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## The Jewish Catacomb of the Vigna Cimarra

"poiche' le antichita' giudaiche sono intimamente connesse alle cristiane" G. B. de Rossi, *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 2 (1865): 40.

### I. PRIOR RESEARCH ON THE CATACOMB OF THE VIGNA CIMARRA

Recent publications have reminded us once again of what little information exists about a Jewish catacomb discovered in 1866 below the Vigna Cimarra in Rome.<sup>i</sup> New research, however, has revealed its exact location and condition. Access to and study of this catacomb look far more promising now than they have been for generations.

Giovanni Battista de Rossi published a brief notice of the discovery of a second Jewish catacomb near the Appian Way (following that of Vigna Randanini in 1859) in the January 1867 issue of his *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana*. This announcement, however, was never followed up with the promised plan and site description.<sup>ii</sup> De Rossi's general plan of the Appia region, published in the same issue, located the catacomb below the property of one Count Giovanni Battista Cimarra on the via di San Sebastiano, the ancient cross road linking the via Appia and via Ardeatina beyond the church and catacombs of Saint Sebastian on the second mile outside of Rome.<sup>iii</sup> (Figures 1–2)

Figure 1. The Jewish catacombs of the Vigna Randanini and Vigna Cimarra on the plan of catacombs and 19<sup>th</sup> century property limits in the Appia region (G. B. de Rossi, *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 4 (1867): 3).

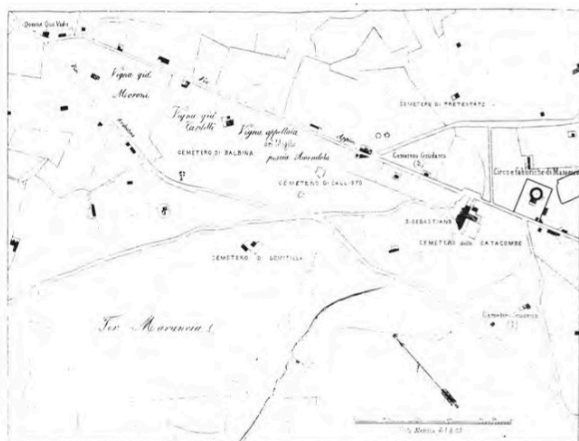


Figure 2. Location of Jewish and Christian catacombs on the via Appia and via Ardeatina in Rome (H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* 2 [Calliste, cimetière de], col. 1668, fig. 1923).



The graves were identified as Jewish from a small number of Greek inscriptions with references to an *archon* and a *synagogue*, as well as images of the menorah and other Jewish motifs that had been carved in marble slabs or painted in red minium on tiles coated with plaster.<sup>iv</sup>

De Rossi's 1867 article made specific mention of three of these finds. First was a fragmentary marble plaque identifying the συνα[γωγη]ῆς Ἐλέας (CIJ 1.281/JIWE 2.406). Next was the front panel of a limestone sarcophagus decorated with strigillations and, at center, the epitaph to a Ζώναθα ἄρχων (CIJ 1.277/JIWE 2.402). Last, de Rossi made special mention of an ax carved onto a marble plaque because two others had been found in a Jewish catacomb nearby and their significance was unclear in the context in which they had been found.<sup>v</sup> (Figure 3) Oblique reference to CIJ 281a, a lost marble fragment, may also found in de Rossi's account of "known Jewish symbols" other than the menorah in the site (although the menorah image itself was seen on at least two of the graves). De Rossi never publishes this singular anepigraphic tablet, but comments in his notes that he found its design unique.<sup>vi</sup> (Figure 4)

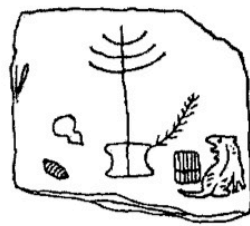


Figure 3. Drawing of the ax found in the Vigna Cimarra catacomb in 1866 (L. Bruzza, "Dell'ascia Fossoria nei monumenti cristiani," *Studi e Documenti di Storia e Diritto* 10 (Rome, 1889), p. 74).

Figure 4. CIJ 281a (*Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* 1, 1936, p. 197).

De Rossi acquired several of these inscriptions along with others from the site for the private lapidary inside the atrium of his house by the Capitoline Hill. Father Luigi Bruzza donated another (CIJ 1.281/JIWE 2.406) to the Barnabite library at San Carlo ai Catinari in Rome.<sup>vii</sup> (Figure 5) The rest may have been left in the site amidst rubble and other debris, being in a far too decayed or fragmentary state for exhibition. De Rossi's drawings of artifacts from the Vigna Cimarra catacomb were published long after the site's discovery in Abraham Berliner's *Geschichte der Juden in Rom* (1893).<sup>viii</sup> (Figure 6) On the evidence alone of the eight artifacts in Berliner's text, including CIJ 1 n. 281a, it is not entirely clear why to de Rossi found these more ancient than the nearly two hundred Greek and Latin epitaphs from the Vigna Randanini site. Determining factors may have been the Cimarra site's "poverty" (the lack of paintings and monumental architectural features); poor soil quality; very small number of tombs; limited growth; and apparent isolation on the outer fringes of the valley containing the Catacombs of Saint Sebastian.<sup>ix</sup> Today, it is generally accepted that the Jewish catacombs on the via Appia were in use primarily during the third and fourth centuries CE.<sup>x</sup>

AEG. IX ANN I	Regg. VII Roma		
D. MEITIVS. APO	I. Quintus et Sextus		
LINARIS. ET. C	Apollonia et Boim		
MAXIMIVS. APOII	Maximianus Apollonius		
NARIS. H. B. M. F.	homo bene merendi f.		
	causa	1872 p. 241	
182	Regg. VII Roma	ACEZHEN	
	causa	KAWC	1872 p. 241
	causa	META	1872 p. 241
	causa	WN	1872 p. 241

