Declaration of Own Work

I confirm that the following statements are true:

(a) that I have composed this thesis myself, and  
(b) that this work is my own, and  
(c) that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified, and  
(d) that any included publications are my own work, except where indicated throughout the thesis and summarised and clearly identified on the declarations page of the thesis.

Signature:

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Date:
Thesis abstract

The presented thesis examines dining practices associated with ancient funerary rites, and representations of meals that decorated Roman tombs. Evidence for dining, and its significance in mortuary rites, comes from various sources: from pagan, Christian and Jewish literary examples that describe funerary and commemorative events, and archaeological material of food remains and dining installations at the cemeteries, to pictures of meals depicted on different media: cinerary urns and altars, gravestones, frescoes, mosaics and sarcophagi. The aim of this thesis is to investigate available sources, focusing mainly on pictorial representations of late Roman and early Christian dining in order to assess the purpose of decorating the tombs with convivial images.

The thesis begins with a discussion of how the Roman catacombs were used by early Christians, and how they were perceived by the post-sixteenth-century explorers and researchers. As our understanding of the development of the subterranean cemeteries has changed over the past centuries, so has our view of the late ancient societies and their funerary practices. Chapter 1 investigates both written and archaeological evidence for Roman funerary meals (*silicernium* and *novemdiale*) and commemorative rites during several festivals for the dead (e.g. *parentalia* or *rosalia*) performed by families and members of *collegia*. This Chapter also presents the development of the funerary Eucharist, and discusses evidence for early Christian funerary prayer. Chapter 2 focuses on memorials decorated with diners reclining on *klinai*, which were intended to represent the status of the deceased. Chapter 3 discusses painted collective meal scenes represented on *stibadia*, which are differentiated according to their interpretation: Elysian picnic scenes, images representing status of the deceased, or *refrigeria* (commemorative events) held by family and *collegia*. This section also includes an investigation into early Christian convivial images, which portray biblical stories and *refrigeria*. Chapter 4 presents convivial images from the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, which provide evidence of a group of foreigners who migrated to Rome. Chapter 5, the final chapter, presents collective meal scenes on sarcophagi, which depict
mythological events and picnic scenes reflecting elite villa life style. However, a small group of early Christian examples were also designed to portray honorary meals.

In conclusion, the thesis provides evidence for shared funerary practices amongst different religious communities in the Roman world. Additionally, in the majority of cases the dining scenes focus on the representations of the deceased (their status or profession) rather than any particular religious affiliation; while both pagan and Christian images of *refrigeria* were designed to strengthen, or substituted for, actual commemorative rites.
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### Content list:

**Thesis abstract**  

**Acknowledgments**  

**List of figures**  

**List of Tables**  

**Introduction:**

0.1. Structure of the thesis  
0.2. Framework  
0.3. Methodology and problems  
0.3.1. Christian, Jewish or pagan – some definitions  
0.3.1.1. Pagans  
0.3.1.2. Jews  
0.3.1.3. Christians  
0.3.2. The earliest Christian art  
0.3.2.1. How to classify a funerary monument as ‘Christian’?  
0.3.2.1.1. Jonah  
0.3.2.1.2. Biblical scenes in Jewish art  
0.3.2.1.3. The Good Shepherd  
0.3.2.2. Christian or not: a summary  
0.3.3. Visibility of funerary art  
0.4. Location: The catacombs of Rome  
0.4.1. History of catacomb research  
0.4.2. The development of the Roman catacombs  
0.5. Summary

**Chapter 1. Textual and archaeological evidence for dining in a funerary context in the Greco-Roman World:**

1.1. The Romans  
1.1.1. Roman funerary dining  
1.1.1.1. Silicernium  
1.1.1.2. Novemdiiale  
1.1.2. Commemoration of the dead: collegia and families  
1.1.2.1. Commemorative festivals  
1.1.2.2. Roman perceptions of the afterlife  
1.2. The Jews: Jewish funerary customs and dining  
1.3. The Christians: shared practices  
1.3.1. ‘Christian’ burial and funerary dining  
1.3.1.1. Gold-glass vessels  
1.3.1.2. Refrigerium  
1.3.1.3. Dining installations in the cemeteries
Chapter 2: Dining on Roman funerary monuments: *kline* scenes

2.1. *Stibadium* vs. *kline*  
2.2. Collective dining scenes on *klinai* in funerary contexts  
2.3. *Kline* scenes on frescoes and mosaics  
2.4. Ash chests and grave altars with dining *kline* scenes  
2.5. The ambiguity of *kline* scenes with diners  
2.6. *Kline* dining scenes on late antique Christian sarcophagi  
   2.6.1. The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus  
   2.6.2. A fragment of a sarcophagus’ lid from Palazzo Doria Pamphilj  
2.7. Summary

Chapter 3: Meal scenes on Roman funerary monuments: *stibadia* scenes

3.1. Pagan painted collective dining scenes from Roman tombs  
   3.1.1. The Elysian picnic scenes  
      3.1.1.1. Picnic scene from the Large Columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj  
      3.1.1.2. Hypogeum of Crispia Salvia in Sicily  
      3.1.1.3. The picnic scene from a tomb near the columbarium of Vigna Codini in Rome  
   3.1.2. Dining scenes that represent social status of the deceased  
      3.1.2.1. A lavish banquet scene from the tomb of Vestorius Priscus in Pompeii  
      3.1.2.2. The Hypogeum of Arangio from the Villa Landolina Necropolis in Syracuse  
   3.1.3. The dining scenes depicting family commemoration of the dead and *collegia* events  
      3.1.3.1. Tomb of Atitetus in the *piazzola* on the Via Appia Antica in Rome  
      3.1.3.2. Columbarium 31 in the Via Laurentina Necropolis in Ostia  
      3.1.3.3. Hypogeum of the Aurelii on Viale Manzoni in Rome  
      3.1.3.4. The façade of the Tomb of M. Clodius Hermes  
      3.1.3.5. Tomb of the Banquet in Constanta  
      3.1.3.6. The function of the family and *collegia* dining scenes

3.2. Painted meal scenes from Christian *cubicula*  
   3.2.1. General overview of the scenes  
   3.2.2. Christian convivial scenes in context  
      3.2.2.1. Biblical picnic scenes in *cubiculum* A2 in the catacomb of San Callisto, and *cubicula* 3 and 19 in the *Coemeterium Maius*  
      3.2.2.2. *Cubiculum* A3 in the catacomb of San Callisto  

1.3.2. Early Christian funerary dining: the development of the funerary Eucharist  
1.3.3. Christian funerary prayers and/or formulas  
1.4. Summary  

Summary

Kline

The ambiguity of Ash chests and grave chests  
Kline

Collective dining scenes on *stibadium* scenes

1.3.3. Christian funerary prayers and/or formulas  
1.4. Summary  

Chapter 2. Dining on Roman funerary monuments: *kline* scenes
3.2.2.3. *Cubicula* A5 and A6 in the catacomb of San Callisto 188
3.2.2.4. *Cubiculum* 16 in the *Coemeterium Maius* and the *Capella Greca* in the catacomb of Priscilla 189
3.2.3. Christian dining scenes – a summary 190
3.3. The *arcosolium* of Vibia and Vincentius 192
3.4. Conclusions 195

