning suitable to their new location. Funerary painting thus loses its symbolic, unitary character, and Styger's historicist theory, though completely invalid, may be proved to be true by these most recently discovered exemplars.

NOTES TO CHAPTERS

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NOTES TO CHAPTERS

Introduction

1. Page 10: *L'eta imperiale romana e la caduta del mondo antico.*
2. Page 13: *Iscrizioni cristiane a Roma: Testimonianze di vita cristiana (secoli III-VII)* Biblioteca Patristica, 7, Florence 1986.
3. Page 16: *Lepusclus*, a syncopated form of *lepusculus*, a pet name which is also used by Plautus.
4. Page 18: *Die Katakombengemälde und ihre alten Kopien* Freiburg in Breisgau 1891.

Chapter III: Description of the Paintings

1. Page 62 (fig. 29): A. Calderini, G. Chierici, C. Cecchelli *La Basilica di San Lorenzo Maggiore in Milano*, page 234 and plates XCV and XCVI.
2. Page 68: G. Wilpert *Le Pitture delle Catacombe romane* plate 54.
3. Page 72 (fig. 42): H. Marrou *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 1969, pages 250-56.
4. Page 72 (fig. 43): See the passages referred to by Seligson in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* X, pages 18-19, and the present author's comments on this scene in *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia di Archeologia* XXX, 1958, pages 107-116.
5. Page 80 (figs. 55, 82): *Rivista di Archeologia cristiana* 1939, pages 245, 252.
6. Page 83 (fig. 59): A.N. Grabar noted (*Comptes rendus* 1956, page 277) that this is explained by the Ashburnam Pentateuch miniature (Oscar von Gebhardt *The Miniatures of the Ashburnam Pentateuch* London 1883, lower part of plate XIII), but this is about the burial of Jacob in Palestine and the carts are empty. Closer to it is a similar representation, which Dr Carlo Nordström has pointed out to me, in the psalter of 1066 in the British Museum (Add. 19.352 f.141) of a single cart carrying seven people and entering a gate, which has certainly to do with the arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt. It would also be useful to compare the same scene as depicted in the Vatican octateuch (cod. Vat. gr.746 f.132v) and in that of the Evangelical School at Smyrna (f.57v, D. Hesseling *L'Octateuque de Smyrne* Leiden 1909, plates 11, 46 [139]).
7. Page 84 (fig. 62): See *Rivista di Archeologia cristiana* 1951, pages 21, 111.
8. Page 90 (fig. 66): Eight lines are to be seen. Taken together, they may represent the twelve paths which, according to rabbinical legend, were opened by Moses in the Red Sea, one road for each tribe. See C.O. Nordström *The Water Miracles of Moses* in *Orient. Suecana* VII, 1958, pages 87ff.
9. Page 93 (figs. 65, 68): *Rivista di Archeologia cristiana* 1951, pages 31, 107.
10. Page 103 (fig. 79): I owe this interpretation to Margherita Guarducci, (*Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* XXXVII, 1964-1965, pages 259-291), and it was later well confirmed by a floor mosaic in the Carthage museum (*Röm. Quart.* 66, 1971, page 148, plate 24*b*). At first I thought it was a portrayal of the suicide of Cleopatra, and its presence in a tomb was certainly difficult to explain. Carcopino (*Comptes rendus* 1956, page 276) suggested it was the union of Zeus the serpent with Persephone from which Dionysus Sabatius was born—the initiate who had a metal serpent passed into his chest (Clem. Al., *Cohort. ad gentes*; Arnob *Adv. nat.* V, 21 and Firmico Mat. *De errore* 10), but we do not know that this subject became an art theme nor how it could have been used as decoration for a sepulchre. In any case, we do not find the great dragon of the legend, but a tiny asp. This same objection also applies to the idea that it is the union of Olympias with the serpent from which Alexander the Great was born, a scene which is often depicted within borders, as Stern has pointed out (A. Alfoldi *Die Kontorniaten* Budapest 1943, page 102 and plates III 1-2; IV 1-2; X 5; XII 9; XIV 1-2; XXX 9-10; XXXII 5-7; XXXIII 4; XXXVII 10-