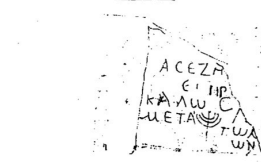
IN FR. P. IIS. *Ediz. del P. Barnabite nel Sing. Arcadio Tom. CXVII*

151. *Stade. Ulter. parimenti in museo barnabite.*

fr. un' altro Marnate	D. M. C. DOMITI	1872 p. 241
D. M. C. CARRIO CA	LVIANI VETERA	1872 p. 241
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PR. MIS. III. VEST. NA	Q. MEITIVS. APO	1872 p. 241
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L. ecc. Ant. Arch. sup.	MAXIMIVS APOII	1872 p. 241
182. <i>Archeo. Barnabite. prod. 1872</i>	NARIS H. B. M. F.	1872 p. 241

*ACEZHEN* *KAWC* *META* *WN*

op. bene in conclusioni altissimi non Rand. in. n. in collegio delle Querce pass. Teresianum.



See. Bormann 1887

16264



Figure 5. Barnabite inventory of acquisitions with copy of CIJ 281 (courtesy of the Barnabite archive of S. Carlo dei Catinari, Rome); 281 in the Collegio delle Querce of the Barnabite Order at Florence (photograph courtesy of Father Parenti, B.); E. Bormann drawing of 281 in de Rossi, ms. ICUR 41 n. 16264 (Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology, Rome).



The other inscriptions copied by de Rossi during his 1866 site visit to the vineyard did not contain recognizably “Jewish” elements, and de Rossi eliminated all but one from his collection of Jewish inscriptions from Rome.<sup>xi</sup> As in the case of the Jewish catacomb of the Vigna Randanini, accessed from *sub divo* funerary monuments (not necessarily or exclusively Jewish), the Jewish catacomb in the Vigna Cimarra was in an area that had seen generations of burial activity by the Romans since Republican times. The Via di San Sebastiano is now thought to correspond to the ancient via Asinaria, joining the via Latina and via Ardeatina south of Rome (the Jewish catacomb of the Vigna Randanini is located on another branch of this road).<sup>xii</sup> In the past, Roman buildings, including columbaria, were visible on both sides of the street at a short distance from the gated entrance into the Vigna Cimarra.<sup>xiii</sup> Remains of an ancient country residence have also come to light.<sup>xiv</sup>

Figure 6. Inscriptions identified by de Rossi as Jewish from the Vigna Cimarra catacomb (A. Berliner, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom*, 1893, pp. 90-92).

De Rossi found the catacomb's condition so poor that he uncharacteristically allowed the excavators to empty the site of its artifacts.<sup>xv</sup> Many of these, as noted above, wound up in his private museum. The catacomb was not opened to the public after de Rossi's visit, and generations of scholars lamented the absence of a plan and topographic study.<sup>xvi</sup> A few persevering individuals, however, including L. Bruzza (1866); J. H. Parker (late 1860s); N. Muller (1915); J-B. Frey (1920s); G. De Angelis D'Ossat (1920s); and A. Ferrua, S.J. (1954), all found the site accessible well into the twentieth century.<sup>xvii</sup>

## II. DE ROSSI'S ROLE IN THE DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION OF THE CATACOMB

In the beginning of April of 1866, Count Giovanni Battista Cimarra wrote to the Papal Ministry of Public Works in Rome to announce the discovery of a funerary hypogeum during the process of enlarging his wine cellar (*cantina*).<sup>xviii</sup> More remarkably, evidence from the tombs had led the count to conclude that it was a Jewish site.<sup>xix</sup> He requested an excavation license from the Ministry. Count Cimarra was no doubt already aware of the sensational discovery in 1859 of a Jewish catacomb below the grounds of a neighboring estate cultivated by the Randanini family. He may also have heard of how the Randanini had been offered great rewards for this discovery and even larger sums for its purchase by local and international dignitaries, including a member of the Rothschild family, bankers to Pope Pius IX.<sup>xx</sup> In light of these developments, the discovery and exploration of a Jewish catacomb would have seemed a sound investment on Cimarra's part in a modest suburban field.

The matter was turned over to the Papal Ministry's Antiquities Commission, responsible for issuing excavation licenses and for the inspection of Rome's ancient sites. It promptly granted Count Cimarra permission to excavate with the usual stipulations that the Commission of Sacred Archaeology (CDAS) should first verify that the catacomb had been used by Jews and not by Christians and that weekly reports keep the Ministry informed of all developments on the site.<sup>xxi</sup> In the event that the catacomb proved to be Christian, the CDAS would take over its excavation. Yet even after such promising beginnings, and a genuine interest on the part of the CDAS, the Cimarra file in the Roman State Archives contains no further information about the length and success of the dig. Apparently the project was quickly abandoned because of difficulties encountered while digging in an area infiltrated by water from an ancient well.<sup>xxii</sup> A costly dispute over profits from another "famous" quarry in the nearby "Vigna Annunziatella" also cut short Cimarra's patronage of the dig.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Giovanni Battista de Rossi, a senior member of the Commission of Sacred Archaeology, supervised the short-lived project and announced the site's discovery in his *Bullettino* of the following year (1867). Evidence was too scarce, however, to elaborate at length on this hypogeum's value to the study of Jewish and Christian burials in Rome, apart from de Rossi's suggestion of an earlier use (and abandonment) of the Cimarra cemetery in respect to the hypogea below the Vigna Randanini.