Chapter 4: Collective meal scenes on sarcophagi 198

4.1. Pagan and ‘religiously neutral’ collective dining scenes 199
   4.1.1. Mythological meal and picnic scenes 199
      4.1.1.1. Picnic scenes with Dionysus 199
      4.1.1.2. Dining Trojans 202
      4.1.1.3. Post-hunt picnic scenes with Meleager and Atlanta 202
   4.1.2. Sarcophagi with scenes related to the lifestyle of the Roman elite 203
      4.1.2.1. Post-hunt picnics 204
      4.1.2.2. Travel scenes 209
      4.1.2.3. Picnic scenes that are not related to hunting or travelling 212
      4.1.2.4. Other representations of picnics held on *stibadia* 214
   4.1.3. Sarcophagi with non-Christian imagery used by Christians 217
4.2. Christian *stibadia* meal scenes 218
4.3. Summary 222

Chapter 5: The dining scenes in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino – a case study 225

5.1. *Kline* scenes 227
5.2. Convivial scenes combined with images of members of the working class 229
5.3. Biblical *convivium* and *refrigeria* 231
      5.3.1. *Refrigerium* in cubiculum 48 and biblical *convivium* in cubiculum 62 232
      5.3.2. *Arcosolium* 52 233
5.4. Dining scenes with inscriptions referring to *Agape* and *Irene* 234
      5.4.1. Previous interpretations 234
      5.4.2. A different approach 238
5.5. Two dining scenes in *arcosolium* 75 249
5.6. Summary 253

General conclusions and final remarks 256
List of figures:

1. The fourth-century AD sarcophagus with three Good Shepherds, Museo Pio Christiano, (191/inv. 31554), The Vatican. Source: artstor.org 22

2. The Berlin lamp, now in Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst inv. 2354. Source: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin online collections database 24

3. Late third-century ‘Via Salaria’ sarcophagus, now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (inv. 181), The Vatican. Source: artstor.org 27

4. Location of the catacombs around the City of Rome. Adapted after Stevenson (1978) fig. 1 34

5. Crypt of the Popes in the catacomb of San Callisto. Source: Fiocchi Nicolai (1999) fig. 32 39


7. Area 1 in the catacomb of San Callisto. Source: Fiocchi Nicolai (1999) fig. 6 48


9. Gold glass vessels with inscriptions pie zeses. Morey 302 with an image of a gladiator (now in the British Museum reg. BEP 1891,0719.2), Morey 315 (with a couple and a chi-ro symbol, now in the BM, reg. BEP 1863,0727.5) and Morey 114 (with Torah shrine flanked by two lying lions and two menorahs below, now in Israel Museum in Jerusalem, inv. 66.36.15). Source: britishmuseum.org and Biblical Archaeology Society Library, baslibrary.org 91


11. Relief panel depicting Assurbanipal dining with his wife in Ninevah, now in the British Museum, inv. 124920. Source: britishmuseum.org 113


13. Funerary relief from Amiternum, now in the Church of San Stefano in Pizzoli. Source: Dunbabin (2003) fig. 40 117
14. Funerary altar from Este, now in Museo Nazionale Atestino, inv. 1547. Source: gettyimages.co.uk

15. A commemorative monument from Sentinum, now in Museo Nazionale in Ancona. Source: gettyimages.co.uk


17. Reclining couple from Tomb C on the Via Portuense, now in the Museo Delle Terme in Rome. Source: Blanc (1998) fig. 51

18. Decoration of the ceiling in the Tomb on the Via Porta Maggiore. Source: Parker (1877), no. 3312

19. A couple sitting on a kline from the Hypogeum of the Flavii. Source: Wilpert (1903) pl. 7.4


22. Late first- or early second-century cinerary urn of L. Roscius Prepon from Puteoli, now in Naples, Museo Nazionale, inv. 4189. Source: Dunbabin (2003) fig. 63

23. Late first- or early second-century urn of Lorania Cypare, now in the Louvre Museum, inv. MA214. Source: Dunbabin (2003) fig. 65

24. Late first-century cinerary urn of M. Domitius Primigenius, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 27.122.2 ab. Source: Dunbabin (2003) fig. 66

25. Late second-century uninscribed funerary altar from Rome, now in the Archaeological Museum in Rhodes, inv. 638. Source: Dunbabin (2003) fig. 83


27. Ash chest of M. Servilius Hermeros, now in the Palazzo Corsini. Source: Davies (2007) fig. 2.4

29. Third-century floor mosaic from a tomb on Via Appia, found at Convent of San Gregorio, now in Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Rome. Photo: G. Ingle

30. Late first-century funerary altar of Antonia Panace from Rome, now in Museo Nazionale in Naples, inv. 2803. Source: Dunbabin (2003) fig. 79

31. Funerary altar of C. Rubrius Urbanus, now in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome. Source: Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby, db.edcs.eu

32. Sarcophagus of P. Caecilius Villianus, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 9538/9539. Source: Amedick (1991) fig. 15.2-4

33. Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, c. 359 AD, now in the Sagrestia di San Pietro, the Museo del Tesoro inv. 31648, Vatican City. Source: artstor.org

34. A later fourth-century fragment of a sarcophagus from Palazzo Doria Pamphilj in Rome. Source: Deichmann (1967) no. 949

35. Fragment of a sarcophagus from an ancient necropolis underneath the Basilica Saint-Just de Valcabrère, now in the Musée Archéologique Départmental, Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges. Source: Immerzeel (1995) pl. 2

36. The panel with the dancers below the picnic scene from the columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj. Photo: G. Ingle

37. The judgement of the souls and the Three Fates in the columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj. Photo: G. Ingle

38. Elysian Fields from the Hypogeum of the Octavii on the Via Triumphalis near Rome. Now in the Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 104480, first quarter of the third century AD. Source: Blanc (1998) fig. 54

39. Picnic scene supplemented with the depiction of a table laden with silver dishes, and a Nilotic scene with pygmies on the Tomb of Vestorius Priscus, Pompeii. Source: Clarke (2006) fig. 105

40. An inscription from the Hypogeum of the Aurelii in Rome. Source: Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby (db.edcs.eu)
41. Moses, an angler and a picnic scene from cubiculum A2 in the catacomb of San Callisto. Source: Baruffa (2000) p. 67

42. Two scenes of sacrifices from cubiculum A3 in the catacomb of San Callisto. Source: Fiocchi Nicolai (1999) figs. 127, 133

43. The judgement of Vibia, and the kidnap of Vibia. Source: Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby, db.edcs.eu

44. Dionysiac sarcophagus decorated with a ceremonial procession (on the casket) and a symposium scene (on the lid) from Museo Nazionale delle Terme in Rome, inv. 128577, 160-180 AD, discovered in 1956 in a tomb on the Via Aurelia Antica. Photo: G. Ingle

45. Phaedra and Hippolytus sarcophagus from the Camposanto Monumentale in Pisa, inv. C9 est., c. 180 AD. Source: artstor.org

46. Sarcophagus of Lot, from a round Mausoleum underneath the basilica of San Sebastiano, Via Appia Antica, Rome. Source: Deichmann (1967) pl. 45