11; XXXVIX 3-4, and XL 9), but the manner is too different. Thus Picard (*Bulletin des antiquaires de France* 1956, page 80) refuses to recognize this portrayal, and he too believes rather that it is a representation of the death of Cleopatra, with symbolic intent. The serpent which is found beside various sleeping figures on the covers of sarcophagi is nothing more than the *genius*, the departing spirit, for Cumont (*Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire*, pages 392ff) and is therefore out of context with our painting. The Macedonian relief mentioned by Eisele for the sacred wedding of Zeus with Persephone (in Roscher *Lexikon der Mythologie* IV, pages 252ff) is more likely than the episode of Olympias.

11. Page 121 (fig. 105): Wilpert *Pitture* plates 179, 181.
12. Page 121 (fig. 111): This scene has been much discussed. Some say it is *A return from the dead* (especially W. Arteli in *Rhein Merkur*, June 7, 1957, page 8, who opts for the vision of Ezekiel) or the miraculous healing of an invalid. J. Hempel (in *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 68, 1956 page 273) sees a *Creation of the first man* as a work of God assisted by the angels. Most doctors say it is an *Anatomy lesson*, for example, repeatedly by C. Proskauer (as in *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 1958 pages 672-686, together with the opinion of several others). It seems to me that the patient is alive, and I would therefore opt for a lesson in surgery. Also of this opinion is the doctor, G.W. Corner in *Proceedings of the American Philos. Society* 101, 1957, pages 245-248, and the archeologist, C. Picard in *Comptes rendus* 1956, page 278. It seems clear to me that the location of the painting must indicate an idealized portrayal of the deceased, buried in the arc underneath. He is a famous doctor surrounded by his pupils or colleagues, carrying out his profession. In connection with this interpretation, I see the characters painted in the webs of the vault as various masters of medicine, that is, the learned men with whom the deceased had studied and whom he wished to honour. This opinion is fully shared by Picard, *cit.*
13. Page 130 (fig. 119): The scene is new to funerary art, but there is no doubt about its interpretation as a basically similar scene appears in ivories (A. Goldschmidt *Elfenbeinskulpturen* I, page 20, plate XV, no. 31 and page 66, plate LVII, no. 132a) and in illuminated psalters, like the one in Utrecht f.12 at psalm XXI, 19 (E.T. de Wald *The Utrecht Psalter* plate XIX). The same instrument used for drawing lots is seen in the bas-relief now in the Berlin museums (O. Wulff *Altckristl. Bildwerke in Berlin*, page 16, no. 27). It is impossible that one of the two poles held by the soldier on the right is a stick with the sponge on the end, as has been interpreted in the light of the Utrecht Psalter.
14. Page 144 (fig. 134): On the left-hand border of the surviving painting in the loculum, these superimposed grey-coloured areas can be seen quite clearly. Twelve could be counted with reference to the 12 paths mentioned above, but I do not believe that this was the artist's intention because these lines appear, in no sort of order, elsewhere in the painting. Nor do I believe that the arch of pink sky signifies the *nubes tenebrosa et illuminans noctem* of Exodus 14:20.
12. Page 146 (fig. 137): Apart from anything else, the figure of the mummy and the attitude of the character touching its forehead with the long rod render improbable the interpretation proposed by Graber (*Comptes rendus* 1956, page 277)—that these are the Hebrews crowding in front of the sanctuary built by Moses, according to Exodus 15-28, with Aaron or another priest at its door.