De Rossi himself may have “abandoned” the Vigna Cimarra to some extent (the CDAS and later PCAS never, in fact, assumed responsibility for the site), but several of his students believed that the similarities between the Jewish and Christian catacombs on the Appia, including their proximity to each other and possible shared origins in Eastern (or what was popularly termed at the time “Biblical”) funerary practices, would reveal a common and even more ancient source for the underground cemeteries of Rome. Taking his cue from de Rossi’s own work in the catacomb of Domitilla—which a colleague had once referred to as “the Jewish galleries”—the archaeologist Mariano Armellini considered the “*memoria apostolorum*” for the relics of the apostles Peter and Paul as part of an ancient and extensive Jewish burial grounds below the Church of Saint Sebastian that incorporated the catacombs of the Vigna Randanini and Vigna Cimarra.<sup>xxiv</sup> According to this theory, the *platonica* that once held the two apostles’ remains would have been turned over to the Christians at a later date. In the late nineteenth century, this “translation” of a catacomb from Jewish to Christian hands would have contested the theory that the Christians had taken over many of the underground cemeteries from the pagans (which, in the end, appears to be what had happened to the catacombs below Saint Sebastian’s). The idea persisted for some time that the ancient Christian cemetery and memorial to the apostles had a direct connection to the Jewish hypogea nearby. In his prologue to the *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, Father Jean-Baptiste Frey mentions a “new” Jewish hypogeum recently discovered in the catacomb of Saint Sebastian, in the area of the *via delle Sette Chiese*.<sup>xxv</sup> Father Frey could have intended the small hypogeum excavated into the high tufa banks next to the church where a clay oil lamp decorated with a menorah had been found in 1930.<sup>xxvi</sup> Another possibility is the cemetery region published by Salvatore Fornari in 1929, adapted from the wide, short galleries of a former *pozzolana* quarry and resembling in its layout certain areas of the Vigna Randanini catacomb at a short distance across the Appian Way.<sup>xxvii</sup> In any event, no evidence has surfaced thus far to explicitly connect Jewish and Christian burial sites in any of the subterranean cemeteries around Rome.

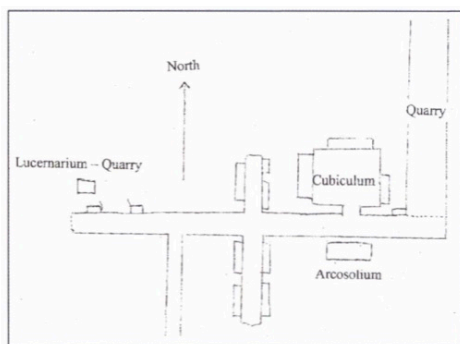


Figure 7. Plan of the Vigna Cimarra catacomb ca. 1957, drawn by A. Ferrua (relaboration of Ferrua notes in L. Spera, *Il Paesaggio suburbano di Roma dall'antichità al medioevo: Il comprensorio tra le vie Latine ed Ardeatina dalle mura Aureliane al III miglio*, Rome, 1999, p. 326, fig. 233).

### III. THE LOCATION AND CONDITION OF THE CATACOMB TODAY

The plan of an apparently unidentified catacomb was discovered among the notes of the late Father Antonio Ferrua, S.J., and first published by Lucrezia Spera in 1999.<sup>xxviii</sup> (Figure 7) Father Ferrua had accessed the site in 1957 from a flight of stairs at the northeast corner of a farmhouse on the *Via di San Sebastiano*, no. 28. The small hypogeum had been intercepted and damaged by the modern excavation of galleries and niches for a

wine cellar. Ferrua mentioned this hypogeum only once (and not by name) in a catalogue of pagan epitaphs discovered in the area of St. Sebastian's. Found completely "saccheggiata" (ransacked) as well as nearly obliterated by the new cellars, the site contained no evidence *in situ* to determine if the original occupants were pagan, Jewish or Christian.<sup>xxix</sup> The location and plan of the hypogeum, however, concur with what is known of the Jewish catacomb's discovery in the Roman State Archives as well as references to the site in the works of Muller, Frey, and de Angelis d'Ossat. Both de Angelis d'Ossat and Frey locate the Jewish catacomb of the Vigna Cimarra at the western corner of the estate later owned by the Limiti family (probably at the point where the surviving area of the hypogeum passed under the vigna grounds).<sup>xxx</sup>

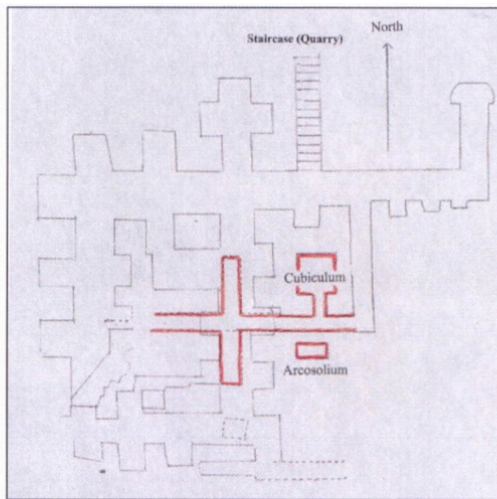


Figure 8. Partial plan of the quarries and cantina areas below the ex-Vigna Cimarra ca. 1958, drawn by A. Ferrua (relaboration of Ferrua notes in Spera, 1999, p. 326, fig. 233).

Figure 9. Pastureland near the ex-Vigna Cimarra (Photo: J. Dello Russo).