47. Sarcophagus from Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 65199 (c. 100AD). Source: Amedick (1991) pl. 45.1

48. Annona Sarcophagus from a tomb of the Via Latina in Rome, now in the Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 40799. Source: artstor.org

49. The reclining figure (BINKENTIA) in cubiculum 10, the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino. Source: Wilpert (1903)

50. Kline scene in cubiculum 59, the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino. Source: Deckers (1987) pl. 42c

51. Woman mixing wine with hot water from the authepsa, cubiculum 76, catacomb of Ss. Pietro e Marcellino. Source: Deckers (1987)

52. Gravestone of C. Iulius Maternus a veteran of legio I Minerva, and his wife Maria Marcellina, late second century AD, now in the Roman-Germanic Museum in Cologne. Source: Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby, db.edcs.eu

53. Funerary stela from Mainz Museum, late second to early third century AD [source: Selzer (1988) fig. 256]; funerary monument from the civitas Treverorum, now in the Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art, Luxembourg, late second to early third century AD
[source: Colling (2011) no.2]; and fragment of the Igel Column – a mid-third century AD 23-metre-high funerary monument of the Secundinii family from Igel, near Trier. The original column still stands in its place [source: alinari.it database no. 46922]

54. Second-century BC funerary stela from Kyzikos, now in the British Museum. Source: Karlsson (2014) pl. 47.1

55. Second-century tomb found in 1843 on Aachener Strasse 1328 in Cologne. The tomb was originally built on Via Belgica necropolis and was used until the fourth century AD. Source: Römisch-Germanisches Museum der roemisch-germanisches-museum.de

56. A late third-/early fourth-century jug with an inscription MISCE (‘mix!’), Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier. Source: commons.wikimedia.org

57. Mosaic from a fifth/sixth century funerary complex in Tipasa. Source: Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby, db.edcs.eu

58. Drawing of arcosolium 75, the catacomb of Ss. Pietro e Marcellino. After Deckers (1987)

59. The right side of the Brescia Casket (also known as Lipsanotheca), late fourth century, now in the Museo di Santa Giulia at San Salvatore in Brescia, Italy. Source: artstor.org

**List of Tables:**

1. Table 1: Biblical images accompanying collective convivial scenes in Christian cubicula in the Roman catacombs
2. Table 2: Selection of previous interpretations of Christian dining scenes
3. Table 3: Selection of previous interpretations of dining scenes with inscriptions referring to Agape and Irene
**Introduction**

[...] while the loaves, the cups, the cushions are set out, so as to assuage the sharp hurt that eats at our hearts. While the hour grows late, gladly will we revisit our tales about our virtuous mother, and our praises of her, while the old lady sleeps [...]

This third-century AD inscription from a funerary memorial provides a perfect piece of written evidence for traditional Roman commemorative meals, which were commonly held at graves in order to honour the dead. The gatherings, which in the third and fourth century were known as *refrigeria*, were a vital part of mortuary rites, and were intended to provide nourishment for the dead and ensure their happy afterlife. The Romans put a lot of emphasis on their funerary culture: from grand mausolea, elaborately decorated sarcophagi and painted tombs, to smaller scale grave stones, memorials, altars, and even simple inscriptions and grave goods; all evidence of the desire to preserve the memory of the deceased. In addition, cemeteries, tombs and graves were equipped with dining installations and paraphernalia intended to supply the dead with all necessary provisions: memorial meals and libations.

The significance of dining practices can also be deduced from the many convivial scenes that have been preserved in Roman tombs and catacombs. As the images are most often placed centrally in decorations we may assume that they played an important role, or carried a significant message for the tombs’ owners. Various interpretations of the scenes have been provided to date, but the scholarship has never focused on the role of the images of collective dining, and why the Romans actually used such a motif on their funerary monuments. It would seem that some scenes were designed to illustrate commemorative meals, while others portrayed the elite villa life style. But what was the purpose of decorating the tombs and grave stones with convivial images?

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1 CIL VIII 20277 = ILCV 1570. For the full text and a discussion see Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.
The following thesis will investigate in detail Roman and Christian funerary dining practices and their representations in art in order to answer these questions. Perhaps, despite being deeply meaningful, the convivial images performed a simple aesthetic role? Or, maybe, they were part of a funerary decoration for a particular reason? Why did both pagans and Christians use almost identical dining scenes in their tomb decoration? Can we actually distinguish Christian dining images from the pagan examples? What made an image ‘Christian’? There are also some inscribed monuments, but was there a connection between the image and the inscription? As the dining scenes can be found in many parts of the Roman Empire, is it possible that similar decorations from distinct locations, or from religiously different tombs, carry a similar meaning? And, most importantly, as some of the dining scenes are not accompanied by any religious images which would indicate the faith of the tombs’ owners, can the convivial decoration tell us anything about the deceased, buried in these tombs? Perhaps funerary decoration provides insight into personal beliefs rather than established religions? Or, maybe, it was not religion at all that mattered to those who commissioned the decoration but their social status or profession?

0.1. Structure of the thesis

The funerary inscription quoted above also provides an interesting insight into early Christian funerary culture, as, apparently, Aelia Secundula to whom the memorial is dedicated, was a Christian herself. But would it be possible that early Christians buried, remembered and commemorated their dead in a traditional pagan way? This particular question has puzzled scholars for centuries and is still vigorously debated today. The arguments on both sides have been based mainly on the understanding of the development of Christian art and the Christian community and its burial grounds in, and around, Rome. For this reason, it is essential to begin this thesis with discussions of the art itself and the development of Roman catacomb archaeology and scholarship, and how the understanding of the catacombs’ origins and expansion has changed over past centuries. In addition, as many of the objects and images have
been mistakenly classified as Christian based on the affiliation of certain symbols or motifs with the Christian faith it is essential to examine the development of Christian art in more detail.

The first chapter will be focused on both written and archaeological evidence for Roman funerary and commemorative practices. I shall investigate the role of families and *collegia*, and discuss Roman festivals for the dead and private commemorative events. In addition, I shall examine whether it is possible to detect any similarities between pagan, Jewish and early Christian mortuary customs. Chapter one will also present the development of the funerary Eucharist, and will discuss evidence for early Christian funerary prayer, which must have been derived from both Jewish and pagan examples. This is especially essential as the earliest biblical scenes that appear in the Roman catacombs reflect the stories of biblical characters that are included in the earliest known example of Christian funerary prayer. Therefore, it is very likely that biblical images might have reflected a prayer, which may lead us to establishing the function of other scenes depicted in the tombs.

Chapter two will present a selection of funerary monuments decorated with images of single diners reclining on *klinai* (very rarely a couple reclining). As it is impossible to determine a single interpretation of the motif, the discussion will focus on the function of the *kline* scenes in funerary decoration, which was to confirm or elevate the status of the deceased.

Chapters three, four and five will discuss the convivial images which represent collective dining. First I shall present painted scenes from Roman tombs and catacombs and divide them according to their interpretation: the Elysian picnic scenes, images that represent the status of the deceased, and scenes that depict family commemoration of the dead and *collegia* events. I shall also discuss Christian examples; however, as I shall demonstrate, there is hardly any difference between pagan and Christian dining scenes, therefore they must be considered as part of the wider decoration. In this chapter I shall compare several examples in order to investigate the function of the collective dining scenes, and why they were depicted on the tombs’ walls. As I shall argue, both
pagan and Christian honorary dining scenes were designed to strengthen, or even to be a substitute for, the actual commemorative rites.