Chapter IV: Problems and Conclusions

1. Page 154: See *Inscr. christ. Urbis Romae* III, pages 317ff *Rivista di Archeologia cristiana* 1957, pages 7ff; 1958, pages 5ff.
2. Page 156: Today a normal workman can dig out an average of one and a third cubic yards (one cubic metre) of rock in a day. A good idea of how work proceeded in a catacomb under ecclesiastical authority is given by the third cubiculum of Eusebius in the Callistus catacomb, (marked 0 12 in G.B. de Rossi's *Roma Sotterranea* II, plate LIII; the entrance bears the words *fecit Iconius* [*et*] *adalbau*(*i*)*t oc loc*[*u*] *diebus X*). This was how long Iconius and his team took to dig out and plaster a room roughly 31 cubic yards (24 cubic metres), 34 cubic yards (26 cubic metres) if we include the entrance, but excluding, of course, light well and arcosolia which are not plastered. The total would be 105 cubic metres (80 cubic metres), a job materially impossible in ten days for one man.
3. Page 158: It should be noted, however, that many of these coincidences also exist between group D-F and the rooms after it: not one scene is repeated, there is the same use of imitation marble mirrors, of garlands hung in festoons, of stylized palmettes at the tops of panels, of fine braids intertwined with flowers, of garlands made up of oval shields decorated with spirals, of panels with serrated borders or with L-shaped brackets at the corners. The deer at the fountain in E and L-M are the same. Is it imitation, or has the work been done by the same team of artists? Here too there is a pagan cubiculum opposite a totally Christian cubiculum.
4. Page 158: See H. Pinard de la Boullaye in *Enciclopedia cattolica*, XI, 662ff.
5. Page 159: We found nothing to help us in M. Simon's book *Hercule et le christianisme*, Strasbourg

1955. Equally, in the gilt glass published by Garrucci, plate XXXIII, 3 and XXXV (where at No. 8 Hercules holds out his hand to Minerva, as in our fig. 125), are not relevant because they are of pagan origin and not Christian. However, J. Bayet's study (*Hercule funéraire*, in *Mél. de l'Ercole Franç.* 39, 1921-1922, pages 219ff) is of great help for the pagan interpretation.

6. Page 160: See the verses of St Ambrosius in Forcella and Seletti *Iscrizioni cristiane di Milano anteriori al sec. IX*, pages 224ff, and those of San Paolinus in *Carm.* XXVII, 620. Mentioned are *Isaac's meal, The vision at Mamre, Joseph's dream, Joseph talking with his brothers, Rahab saving the Israelite spies*, Samson and the lion and the foxes, and *The death of Absalom. The finding of Moses* was one of the original mosaics in Santa Maria Maggiore according to Wilpert *Mosaiken* I, page 466; *The vision at Mamre* had already been depicted as early as the third century in a painting placed at the very spot *ad terebinthum* (Garrucci *Storia* I, page 441).

7. Page 160: For example, *The vision at Mamre* appears in the mosaics at Santa Maria Maggiore (Wilpert *Mosaiken*, plate 10) and at San Vitale (C. Ricci *Tavole storiche dei mosaici di Ravenna*, plate 58), among the paintings of the ancient St Peter's (Wilpert *op. cit.* I, page 380, fig. 121) and of St Paul's (cod. Barb. lat. 4406, f.36). Among these can also be found *Joseph's dream* at fig. 41, which appears again during the ninth century at Santa Maria Antiqua (De Gruneisen *Sainte-Marie Antique*, page 163, fig. 89) and in various textile materials such as the one in the Golenischev collection in Strzygowski (*Orient oder Rom*, page 113, fig. 44) and at the Victoria and Albert Museum (A.F. Kendrick *Victoria and Albert Museum Textiles* III, 1922, page 25, plate XII). *Rahab saving the Israelite spies* is among the mosaics at Santa Maria Maggiore (Wilpert *op. cit.*, plate 24). *The meeting of Judah with Tamar* in Cubiculum A already appears in St Aquilinus in Milan, as previously mentioned. *The finding of Moses* is also in the Brescia reliquary (Garrucci *Storia*, plate 444). *Samson slaying the lion* is on textile in the Vatican's Museo Sacro, formerly the Sancta Sanctorum (Volbach *Tessuti del Museo sacro* I, page 38, plate 28), as well as on the floor at Mopsuestia, mentioned below. *Isaac's meal* is one of the mosaics at Santa Maria Maggiore (Wilpert *op. cit.*, plate II), and among the paintings of St Paul's (*cod. cit.* f 39) and those of ancient St Peter's (*cit.*). *The death of Absalom* is depicted in a painting in the Landesmuseum in Zurich (eighth-ninth century). Among the Ravenna mosaics, in the Galla Placida mausoleum there are deer at the fountain (Wilpert *op. cit.*, plate 52) depicted in a way similar to our fig. 116 (the iconography in the baptistry at Naples is completely different). *Joseph talking with his brothers in Egypt* is perhaps the same as that depicted on the throne at Ravenna (Garrucci *Storia*, plate 422, I).