The wide tunnels for the cantina and nearby quarries show that modern excavations led to the discovery of the funerary hypogeum.<sup>xxxii</sup> (Figure 8) Contrary to later reports, the property today remains farmland. (Figure 9) Only the rustic villa at number 28 has



been greatly altered in modern times (which may have led to Ferrua's site inspection), but it too is built on medieval foundations or on even more ancient remains.<sup>xxxiii</sup> (Figures 10–11)

Figure 10. Farmhouse buildings on the property of the ex-Vigna Cimarra. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 11. Restored gatepost of 19<sup>th</sup> century vineyard on the via di San Sebastiano, n. 28. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 12. Point at which a modern quarry tunnel intercepts the ancient catacomb. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

Figure 13. Detail of fig. 12 (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

Figure 14. Lucernarium shaft (skylight).  
(Photo: J. Dello Russo)



The catacomb seen by Father Ferrua is still partially accessible. A large mound of earth now blocks passage into the catacomb from the corner where one of the modern tunnels intercepts the ancient site. (Figures 12-13)



Entrance into the catacomb is possible only by climbing over a pile of debris below a skylight (Figure 14) and lowering one's body through a narrow gap where the fill does not quite reach the ceiling. From this point below the skylight (Figures 15-16), other galleries or the continuation of the same gallery can be seen (Ferrua's plan does not clearly indicate whether these belong to the cemetery as well).

Figure 15. Modern debris from the surface area below the lucernarium opening. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 16. Access to the catacomb from the quarry. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 17. Detail of the marble doorframe of the cubiculum, showing calcium deposits over its surface. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 18. Partial view of the doorframe and cubiculum interior. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

The principal gallery proceeds past a roughly square-shaped chamber that contains stacks of loculi tombs for adults and children. The doorway to this chamber is formed from travertine piers and an architrave of white marble, coarsened by deposits of *calcare*. (Figures 17–18) A large *arcosolium* is excavated





into the gallery wall directly opposite the chamber entrance, with parallel trenches for two separate graves. (Figure 19) The other wall tombs in the hypogeum are loculi. (Figure 20) Several of the tombs are still partially closed with clay tiles (Figure 20); others were planned but never excavated. The majority of the tombs, however, have been violated to an extreme degree, leaving only rectangular depressions in the wall although in places bone fragments can still be seen inside.

Figure 19. Interior of the arcosolium for a double burial. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 20. A partially sealed loculus at ground level in a side gallery. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 21. Adult loculi in the catacomb. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

Figure 22. Detail of open loculi in a side gallery. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

The other galleries of the catacomb seen today are short and narrow and located directly opposite each other across the main gallery.



They contain loculi burials. (Figures 21–23) A deep level of debris and calcium deposit covers the tombs at ground level. (Figures 24–25) It is this stratum or those below that may contain more archaeological remains. (Figures 26-27)



Figure 23. Loculi partially exposed behind rubble and dirt in a gallery. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

Figure 24. Calcium deposits covering the interior of loculi and human remains. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

Figure 25. Loculi with fragments of marble and tile above modern debris. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

Figure 26. A pile of rubble covered with calcium deposits. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)





Figure 27. Fragment of a clay tile with traces of red paint. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

In the half-century since Father Ferrua's visit in 1957, the catacomb has become even more difficult to access. A new pump has been installed in the remains of an older well nearby (Figure 28), but water continues to seep inside, leaving white calcium deposits on much of the catacomb's surface area as well as a layer of soft mud on the floor. Even with such periodic flooding, however, the catacomb itself,

excavated into a reddish stratum of pozzolana slightly below the level of the modern quarry, does not appear to be in any great danger of collapsing, and the galleries of the cemetery are distinctly narrower than those of the quarry, another way to distinguish the two excavations.

Figure 28. Newly installed water pump inside the quarry/well area. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Our exploration of the accessible areas of the quarry (Figures 29–30) has determined that it was not incorporated into the cemetery. Modern regulations governing the excavation of pozzolana impose a certain distance between this activity and the road, and the quarrying appears not to have reached the area below the present via di San Sebastiano, perhaps to avoid intercepting catacomb galleries and other preexisting remains. The long flight of stairs into the caverns today from the exterior of the villa (Figure 31) is close to the catacomb, but it is difficult to say at this time if its origins are ancient, even as it joins to the remains of much older buildings upon which the modern farmhouse now rests.

Past and present visitors to the catacomb, and even Father Ferrua's sketches and notes, cannot substitute for a scientific study of a site de Rossi himself believed "degnà della pubblica luce e di esame." The hypogeum must be measured to determine its extent and relationship to surrounding areas above and below the Vigna Cimarra. There is a conspicuous absence today of Jewish artifacts in the site (Figure 32), and perhaps the removal of trash and rubble can uncover more traces of its occupants and their religious beliefs. Without this evidence, only the earliest testimonies of Count Cimarra and de Rossi identify a second Jewish cemetery on the

via Appia. But with the catacomb's fortunate preservation, de Rossi's "note" can now be transformed into a modern presentation of the site.<sup>xxxiii</sup> (Figure 33)



Figure 29. Inside the galleries of the quarry. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 30. Another view inside the quarry. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

Figure 31. Stairway and modern entrance into the hypogeum from ground level. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)



Figure 32. Fragment of a marble cornice cemented on a brick wall in the quarry. (Photo: J. Dello Russo)