Chapter four will present and discuss convivial images carved on Roman sarcophagi. Even from the first glance at the dining scenes it is evident that, despite stylistic similarities to the painted examples, the images on the sarcophagi were intended to perform a different function. I shall also discuss a small group of Christian convivial images which were evidently designed to perform the same commemorative role as the painted dining scenes representing honorary family and collegia meals.

Finally, chapter five will present a very interesting case study from the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino on the Via Cassilina in Rome. Some of the dining scenes found in this catacomb are different from any known examples from the City of Rome, and provide evidence of a group of foreigners who migrated to Rome in the early fourth century AD. Therefore, the scenes merit a separate investigation to all other examples, as they may shed more light on traditional provincial funerary rites, and provide more information about cultural and social integrations of different ethnic communities in Rome.

0.2. Framework

The majority of the dining scenes discussed in this thesis come from third and fourth century AD funerary contexts. However, it is also necessary to look at much earlier examples, as they demonstrate the development of both funerary dining and convivial scenes themselves. For this reason, the discussion will also encompass examples from the first and second centuries AD.

As the vast majority of Christian convivial images, in a funerary context, were found around the city of Rome this geographic area will be my main focus. I shall also refer to literary evidence from North Africa and pictorial evidence from the northern provinces of the Roman empire. This thesis will demonstrate that funerary culture was relatively unified in the Roman Empire, and evidence from different geographical locations may shed light on the mortuary customs of communities living in the city of Rome. This phenomenon will be especially noticeable in the case of the dining scenes with inscriptions referring to Agape
and Irene from the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, design of which clearly originated in the northern provinces (Chapter 5).

0.3. **Methodology and problems**

After presenting written and archaeological evidence for Roman, Christian and Jewish funerary rites I shall focus on pictorial representations of dining scenes found in Roman tombs, catacombs and on sarcophagi. My main focus will be on the depictions of collective meals held on stibadia couches, though it is also necessary to discuss the so-called *kline* scenes portraying single figures reclining. In the case of the *kline* scenes and relief representations of dining scenes on Roman sarcophagi I shall discuss only a selection of the available material, due mainly to the large number of known examples. On the other hand, I will attempt to discuss all known painted representations of collective dining scenes from Roman tombs and catacombs.

From the scholarship to date it is evident that the collective convivial scenes have been always considered as a separate motif, and many attempts have been made to provide a single interpretation of the design. This, however, is an incorrect approach, as will be demonstrated in this thesis; the dining scenes should be viewed as integral parts of larger decorations. Only in such a way it is possible to properly identify the images and determine their function, which related to funerary rites.

All collective dining scenes from Roman tombs, catacombs and sarcophagi are included in the catalogue (see Appendix 1). Additional pictures, which are used to make comparisons, will be added in the main text.

In addition, the names of the catacombs will be written in their present Italian form as this is how they appear in the majority of modern publications.

There are three main issues with regard to any discussion of early Christian funerary material, and all three refer to our modern perception of ancient societies: firstly, who were the ‘Christians’ and how can we distinguish

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2 Or, as proven by the example of St. Augustine discussed in Chapter 1, who was born and lived most of his life in North Africa, but buried his mother in Milan according to a traditional local custom which he described in his treatise.
them from the other social/religious/ethnic groups in the Roman world? Secondly, how can we identify an object or an image as 'Christian'? And, finally, how visible was the funerary decoration? The next three sections will investigate these problems in more detail and will provide the most recent understanding of the subject.

0.3.1 Christian, Jewish or pagan – some definitions

Despite the great variety of religious cults which thrived in the Roman Empire in the third and fourth century after Christ it is noticeable from the archaeological material found in funerary contexts, that the evidence suggests only three general groups of material: the largest group, which can be referred to as pagan; the smallest, which appeared in the mid-second century as Jewish, and Christian which originated no earlier than the early third century but became dominant by the end of the fourth century. However, before discussing funerary material any further, it is necessary to explain the terminology used in this work.

0.3.1.1. Pagans:

The popular use and understanding of the word 'pagan' may be pejorative or carry some negative connotation. However, the Latin term *paganus* was used commonly to describe ‘a stranger or an alien with regard to a particular group’. For instance, it often referred to civilians as opposed to the military, or to countrymen in order to differentiate them from people living in the cities. Around 350 AD the term was adopted by Roman Christians to denote non-Christians and non-Jews. It is likely, that the term had been used earlier by

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3 Cameron (2010) 25.
6 Cameron (2010) 14-24 provides a comprehensive analysis of the term *paganus*. It, most likely, replaced the Greek *hellenos*, which had been substituted for Greek *gentes/gentiles* used by the Jews, and was used by Christians living in the Eastern part of the Empire to refer to non-Christians. For Christians living in Rome, calling their non-Christian neighbors *hellenes* must have been rather unsuitable, while *romani* or *nationes* would not make much sense either as by 350AD the majority of Christians living in Rome were native Romans as well.
Christians to describe those who were not yet members of the Church, i.e. were unbaptized.\footnote{7}{E.g. a funerary inscription of Iulia Florentina from Catania in Sicily from before 324 AD: CIL X 07112 in Cameron (2010) 23-4.}

From the literary examples of the late fourth and early fifth century it is evident that the term \textit{paganus} was regarded as ‘popular or vulgar’\footnote{8}{‘…not a term that educated people were willing to use without apology’ as stated by Cameron (2010) 16. E.g. Augustine, \textit{Epistulae} 184A 3.5, \textit{Codex Theodosianus} XVI.5.46 (409).}, yet by no means insulting. It is with this particular understanding that the term ‘pagan’ will be used in this thesis in order to refer to non-Christians and non-Jews living in the Roman Empire.

The term ‘pagan’ has been especially convenient when discussing funerary material. From the archaeological evidence it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the religion of the deceased. In the majority of cases it would be possible to use the term ‘Greco-Roman’, however, that term does not cover all aspects of the religious diversity of the population of the Roman Empire.\footnote{9}{As explained by Cameron (2010) 25-30 neither do ‘polytheists’, ‘heathens’, infidels’ or ‘idolaters’.} For instance, there is only scarce epigraphic evidence for graves of the followers of Mithras. There are several dedicatory inscriptions engraved on altars or cult objects offered by the worshippers of Mithras, but only few known mortuary epitaphs from Rome.\footnote{10}{Two funerary inscriptions that refer to the cult of Mithras were found in the hypogeum of Vibia on Via Appia Antica, see: Ferrua (1971) 36-8 and 43-5. A funerary epitaph of M. Valerius Maximus, the priest of Sol Invictus found in Milan under the basilica of San Simpliciano: CIL V 05893. Also CIL VI 00968, 02271 and 03881. One potential tomb of the associates of the cult of Mithras was found in 1903 in Oea, Tripolis in North Africa, however the evidence is still debated, see: Griffith (2006) 48-77. An example of possible (but never discussed in any scholarly publication) Mithraic decoration can be found on the wall above \textit{arcosolium} 75 in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino. I shall discuss it further in Chapter 5, section 5.5. For the cult of Mithras see Merkelbach (1998).} Lack of any more evidence may be attributed to the biased research of the pre-late twentieth-century scholars, who catalogued all material from the Roman catacombs as ‘Christian’.\footnote{11}{E.g. Raffaele Fabretti, suggested that the popular formula D M (Dis Manibus) found on several inscriptions in the catacombs must in fact be read as Deo Magno, see Fabretti (1862) 564. The example used by Fabretti was in fact an altar from around 180AD dedicated to Sol.}