8. Page 160: In the excavations mentioned in *Rivista di Archeologia cristiana* 1956, pages 41ff; from a communication of the discoverer, L. Budde, who also sent me two photographs, it would appear that the surviving remains of mosaics show the two scenes of the foxes and the fight with the lion in a composition very similar to that of our paintings.

9. Page 160: *The drunkenness of Noah* can be seen in the Vienna Genesis (Garrucci *Storia*, plate 112, 3) and in Cotton's Bible. It then appeared in the mosaics in Venice and Monreale (J.J. Tikkanen *Die Genesismosaiken in Venedig*, Helsingfors 1889) and then in the Octateuch (Vat. gr.746, f.54 and 58 and Vat. lat.5759, f.6). A fairly similar encounter of Judah and Tamar can be seen in the National Gallery in Munich (G. Leidinger *Miniaturen von Handschr. in München* VII, 1924, plate 28); less similar in Vat. gr.746 *cit.*, f.119, in the Octateuch of the Serraglio of Constantinople f.126 (T. Ouspensky *L'octateuque du Sérail à Constantinople*, plate 16, fig. 64) and in St John of Damascus in Paris (gr.923, f.79). In this same codex (f.246v) there are the scenes of Samson chasing the foxes into the fields of the Philistines and slaying the latter with the jawbone of an ass. The slaying also appears in Paris gr.510 *cit.* (Omont *cit.*, plate 49). A fairly similar *Death of Absalom* can be seen in the Moscow psalter (ms. gr.129 f.140v); a less similar one is at Athos (in the Pantocrator Monastery cod. 61, f.196). In Vat. gr.746, f.43 there is also an Adam and Eve, dressed *tunicis pelliceis* and sitting sadly on a rock, similar to our fig. 56.

10. Page 161: On the contrary, it is interesting to observe that in the paintings and sculptures of funerary art all the themes are repeated identically or with slight variations, but in churches and other non-funerary monuments there is the greatest possible variety because there was no fixed and obligatory tradition in iconography for them, and because during those early centuries variety and a certain originality—if not in the themes then at least in form—were deliberately sought after for such important structures. In this at least there is a close point of contact between the paintings of our catacomb and those of the churches.