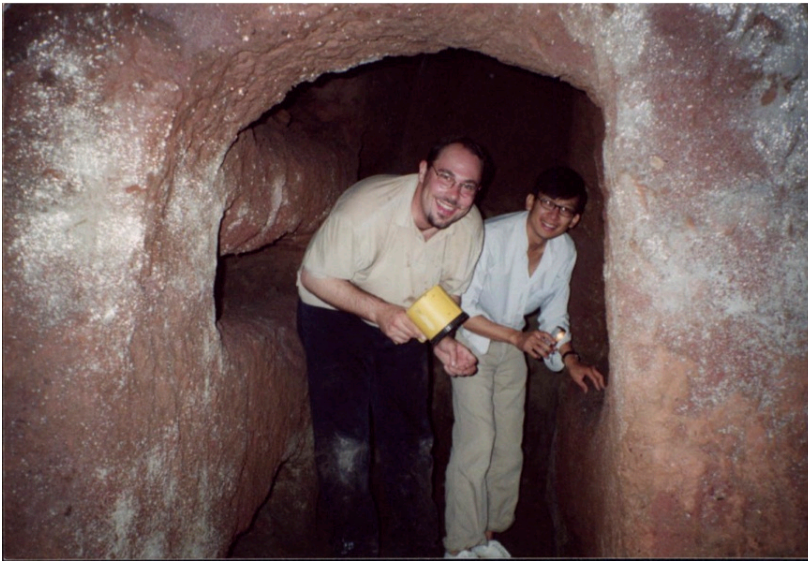


Figure 33. Gregory DiPippo and David U. Liu inside a side gallery of the catacomb.  
(Photo: J. Dello Russo)

## NOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

CIJ 1 = *Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum* 1: Europe, ed. J-B. Frey, Vatican City, 1936

CIL 6 = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 6.2–4: *Tituli Sepulcrales*, eds. E. Bormann, G. Henzen, Chr. Huelsen, Berlin, 1882–1894

Ms. de Rossi 41 = *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, ms. of G. B. de Rossi, now at the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology in Rome

JWE 2 = *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe 2: The City of Rome*, ed. D. Noy, Cambridge, 1995

LTURS = *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae. Suburbium*, 1–8, ed. V. Flocchi Nicolai, M. G. Granino Cecere and Z. Mari, Rome, 2001–2008

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Cod. Vat. De Rossi Correspondence, n. 14280, f. 273.

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Von Engestrom, A. *Om judarne i Rom under äldre tider, och deras katakomber*, Uppsala, 1876.

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<sup>i</sup> S. Cappelletti, *The Jewish Community in Rome From the Second Century B.C. to the Third Century C.E.* Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 113, Leiden, 2006, pp. 159–160, inaccurately dates the catacomb's discovery to 1864 and observes, confusingly, that "although we assume that the area on the surface corresponded to the original extent of the catacomb, we should speak of an hypogeum more than a catacomb." L. V. Rutgers describes the Vigna Cimarra Jewish catacomb as "small" and "destroyed as a result of collapse"; see Rutgers, "The Jews of Italy c. 235–638," *The Cambridge History of Judaism 4: The Late Roman-Rabbinic Period*, ed. S. T. Katz, Cambridge, 2006, p. 496. S. Frascati, "Vigna Cimarra," *LTURS* 1, A-B, 2001, p. 107, summarizes the studies to date (2001), including the Jewish epigraphic evidence, but leaves out L. Spera's essential contribution on the Vigna Cimarra catacomb that will be discussed below (L. Spera, *Il Paesaggio Suburbano di Roma dall' Antichità al Medioevo: il comprensorio tra la via Latina e la via Ardeatina dalle Mura Aureliane al terzo miglio*, Rome, 1999).

<sup>ii</sup> G. B. de Rossi, "Scoperta di un cimitero giudaico presso la via Appia," *Bullettino di Archeologia Cristiana* 5 (1867), p. 16.

<sup>iii</sup> De Rossi, 1867, p. 3 and A. Berliner, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom*, Frankfurt, 1893, p. 48.

<sup>iv</sup> CIJ 1, pp.194–197, nn. 277–281a; republished in JIWE 2, pp. 332–336, nn. 402–406.

<sup>v</sup> R. Garrucci, *Cimitero degli antichi ebrei scoperto recentemente in Vigna Randanini*, Rome, 1862, p. 9. One of these axes is described as "probably from a pagan sepulchral monument" by E. Goodenough in *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, vol. 2, New York, 1953, pp. 28–29, and vol. 3, f. 781. L. Bruzza publishes a picture of the Vigna Cimarra ax in "Dell'ascia Fossoria nei monumenti cristiani," *Studi e Documenti di Storia e Diritto* 10 (Rome, 1889): 73–76. It is possible that this artifact, like CIJ 1.281, ended up in Bruzza's possession. L. V. Rutgers finds the two tablets with the image of the ax in the Vigna Randanini catacombs examples of a "Late Ancient rather than uniquely Jewish" trend, representing "exclusive ownership" of a tomb. L. V. Rutgers, *The Jews of Late Ancient Rome*, Leiden, 1995, p. 89. n. 113. Yet in an entry for "Ascia" in *Temi di Iconografia Paleocristiana*, ed. F. Bisconti, Vatican City, 2001, pp. 129–131, M. Di Martino observes that while the ax can be seen as a "real instrument," it might also refer to the Semitic letter "Taw," that "Hebrew tradition associates with the salvation of mankind."

<sup>vi</sup> A. Berliner, 1893, p. 60, published de Rossi's drawing of CIJ 1 n. 281a to illustrate a passage in which he discusses images found on gold glass. Frey p. 197, is the first to attribute the piece to the Vigna Cimarra from explicit mention of its find spot in de Rossi's notes, and corrects Berliner's description from that of a "coppa" to a "tabella marmorea. Disegno originale ed unico" (ms. de Rossi 41, f.16234). Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, vol. 2, n. 4, p. 33, describes the object as including "a small undetermined object to the left; menorah with lulab attached at center; and peculiar

small object guarded by a lion at the right. [Frey] may be right in calling the object 'sacred rolls' but I [Goodenough] cannot share his confidence."