The cult of Mithras itself had been strongly influenced by, if not actually based on, the Persian god Mitra,\footnote{12}{Clauss (2001) 3-8. Cumont (1956) 1-32.} therefore the term ‘Greco-Roman’ may not
reflect its character fully. There could have been as many as 250 Mithraea in Rome active in the mid-fourth century,\textsuperscript{13} which suggests a relatively substantial number of followers. However, even though there are remains of many cult sites and activities all over the Roman Empire, it is surprising to have such limited remains of Mithraism in a mortuary context. The almost total ‘invisibility’ of Mithraism in funerary material also suggests a strong possibility that other mystery cults and religions might not have been represented in a mortuary context either.\textsuperscript{14} As for the early Christians, they would have used the term \textit{pagani} for the followers of all foreign cults and Greco-Roman religions regardless of their association with any particular group.

On the other hand, there is some archaeological evidence for the presence of some Egyptians in Rome (suggesting different, non-Greco-Roman ethnicity and/or religion) or the remains of people from North Africa buried in Rome, whose mortuary customs differed from the Greco-Roman ones.\textsuperscript{15} In the latter case, the relatives of the deceased made a special effort to observe North African burial rites, which may suggest that either their different ethnicity and/or religion played a significant role in their lives. Therefore, describing these burials as ‘Greco-Roman’ may not be sufficient. It is thus clear that the word ‘pagan’ can be used in a much broader sense than ‘Greco-Roman’, as it comprised the religions of all who were identified by Christians as non-Jews and those who did not belong to the Christian religion. And in that sense the term ‘pagan’ will be used in this thesis.

\textsuperscript{14} Apart from very few examples, for instance, the \textit{arcosolium} of Vibia with a clear reference to the cult of Sabasius, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. A marble sarcophagus lid with a reclining \textit{archigallus} and two separate reliefs depicting \textit{archigallus} performing religious rites (one with Magna Mater and Mercurius and the other with Attis) were found in Isola Sacra necropolis near tomb 75, see Meiggs (1973) 359 and 362 Pl. XXXIX a and b; Calza (1940) 205-10, figs. 108-111.
\textsuperscript{15} E.g. BCAR 1915-324: \textit{D(is) M(anibus) / M(arcus) Pinnius Vale(n)s / mil(es) cl(assis) pr(aetoriae) Mis(enensis) / ex III(triere) Lucifero n(atione) / Aegypt(us) vix(it) an(nos) XLV / mil(itavit) an(nos) XXIV / b(ene) m(erenti) f(ecit);} funerary inscriptions of T. Fl. Maximus: CIL VI 03110, C. I. Priscus: CIL VI 03117, T. Pl. Maximus CIL VI 03127 or L. Sculpitius Artemidorius CIL VI 03133. The Tomb of the Egyptians (Tomb Z) in the Vatican Necropolis might have belonged to an Egyptian family or to some followers of the Egyptian cults, see Noy (2004) 53; or the recently discovered Tomb X in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino containing remains of people of North African origin, see Blanchard, et al (2007) 989-998.
0.3.1.2. Jews:

Looking at the Roman Jews it is evident that they were not solely perceived in an ethnic/geographical context (i.e. citizens of Judea) but also as a religious community.\(^{16}\) Although there probably were Jews in Rome as early as the mid-second century BC, it was Pompey’s conquest of Judea in 63 BC that resulted in the bringing of thousands of Jews to Rome as captives and slaves.\(^{17}\) From Philo’s account it is clear that the emancipated Jews became Roman citizens and settled ‘on the other side of the Tiber’, while those still in slavery were allowed to perform ‘national observances’.

Another major event was the 66 AD Jewish revolt in Judea, which ended in the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD. The report of Josephus mentions over 30,000 Jews being sold as slaves, of which at least some must have reached Rome.\(^ {18}\)

There are not many written accounts of the Jewish community in Rome in the third and fourth centuries and the existing evidence may suggest that the links between Diaspora Jews and Judea required strengthening by rabbis’ frequent visits to Rome.\(^ {19}\) As proven by Rutgers, the Roman Jews were integral members of society despite different religious practices,\(^ {20}\) and it is likely that at least some of them gained Roman citizenship.\(^ {21}\) A few centuries of assimilation provided new generations of Jews born in Rome, whose connection with Judea and their sense of ethnicity might have weakened. It is, therefore, evident that looking at the Jews of Late Antiquity living in Rome their Jewishness was much more dependent on their religious customs than on their ancestral origin.\(^ {22}\)

The presence of the Jews in Rome is also well attested in the funerary inscriptions found in the Jewish catacombs.\(^ {23}\) However, as I will discuss later in this chapter, the ‘Jewish’ archaeological material from the catacombs should be

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\(^ {18}\) Josephus, _De Bello Judaico_ 3.540.

\(^ {19}\) E.g. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi in the third century (Midrash Levi. R 27.1) or Rabbi Hiyya ben Abba in the early fourth century (Midrash Sh. 4.1.54.d) in Noy (2000) 259.


\(^ {23}\) I discuss the Jewish catacombs further in section 0.4.1.
considered with caution. It is evident that there were no clear cut distinctions between Christian and Jewish funerary epitaphs, as both ‘Christians and Jews living in the Greco-Roman world frequently employed many of the same symbols, making it difficult for scholars in the twentieth century to distinguish, in the absence of more explicit evidence, between Jewish tuna and Christian fish’. In fact, a famous inscription from the Via Latina necropolis mentions a certain Calevius who sold a burial place to Avin[ius], where Cavilius and Lucius had been placed in peace. The inscribed epitaph is especially interesting as it is combined with both a chi-ro symbol and a picture of a menorah. The inscription should therefore be considered as clear evidence for the interaction between Jews and Christians in Rome.