11. Page 163: See *Rivista di Archeologia cristiana* 1958, page 42.

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GLOSSARY

acroter (pl. *acroteria* or *acroters*) the pedestal, or the ornament (often floral) on the pedestal, placed on the apex or at the sides of a pediment.
amphora (pl. *amphorae*) a two-handled tall-necked jug used to contain oil or wine.
ampulla (pl. *ampullae*) a small two-handled flask used to contain oil, wine or perfume.
acrosolium (pl. *arcosolia*) a form of arched tomb found in cubicula. The grave was made in the lower half of the arch and covered with a *mensa*, a shelf, and decorated, on the front.
apse a semicircular or polygonal recess, which is arched or domed.
architrave the various parts (lintel, jambs, etc.) that surround a doorway or window.
argil a type of clay used to make pottery.
breccia a composite rock made up of angular fragments of stone cemented together, often by lime.
capital the head or top of a column or pillar.
cinerary (adj) of or pertaining to ashes. A cinerary urn was used in ancient times to preserve the ashes of the dead after cremation.
cingulum (pl. *cinguli*) the Latin word for a belt or girdle.
cipolin (or *bardiglio*) an Italian marble containing veins of talc, mica, quartz, etc., which gives it alternations of colour, especially white and green.
columbarium (pl. *colombaria*) a niche in which to place funerary goods.
corbel a projection of stone or brick jutting out from (not merely attached to) the face of a wall to support a weight.
cornice the decoration along the top of a panel or wall.
crypt an underground chamber used for religious observances or as a burial place.
cubiculum (pl. *cubicula*) a tomb chamber containing the graves of several people , usually those of one family. The graves were made in the walls or in the floor. Cubicula frequently contain arcosolia.
dado the lower part of an interior wall decorated in a different material or colour from that of the upper part.
dalmatic a long robe with a slit on each side of the skirt and wide sleeves.
fossor (pl. *fossores*) a professional digger, painter and caretaker of graves. Fossores are frequently portrayed within the decoration of a catacomb.
fret an interlacing decorative pattern used for edging, cornices, etc., and usually made up of lines intersecting at right angles.
genie (pl. *genii*) a sprite or goblin.
gorgon a terrible or ugly person, from one of three mythical females with snakes for hair, whose look turned the beholder to stone.

gryphon (or *griffin*) a fabulous animal usually represented in art as having the head and wings of an eagle and the body and hindquarters of a lion.
herma (pl. *hermae*) a stone or marble head of Hermes, the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology, corresponding to the Roman god Mercury.
Hymettian marble a type of densely patterned marble from Mount Hymettus in Greece.
hypogeum or *hypogaeum* (pls. *hypogea, hypogaea*) an underground tomb chamber.
impost the upper course of a pillar, frequently projecting in the form of an ornamental moulding or capital, on which the foot of an arch rests.
lacunar (pl. *lacunaria* or *lacunars*) a ceiling consisting of sunk or hollowed compartments, or the sunken panels in such a ceiling.
loculus (pl. *loculi*) a simple grave within a catacomb, inserted in the wall of a passage, parallel to it, and sealed with marble or stone slabs or tiles. Often used to contain more than one body.
lucernaria (or *luminaria*) a light well that also served as a means of acess to a catacomb or hypogeum.
lunette the semicircular panel under the arch of an arcosolium, used for decoration.
mensa the stone or marble shelf covering the grave in an arcosolium.
palmette an ornament or design similar in shape to a palm leaf.
pediment a shallow gable, usually triangular, above a door or wall panel.
peperite a porous brown tufa found around Monte Albano near Rome.
pergola an arbour or covered walkway formed of growing plants trained over trelliswork.
pilaster a square or rectangular column or pillar attached to a wall from which it projects.
portico a covered area consisting of a roof supported by columns placed at regular intervals, usually attached as a porch to a building.
pozzolan a volcanic ash found in the vicinity of volcanoes and named after Pozzuoli, a town near Naples.
putto (pl. *putti*) a cupid or cherub used in painting and sculpture.
sarcophagus a coffin or tomb made of marble or stone and decorated with sculpture.
socle a low plain block or plinth serving as a pedestal to a column, etc., or as a foundation for a wall.
solum (pl. *solia*) a stone coffin.
*spring*er the support from which an arch springs; the impost at each end of an arch.
stele (pl. *stelae*) an upright slab bearing sculptured designs or inscriptions.
strigil an instrument with a curved blade for scraping off dirt.
thyrsus a staff or spear tipped with an ornament like a pine cone, and sometimes wreathed with ivy or vine branches.
tondo (pl. *tondi*) a painting in circular form.
transenna a lattice or screen of stone.
tufa a soft porous limestone rock, easily worked. Its presence around Rome enabled the building of hypogea and catacombs, and other forms of cemetery.
tympanum (pl. *tympana*) the space enclosed by the edges of a pediment.
volute a spiral scroll decorative device. It is the chief ornament of the Ionic column and is also found in those of the other Greek orders.

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