<sup>vii</sup> Communicated to the author in 2001 by the Barnabite fathers P. Parenti at Florence and P. Cagni at Rome, from an index compiled by Father L. De Feis of the collection taken to the Collegio delle Querce in Florence in 1871. Father Bruzza removed other inscriptions from the area near Saint Sebastian's; for example, CIL 6.2 n. 25242. He had not seen de Rossi's notes for CIJ 281 and reconstructs line 2 as (Ιυδ)/αϛ εζη(σεν), omitting also the problematic line 3. E. Bormann's copy from 1882 (conserved in ms. de Rossi 41, f. 16264) reads for line 3: σ (ι?) (v?) π. Today the π is still visible, although the inscription appears to have been cleaned and re-painted. JIWE 2.406 uses the older reading of de Rossi's sent to A. Berliner that reproduces only the single letter π in line 3 (Berliner 1893, pp. 90–92).

<sup>viii</sup> De Rossi, ms. 41, f. 16233, "Cimitero degli ebrei," indicates that inscriptions from the Vigna Cimarra catacomb were copied into de Rossi's *Giornale Appia* 3, pp. 23, 30, 31. The whereabouts of this *Giornale* are unknown (although it might have been an early draft of the third volume of his *Roma Sotteranea Cristiana* (1877), in which the Cimarra inscriptions and site plan were originally supposed to have been published). De Rossi sent copies of the Cimarra inscriptions and CIJ 1.289/JIWE 2.538 to A. Berliner in 1888 (Cod. Vat. De Rossi Correspondence, n. 14280, f. 273). *CIJ* 1, pp. 194–197 publishes additional information from de Rossi's notes. The Swedish scholar A. Von Engestrom is the first after de Rossi to discuss Jewish inscriptions from the Vigna Cimarra catacomb in *Om judarne i Rom under äldre tider, och deras katakomber*, Uppsala, 1876, p. 19.

<sup>ix</sup> De Rossi appears to have dated the Vigna Cimarra catacomb to the end of the second century and beginning of the third century CE. In an unpublished treatise from 1863, de Rossi reveals his somewhat instinctual approach to "catacomb chronology": "lo studio che da vent' anni io faccio assai minutamente d'ogni parte delle romane catacombe, e quell' esperienza che naturalmente cresce in ragion di tempo e dell' attenzione posta in esaminare ogni cosa mi assicurano di poter per lo piu' distinguere le escavazioni piu' antiche dalle piu' recenti, quelle del secolo IV da quelle de' secoli anteriori" (G. B. de Rossi, *Sulla questione del vaso di sangue: memoria inedita*, ed. A. Ferrua, Studi di Antichita' Cristiana 18, Vatican City, 1944, p. 41).

<sup>x</sup> S. Frascati, "Vigna Cimarra," in *LTURS* 1, p. 107, reiterates the conventional dating of the Jewish catacombs on the via Appia to the third–fourth centuries CE, with intense use in the fourth century and sporadic use into the early fifth. In recent years, L. V. Rutgers has interpreted data from radiocarbon dating experiments in the Villa Torlonia Jewish catacombs as evidence that the Jews in Rome began using catacombs as early as the second century CE: L. V. Rutgers et al., "Sul problema di come datare le catacombe ebraiche di Roma," *BABesch* 81 (2006), p. 177.

<sup>xi</sup> CIJ 1.16\* is a Greek inscription on a small limestone stele, apparently "recycled" for the closure of a loculus in the Cimarra hypogeum (with text facing inward); for this reason, it is presently excluded from the corpus of Jewish inscriptions from

Rome, although de Rossi included it in the Jewish inscriptions from Cimarra that he sent to Berliner. Photograph in S. Frascati, *La Collezione Epigrafica di G. B. de Rossi presso il Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana*, Vatican City, 1997, p. 185 n. 146 t. 37. De Rossi acquired at least two other fragments (dated by Frascati to the second–third centuries CE) also reused in the catacomb: CIL 6.2 n. 23451 and CIL 6.2 n. 32999, the latter described by Frascati as a piece of the front panel of a sarcophagus with a tablet for an epitaph and images once flanking the sides that had been deliberately scraped away (Frascati pp. 56–57, n. 8, t. 3). CIL 6.1 n. 8936 “in vinea Cimarra pone basilicam S. Sebastiani via Appia nunc in aedibus Iohannis Baptiste de Rossi, descripsit de Rossi e Gatti” is also published by Frascati, 1997, pp. 170–171, n. 126 t. 33, but without mention of its provenance from the Vigna Cimarra). As in the case of most inscriptions attributed to the Vigna Cimarra catacomb, the surface areas of these are heavily corroded from water damage and calcium deposits. The sixth part of the CIL publishes as well the inscriptions nn. 8557, 12975, 25692, and 26812 from the “vinea Cimarra retro basilicam S. Sebastiani, via Appia,” all in de Rossi’s notes from 1866. While it is not known for certain if these, too, had also been found in the catacomb, there is an intriguing but unfortunately ambiguous note in a British guidebook of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that “a Jewish cemetery, more recently excavated (in respect to that in the Vigna Randanini), is on one level, the symbols being occasionally mixed with heathen symbols” (G. Bradshaw, *Bradshaw's Illustrated handbook to Italy North and South, including Sicily and Sardinia*, London, 1898, p. 219). What has been seen so far of the Cimarra hypogeum has been on one level, and a “mix” of Jewish and non-Jewish burials could explain in part the site’s spoliation and neglect.

<sup>xii</sup> Z. Mari, “Asinaria, via,” in *LTURS* 1, p. 110, fig. 164.

<sup>xiii</sup> L. Spera, “Ardeatina, via,” in *LTURS* 1, pp. 153–154 discusses evidence of villa and shrines between the second and third miles of this zone. See also Spera 1999, pp. 257–258 (UT 425), p. 258 (UT 429), and p. 326 (UUTT nn. 616, 619, 620; road σ). A. Nibby, in *Analisi della Carta dei Dintorni di Roma*, Rome, 1827, p. 561, observes the remains of “fabbriche di sepolture” including two cippi still *in situ* and the sepulcher of one Anteia (CIL 6.2 n. 11841) on the “tracciata antica” that joined the Appia and Ardeatina roads before the Tomb of Caecilia Metella.