0.3.1.3. **Christians:**

The name *Christiani* (Greek: Χριστιανοὶ), which described the first believers in Jesus Christ, appears in the literary form around the turn of the first and second centuries. The term most likely originally referred to Gentile Christians, and references can be found in both Christian and pagan sources. However, the boundaries between Christian Gentiles and Jews were not ‘clear-cut and impermeable’. In fact, the strongly polemical letter of Ignatius to the Magnesians may suggest that in some communities there were no boundaries at

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25 [ICUR VI 15780: Calevius bendidit Avinio] trisomu ubi positi erant Vini et Calivilus et Lucius in pa(ce) con(js)u(atu) Stil(ichonis) in De Rosi (1857-9) vol.1: 210, no. 489; Withrow (1888) ref. 673.
all, hence Ignatius’ attempt to create a definition of Christianity as a movement opposed to Judaism.30

In addition, alongside the growth of the Christian communities around the Roman Empire came the divisions of beliefs caused, to a great extent, by the lack of any specific doctrines. An early example is a controversy started by Valentinus, who in the first half of the second century aspired to become a bishop of Rome.31 After his failure Valentinus abandoned the orthodox faith and established his ‘own’ school of Christianity, which taught, amongst other things, about ‘knowledge’ (γνώσις).32 For that reason, Valentinus and many others, who tried to combine Hellenistic philosophy with the teaching of Jesus, have been commonly referred to as Gnostics and heretics.33 On the other hand many, if not all, of the heretics believed that they were ‘the only and true Christians’.34 Moreover, it is essential to point out that many, who identified themselves as ‘Christians’ might have done that before even gaining full Christian membership (i.e. before being baptized).35

It is essential at this point to emphasize that while discussing the early Christians (that is all those who believed themselves to be Christian) one should acknowledge that the term ‘Christian’ refers purely to one’s religious affiliation. Religion (in this case Christianity) was only one aspect of a person’s identity.36 Rebillard even proposes to call it ‘Christianness’ in order to describe activities and situations, during which ancient people acted as Christians. In other aspects of their lives they were active members of the larger Greco-Roman society.37 As I mentioned earlier, the term Christiani from its very origin referred to the religion of a certain group of people rather than their ethnicity. Even the fourth-

30 Ignatius, Letter to the Magnesians 10.3: ‘It is absurd to profess Christ Jesus, and to Judaize. For Christianity did not embrace Judaism, but Judaism Christianity, that so every tongue which believes might be gathered together to God’. For the commentaries see Gaston (1986); Trevett (1992); Schoedel (1985).
34 In this case Naassens, quoted by Hippolytus, Refutatio Omnium Haeresium 5.4.22 in Maarjanen (2005) 19-20.
35 Tertullian’s definition of Christians vs Augustine’s in Rebillard (2012) 11 and 64-7 respectively.
century Christians’ adoption of the term *paganus*, and not *romanus* or *hellenos*, proves that they intended to differentiate their religious rather than social affiliation or ethnic origin.

Looking at the archaeological material in Rome from the first four centuries after Christ it is evident that Christianity was an invisible religion until as late as the early third century. The iconographic examples of the third- and fourth-century Christian tombs and graves do not contain any indication of Gnosticism. Therefore, from the archaeological point of view there is no evidence for any differentiation between different forms of Christianity.

From the given definitions of the terminology used in this thesis it is noticeable, that the terms ‘pagan’, ‘Jew’ and ‘Christian’ refer only to a certain aspect of the identity of members of Greco-Roman society (i.e. their religious affiliation), and in such a way the terms will be understood in this thesis. However, as rightly pointed out by Elsner, in antiquity ‘religious boundaries were less fixed and identities more fluid’. Looking at third- and fourth-century Judaism and Christianity one should not understand them as completely separate religions; quite the opposite: Jews, Christians and pagans should be viewed as integral members of the wider Greco-Roman society. Pagan, Jewish and Christian interaction is also evident from the study of the customary inscriptions found on Roman funerary epitaphs and art, though this subject has proved to be the most problematic and requires further attention.

### 0.3.2. The earliest Christian art

Sometime in the first half of the third century AD Christians living in Rome began to express their religious affiliation through art by commissioning...
artefacts decorated with selected symbols or images, which not only did not contradict their faith but actually affirmed their beliefs.\textsuperscript{44} A list of all appropriate symbols can be found in a treatise by Clement of Alexandria written around 200 AD, which included ‘a dove, a fish or a ship […] or a musical lyre […] or a ship’s anchor’.\textsuperscript{45} Clement continues with a number of images that any good Christian should also avoid (i.e. idols, swords, bows, drinking cups or lovers and prostitutes).\textsuperscript{46} From the passage it is also clear that Clement advises Christians to choose from the available repertoire that is, using the words of Finney, to adapt ‘to an already existing category of material culture’.\textsuperscript{47} This is especially important as it confirms that Christians were not the only ones who used such images and symbols. This, in turn, indicates that not all of the funerary inscriptions, oil lamps or other objects decorated with such pictures undoubtedly belonged to Christians.\textsuperscript{48}

This point was further examined by Elsner, who suggested that it is impossible to talk about ‘Christian’ or ‘Jewish’ art until the end of the fourth century.\textsuperscript{49} As this point of view may be slightly too radical, it is true that the earliest, what we now call, ‘Christian’ images in fact depict Old Testament episodes, which actually refer to Jewish tradition, history and beliefs.\textsuperscript{50} Yet, at some point in the third-century Christians also developed several New Testament scenes, which depict the events from Jesus’ life and cannot be associated with the Jewish religion.\textsuperscript{51} The stories of the lives of Jesus and the Apostles, which were eventually compiled into the New Testament must have been known to the early Christians from oral tradition not only from official sermons, but also from popular story-telling.\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{44} Finney (1994) 104-15 for the ‘selective adaptation’. For the most recent dating of these cubicula see Bisconti (2009).
\textsuperscript{45} Clement of Alexandria, Logos Paedagogus 3.11.59.
\textsuperscript{46} A similar list of forbidden images was provided by Tertullian, De Idolatria 3.1-8.5.
\textsuperscript{47} Finney (1994) 114.
\textsuperscript{48} As suggested, for instance, by Marucchi (1912) 50-7.
\textsuperscript{49} Elsner (2003) 125.
\textsuperscript{51} Jensen (2000) 65.
\textsuperscript{52} Grig (2013) 843-6.
The origin of the earliest Christian images and their connection with the text (i.e. either the Old and New Testament or the treatises of the early Christian theologians and bishops) have been frequently debated. For instance, Jensen provides a case study of a popular scene with Abraham and Isaac, where Abraham is just about to strike Isaac with a sword and God’s hand appears from above to stop him. Jensen provides a rather lengthy explanation of all possible meanings of this scene that vary from God’s need for a sacrifice, an allegorical depiction of the passion of Christ and ‘the passage of the human soul through the trial of death, arriving at last – resurrected from the dead and returned to Paradise’. Although all those interpretations may be suitable for explaining the decoration found in churches it would be surprising if any of these explanations came to mind to a commissioner of a mid-third-century tomb. The earliest known example of the scene with Abraham and Isaac comes from cubiculum A3 in the catacomb of San Callisto and depicts them both as orants: Isaac has been saved through God’s intervention hence there was no resurrection from the dead (fig. 42). The image discussed by Jensen comes from a fourth-century sarcophagus, therefore her interpretation of the scene seems irrelevant to the much earlier examples and does not explain the scene’s origin.

Secondly, as I will discuss in the next chapter, all early Christian scenes were abbreviated to emphasize only certain episodes from biblical stories, each clearly referring to God saving people from misfortune (e.g. Noah standing in the ark and receiving an olive branch from a dove, Daniel as an orant being saved in the lions’ den, or Jesus resurrecting Lazarus or healing a paralytic). As I will argue later, any pictorial decoration of a tomb should be considered as a whole, rather than each image being discussed individually and taken out of the overall context.