<sup>xiv</sup> Spera, 2003, p. 273, n. 9, and p. 286 n. 34.

<sup>xv</sup> M. Armellini, *Le catacombe romane*, Rome, 1880, pp. 431–432, states that this catacomb had been “stripped of all of its inscriptions.”

<sup>xvi</sup> S. Frascati, “Vigna Cimarra,” in *LTURS* 1, p. 107 believes the catacomb “inaccessible.” Frey, 1936, p. 194, writes that he was prevented from exploring the catacomb in the late 1920s due to flooding. It is pronounced “lost” by Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols*, vol. 2, p. 33 and by H. J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, New York, 1960, p. 51. See note 1 for other recent mention of this site.

<sup>xvii</sup> The two notable figures missing from this list of “catacomb scholars” are Raffaele Garrucci, S.J. and Orazio Marucchi. Garrucci had published the inscriptions from the nearby Jewish catacomb in the Vigna Randanini but was not a member of the Commissione di Archeologia Sacra (CDAS). Marucchi, the de Rossi “disciple” most active in the study of the Jewish catacombs of Rome, was still only a boy (b. 1852) at

the time of the discoveries in the Vigna Cimarra, and his apparent failure to visit the site suggests that the catacomb became inaccessible soon after its discovery. For this reason, Marucchi treats the Vigna Cimarra Jewish catacomb as a sort of extension of that in the Vigna Randanini—barely distinguishing it as a “separate” catacomb in O. Marucchi, “Il Nuovo Cimitero Giudaico,” *Rassegna Italiana*, July 15, 1884, pp. 107–108. J. H. Parker refers several times to the conditions of the catacomb in the Vigna Cimarra, which he may have visited (or discussed with de Rossi) in the late 1860s. In *The Catacombs of Rome*, London, 1877, pp. 121–122, he writes “in 1866, another catacomb for the Jews was partially excavated in the Vigna Cimarra on the via Appia, just beyond San Sebastiano. The seven-branched candelabra and other emblems and inscriptions found there leave no room for doubt that it was for Jews, but it appears to have been of small extent, and extremely poor. The soil is clay, which is not well suited for a catacomb, and it has more the appearance of having been the burial place of a particular family than a general one.” Parker adds in *Tombs in and Near Rome*, London, 1877, p. 22, that the Vigna Cimarra catacomb “appears to be only a family burial place, never of much importance, perhaps a cemetery for the very poor. It is in clay soil not well suited for such a purpose, and now is in a very bad state.” Parker’s third reference to the Cimarra site is found in “Notes on the Dates of the Paintings in the Roman Catacombs,” *The Archaeological Journal* 34 (1877), p. 440. In this report, the catacomb “is much neglected, and in wet weather is hardly practicable to get into it, on account of the clay which almost fixes you where you stand.” N. Muller and De Angelis D’Ossat surely visited the site; see Muller, “Il cimitero degli antichi ebrei posto sulla via Portuense,” *Dissertazione della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 12 (1915): 238, and G. De Angelis D’Ossat, *La Geologia delle Catacombe Romane*, vol. 2, Rome, 1943, pp. 179–180. Ferrua’s 1954 visit is described below.<sup>xviii</sup> Angelo and Giovanni Battista Bernabo’ had owned this vigna “a cannetto” during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (“confinante con le vigne Mandozi e Scopaccia”): see R. Lanciani, *Storia degli scavi di Roma ed appunti intorno le collezioni d’antichità*, vol. 5, ed. L. Malavezza Campeggi and M. R. Russo, Rome, 1995, p. 279; vol. 6, ed. P. Liverani and M. R. Russo, Rome, 2000, pp. 136, 141; and Spera 1999, p. 259, UT 429 with appendix, p. 474 (map 161, nn. 542–547). Industrial excavator G. B. De Domenicis quarried in the area in 1842 (Archivio dello Stato di Roma, Camerlengato, parte 2, titolo 4, busta 289, fascicolo 3245). Below the property today are the vast artificial caverns of pozzolana quarries. Documents from the Cimarra excavations are kept in the Archivio dello Stato di Roma, Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici, Industria, Agricoltura, Commercio e Belle Arti, sezione 5, titolo 1, 5a (excavations 1854–1870), busta 407, fascicolo 35. “Roma: Licenza di Scavo Concesso a Giovanni Battista Cimarra nella sua vigna posta fuori di Porta San Sebastiano” April 19, 1866.

<sup>xix</sup> A not insignificant technicality for a request of this nature, as a private individual could still apply to the Papal State at this point for permission to excavate a non-Christian funerary site. Over time, the Jewish catacombs consistently fall into the category of Classical Antiquities, rather than being subject to the protective measures taken by the popes since the seventeenth century to safeguard (and yet

still exploit) the Christian catacombs of Rome. U. M. Fasola, B. clarifies that the Vigna Cimarra site was never, in fact, under Vatican jurisdiction in "12 giugno 1986: Consegnà della catacomba ebraica di vigna Randanini alla SAR," *L'Osservatore Romano* (June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1986) p. 3.

<sup>xx</sup> B. Broderick, "The Burial Place of the Early Judeo-Christians in Rome," *Compte Rendu du Quatrieme Comgres Scientifique International des Catholiques* (Fribourg, August 16<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>, 1897), Fribourg, 1898, pp. 170-181.

<sup>xxi</sup> The Licenza di Scavo is dated April 23, 1866: "con l'ingunzione pero' di porvi in regola colla Commissione di Archeologia Sacra (per quanto poter essere di una attribuzione) in quanto alla catacomba (creduta) ebraica e deve l'assegno al Ministero di tutti gli oggetti che ivi li rinvenissero." The document bears the signatures of P. E. Visconti, Commissioner for Antiquities, and Giovanni Battista Guidi, Excavations Inspector.

<sup>xxii</sup> Von Engestrom, 1876, p. 19 and Frey, p. lx.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Parker 1877, p. 121; De Angelis D'Ossat 1943, p. 179, distinguishes *tufa terrosa* above from *pozzolana rosa* at a lower level. Cimarra may have leased out portions of the grounds to excavators of tuff and pozzolana, as he had done in another recently acquired property (map 161: 591-592; 919-920) further down the via Ardeatina, known as the "vigna Annunziatella" the subject of a bitter lawsuit starting in 1875: P. Nocito, *Sulla Truffa Commessa a Danno del Cav. Bozzo: Osservazioni nell' Interesse della Parte Civile Davanti alla Sezione d' Accusa della R. Corte d' Appello a Roma*, Rome, 1875. Frey, 1936, p. 194, believed that quarrying nonetheless continued on the site, which was later acquired by the Limiti family. Cimarra also rented a neighboring property (map 161: 540-541) behind the Church of San Sebastiano, that was put up for auction in 1875: *Inserzioni della Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d'Italia, 1875 n. 76: Giunta Liquidatrice dell' Asse Ecclesiastico di Roma*, 1875, p. 3225.

<sup>xxiv</sup> O. Marucchi, *Roma Sotterranea Cristiana*, n.s. 1909, p. 91, t. V and XXV (late extension of the Hypogeum of the Flavii in the catacomb of Domitilla) and M. Armellini, *Le Chiese di Roma Illustrate*, Rome, 1896, pp. 905-906. S. Krauss, "Catacombs" in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 3, New York-London, 1903, p. 614, accepts that "the Catacomb of Domitilla was originally laid out by Jews, although it was certainly finished by Christians. The architectural characteristics of this catacomb are so striking that even Müller admits Jewish influence, although he thinks that the Christian catacombs were constructed on pagan and not on Jewish patterns."

<sup>xxv</sup> J-B. Frey, 1936, p. LXI.

<sup>xxvi</sup> A. M. Nieddu, *La Basilica Apostolorum sulla Via Appia e l'area cimiteriale circostante*, Vatican City, 2009, pp. 20-21, nn. 121-122, and Spera 1999, pp. 223-225 (UT 378), 377, define the San Sebastiano site as a "closed" and "anonymous" hypogeum excavated for a *sub divo* funerary structure, which Nieddu finds not necessarily a Christian, or exclusively Christian tomb.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Until recently, scholars sometimes "distinguished" Jewish catacombs by their "wide" galleries. F. Fornari, "Relazione circa un gruppo cimiteriale recentemente scoperto ad catacumbas," *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 6 (1929), pp. 30-31 (area

H). The region near the via delle Sette Chiese excavated in 1927 is believed to have originated as a quarry or private hypogeum in the third century and was joined the St. Sebastian catacombs at a later point, probably in the fourth century CE (Spera 1999, p. 254, UT 413).

<sup>xxviii</sup> Spera 1999, p. 326, fig. 233 (UT 618), and most recently in E. Laurenzi, *Le Catacombe Ebraiche. Gli ebrei di Roma e le loro tradizioni funerarie*. Rome, 2011, p. 70.

<sup>xxix</sup> Ferrua 1978, p. 49 n. 87 found only a small marble base dedicated by a certain Smaragdus to Fortuna (now in the lapidary at San Sebastiano).

<sup>xxx</sup> De Angelis D' Ossat 1943, p. 139 fig. 60 (Pc).

<sup>xxxi</sup> De Angelis D'Ossat 1943, p. 180, found signs that it had been damaged by modern quarrying for *pozzolana rosa*. A smaller cave had been opened nearby.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Comune di Roma, Ex Riparazione delle AA.BB.AA, *Carta Storica Archeologica e Monumentale del Suburbio ed Agro Romano*, Rome, 1988, n. 521 notes cottages in the area of ancient remains and the catacomb of Vigna Cimarra: Bibliography in Spera 1999, pp. 257–258 (UUTT 425–426), 326 (UUTT 618–620).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> A “vincolo archeologico” has now been put on the site at via di San Sebastiano, n. 28, 00179, Rome, Italy, and the “Catacombe di Vigna Cimarra” are included in the Lazio Region’s 2004 *Piano Territoriale Paesistico* (P.T.P) n. 15/12, Appia Antica e Acquadotti e Valle della Caffarella, Repertorio dei Beni di Interesse Archeologico e Storico-Monumentale, p. 39, n. 423. The author visited the Vigna Cimarra catacomb in the company of Professor David U. Liu, Roman scholar Gregory Di Pippo, and musician Paolo Carta, the owner of the site. The inspection was carried out on August 6, 2002, and immediately reported by the author to the Archeological Superintendency of Rome. Subsequently, the author sent notice of the discovery to the International Catacomb Society and the International Jewish Cemetery Project sponsored by the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies ([www.jewishgen.org/cemetery](http://www.jewishgen.org/cemetery)). I wish to thank Professor Liu and Mr. DiPippo for their interest and support of the project, and express sincere gratitude as well to Professor Danilo Mazzoleni of the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology for the exceptional opportunity to consult de Rossi’s notes for the *Inscriptiones Christianae Urbis Romae*, and to Professor Olof Brandt, Secretary of the Institute, for so readily procuring a copy of von Engestrom’s work from the University of Uppsala in Sweden.

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