Thirdly, Jensen is not the first (and probably not the last) scholar to look for more spiritual explanations of early Christian images and their connections with sacred texts. However, a question emerges as to what extent such texts

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54 For the decoration of churches in early Byzantium see Mungo (1986) 32-6.
55 Jensen (2004) 35 fig. 2.2.
56 See Chapter 1, section 1.3.3.
influenced the traditional, private funerary customs of common believers and their choice of decoration for their tombs. As I shall argue in the following chapters, until at least the end of the fourth century, Christian funerary practices and beliefs did not differ from traditional Greco-Roman ones and funerals belonged to the private sphere, controlled by families or collegia. In addition, images were not used to illustrate exact texts; on the contrary, both painters and writers used parts of traditional (in this case: biblical) stories to showcase particular aspects or messages that suited their intentions. In fact, to a certain extent, the text could have been influenced by, or even based on, visual art. Therefore, the image of Abraham and Isaac should not be interpreted through the light of contemporary interpretation of the scripture, but rather as a personal choice of a decoration’s commissioner. Certain images were chosen by early Christians to illustrate their eschatological beliefs; however, as I will demonstrate in the following chapter, these beliefs were more influenced by family tradition and/or interaction within a community rather than by sacred texts, which were not easily accessible for the non-literate members of society.

It is possible, however, that the popularity of certain images could have been influenced by some contemporary sermons and/or prayers, especially those which were rhythmically chanted and which were easily remembered. The best example of such a phenomenon is the decoration of cubiculum B in the Hypogeum of Via Dino Compagni discussed later in this chapter, which might somehow have been connected to the sermons of Ambrose. I shall further discuss the link between some images and funerary prayers in Chapter 1.

Finally, early Christians also continued to use several secular images from Greco-Roman art, which we can now describe as ‘religiously neutral’. These are: victories, seasons, shepherds, anglers, philosophers, orants, meal

57 Borg (2016). I am very grateful to Prof Borg for allowing me to read her article before its official publication.
58 Grig (2013) 855.
59 I.e. ‘concerning death, judgement and the final destiny of the soul of humankind’, according to Oxford Dictionaries.
61 Grig (2013) 845.
62 Snyder (2005) 363-70, see section 0.3.2.1.2.
scenes, hunt scenes, marine scenes, travel scenes, daily-life scenes, flowers and animals. Their ‘neutral’ character refers to the fact that their meaning could have been adapted according to personal belief or need. For instance, as will be discussed further in this chapter, an image of a ram-bearing shepherd (*kriophoros*) in Greco-Roman art indicated the peacefulness of the rural outdoors and often reflected the belief of a happy existence in either the world of the living or the dead while, for at least some Christians, it symbolised the Good Shepherd, which allegory was used by Jesus in his teaching (John 10.1-18). The neutral images were deemed acceptable for pagans, Christians and Jews and were frequently used in funerary decoration.

0.3.2.1. **How to classify a funerary monument as Christian?**

What are the iconographical criteria by which we can define a monument as ‘Christian’? Over the past centuries of discoveries and research it has been assumed that the presence of biblical images, shepherds or certain symbols (recommended by Clement of Alexandria) in tombs were obvious indicators of their Christian ownership. However, as this section will demonstrate, these criteria may be disputable. I shall focus on two case studies and will discuss the origin and usage of the most common biblical motif – the story of Jonah, and the image of a ram-bearer, as these are by far the most common depictions found in Roman catacombs. The first example is intended to demonstrate that while the depiction of Jonah sleeping under a pergola might have been based on the representations of mythical Endymion, the motif itself most likely originated from Jewish art. I shall also examine the common misconception of associating biblical scenes solely with Christian art, and will investigate why they could also have been used by the Jews. The example of ram-bearer will be used in the discussion of how ‘religiously neutral’ motifs were adapted from Roman art by Christians. I will focus solely on visual representations and will not consider monuments decorated with religiously neutral Greco-Roman imagery that

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63 See section 0.3.2.1.3.
64 Grig (2013) 850.
65 See section 0.3.2.
contain Christian inscriptions. Certain monuments, on which decoration is combined with epitaphs, will be discussed in the chapter about the dining images on sarcophagi.

As already mentioned, early Christian iconography emerged around the turn of the third century AD, and included designs taken directly from the Greco-Roman repertoire to represent certain biblical and Christian stories. All of the earliest examples of Christian images are found in funerary contexts.

0.3.2.1.1. Jonah

Probably the earliest pictorial representations from the Roman catacombs or sarcophagi that have been associated with Christian belief are the depictions of Jonah resting under a pergola, depicted in a similar way to mythical Endymion sleeping under a tree. Interestingly, it appears that the figure of Jonah in the pose of a heroic nude could also have been used to represent a portrait of the deceased, as was often practised in Roman funerary art, where the deceased was in fact presented as a sleeping mythological/biblical hero. Similarly, images of another naked heroic youth – Daniel,
represented as standing between two lions with his arms raised in the attitude of a prophet - appear in early Christian funerary art almost as frequently as the depictions of Jonah.  

However, as the representations of Jonah sleeping under a pergola are identical to those of Endymion, and could easily be misinterpreted, a clue to a proper understanding can be found in neighbouring images that decorate a particular object. Consequently, Jonah was usually depicted in a series of images that portrayed his entire story (i.e. Jonah being cast out from the boat, swallowed by a sea-monster and eventually resting under a pergola). Often, just one of the incidents from Jonah’s story was combined with other biblical images, such as Noah in the ark, Daniel between two lions, Abraham with Isaac, etc. Biblical stories, other than that of Jonah, such as the three youths in the fiery furnace or Moses striking the rock, appeared just as often on some funerary monuments. However, is it safe to assume that any biblical images depicted on a mortuary monument or artefact could be considered a criterion for the Christian character of an object as suggested by Jensen?

0.3.2.1.2. Biblical scenes in Jewish art

Biblical scenes are also known in a Jewish non-funerary context, such as, for instance, the famous mid-third-century AD synagogue from Dura Europos (discovered in the vicinity of a Christian baptistery), which demonstrate through a variety of biblical images that pictorial art must have been used by at least some of the Jewish communities in the Greco-Roman world. However, according to the current stage of research, there is no evidence of the usage of

has not been carved with details, which suggest that it was left to be finished off with a specific portrait of the deceased. For portraits of the deceased added to some mythological figures on sarcophagi see Newby (2011) and Huskinson (1998).

Finney (1994) 191. An interesting example of a representation of Daniel as a naked youth was depicted on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. Unfortunately, the naked figure of Daniel was replaced probably in the early twentieth century by a more ‘appropriate’ (for contemporary standards) clothed figure of an old man. For pictures and references see Malbon (1990). For the statistics reflecting popularity of the representations of Jonah and Daniel among Christian motifs see Dresken-Weiland (2010) 237.

E.g. in cubiculum A3 in the catacomb of San Callisto, see no. 41; or on the sarcophagus of Baebia Hermofile, see no. 117.

Jensen (2000) 64-76.

Images from the Dura Europos Synagogue: Hachiiili (1998) 96-197.
any biblical repertoire on Jewish funerary monuments. It is especially surprising as, for instance, Narkiss convincingly argues for the Jewish origin of the depictions of the Jonah cycle, of which the complexity of the images suggests their midrashic rather than biblical source. According to Narkiss, one must consider the Jewish cycle as narrative representations, which were similar to the illustrations of other midrashic stories. There are, however, no examples of the depictions of the Jonah cycle from any of the known preserved ancient monuments classified as Jewish.

In addition, an interesting body of evidence for the Jewish origin of certain designs is provided by images representing Jacob’s dream or Abraham seated, from the Via Dino Compagni catacomb, where certain details (i.e. Jacob sleeping on three stones, Abraham seated rather than standing) evidently point to the midrashic rather than biblical basis of the stories. Interestingly, looking at the pictorial decoration of cubiculum B in the Via Dino Compagni catacomb, where Jacob’s dream has been depicted alongside other unique Old Testament scenes that do not appear anywhere else in the Roman catacombs, and with not even one New Testament scene, could we then interpret this cubiculum as belonging to Jewish owners?

Similarly, the Christian interpretation of cubiculum C has been based on a scene representing the resurrection of Lazarus. However, the depiction is rather unusual as the figure of Lazarus is missing, which led some scholars to argue that this could, in fact, be the scene with Moses or Joshua leading the Hebrews into the Promised Land: a story with a strong eschatological Jewish allegory. Apart from the debatable scene with Lazarus, the decoration of cubiculum C does not include any other New Testament image. Interestingly, this chamber also contains depictions of Jonah.

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76 Narkiss (1979a) 63-76.
78 Narkiss (1979b) 369.
79 Prigent (1990) 324-32 provides a very detailed analysis of the paintings in cubiculum B of the Hypogeum of Vigna Dino Compagni, but still compares them with Christian examples found in other catacombs (according to Prigent, the catacombs’ provenance indicates that the images must be Christian) and, despite the fact that some scenes are indeed unparalleled, still concludes that the iconographical motifs cannot possibly be of Jewish origin (Jewish ownership of the cubiculum is not even considered).
and a Good Shepherd represented as a young boy: a biblical hero and a neutral figure, neither of which definitely points to the Christian character of the decoration, which may potentially indicate Jewish ownership of this tomb. This, in turn, could lead to some very interesting conclusions. Unfortunately, no epigraphic material that could confirm or refute such hypothesis survived; not even one image of a menorah or any other Jewish symbol is preserved on the walls of the Hypogaeum of Via Dino Compagni. None the less, it is evident that the commissioner(s) of cubicula B and C must have been strongly influenced by midrashic sources.

There are a few examples of Jewish sarcophagi from Rome (identified by the presence of a menorah or a specifically Jewish inscription), which contain some ‘neutral’ iconographical motifs, such as cupids playing.\textsuperscript{81} There is also one unusual example of a sarcophagus from around 300 AD decorated with other figures (all depicted as children) such as a philosopher, a seated shepherd or a person sitting on a peacock with his hands raised in a gesture of prayer and a halo behind his head.\textsuperscript{82} The monument has been identified, by the preserved inscription, as belonging to a Jew. Although this particular choice of decoration on a Jewish sarcophagus may seem a little surprising, all of the figures are again of a very ‘neutral’ character. Moreover, as argued by Koch, it appears that the commissioner of the sarcophagus’ decoration deliberately avoided any particularly pagan figures.\textsuperscript{83} However, several other fragments of sarcophagi with typically pagan designs were also found in the Jewish catacomb of Villa Torlonia.\textsuperscript{84} There are three possible explanations for this: either these artefacts accidently ‘migrated’ to the catacomb from a surface cemetery,\textsuperscript{85} or the


\textsuperscript{82} From the Palazzo Rondanini in Rome, in: Koch (2000) 593, fig. 217.

\textsuperscript{83} Koch (2000) 593.

\textsuperscript{84} I.e. a strigilated sarcophagus with Dionysus [Goodenough (1953) vol. II, 43, no. 833], a fragment with a male Bacchic figure [Goodenough (1953) vol. II, 41, no. 822], or three fragments with hunt scenes [Goodenough (1953) vol. II, 41, nos. 819, 823, 824].

sarcophagi belonged to some pagan owners buried in the catacomb, or at least some of the Jews did not refrain from purchasing, using or reusing coffins decorated with pagan themes. As the third option is just as possible as the other two, it would provide another piece of evidence supporting Jewish integration with, rather than separation from, wider Greco-Roman society.

However, what certainly distinguishes Jewish funerary monuments from the Christian ones is the lack of any dining scenes in the former. The only two examples of Jewish objects that are decorated with *stibadia* are two gold glass vessels (no. 131 and 132), however in both cases the couches are represented empty without any diners. These two images most likely refer to the imagined banquets that await the righteous in the world to come, especially when linked with Jewish symbols (menorahs, shofars and Covenant Arks with Torah scrolls), which clearly reflect Jewish eschatological beliefs and God’s promise of a New Jerusalem.

From the available material it appears that, while members of the Jewish communities in Rome did not refrain from decorating their funerary monuments with figural themes, they did chose not to present any biblical motifs in their tombs. However, the lack of evidence that could connect pictorial decoration with Jewish burials should not be considered as positive proof for the Jews not using biblical images at all. It is possible that at least some of the remaining ancient funerary monuments that contain biblical scenes could have belonged to members of the Jewish community in Rome but have been mistakenly classified as Christian; or that the Jewish symbols, which would

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86 The presence of objects with pagan imagery in the Jewish catacombs appeared to be surprising for some scholars [see, e.g. Leon (1960) 225]. However, there is some archaeological evidence for Christian symbols in the Monteverde Jewish catacomb, which suggests that some Christians might have been buried there. I see no reason not to accept that, at least parts of the Jewish catacombs might have been used in a more commercial way and the tombs could have been sold to any potential client, including pagans and Christians.

87 Frankel and Teutsch (1992), It is very likely that the *stibadia* may represent the empty couches with tables laden with food that await the deceased in the Jewish Garden of Eden, see Avery-Peck (2000) 250-262; Ben-Sasson (2009) 35; Bergmann (2016).

88 The so-called Jewish catacombs from Rome have been mostly damaged or even destroyed. Identification of their religious affiliation is based on the occasional appearance of some Jewish symbols (such as a menorah or a temple), see, e.g. De Rossi (1867); Marucchi (1887); Manna (1922). As pointed out by Rutgers [(1998) 67], it is certain that the evidence, on which we base our research/knowledge is very selective.
allow such identification, have been damaged or removed over the past two millennia.\(^{89}\) It is, therefore, evident that the presence of only biblical scenes (especially Old Testament episodes) on a funerary monument from Rome does not necessarily indicate the Christian character of an object, and it may well point to an object’s Jewish origin. However, once biblical scenes are combined with dining images, they do point towards Christian affiliation of an object.

### 0.3.2.1.3. The Good Shepherd

The second most popular figure usually associated with early Christianity was the *kriophoros* (the ram-bearer) also known as the Good Shepherd. This representation had been common in Greco-Roman art since at least the fifth century BC,\(^{90}\) and was widely used in third- and fourth-century AD funerary art. An image of the *kriophoros* itself, however, should not be considered as an indicator of the Christian character of an object. There are several examples of monuments decorated with shepherds where the religious affiliation is rather debatable, such as the late third-century sarcophagus of Iulius Achilleus or the sarcophagus with three ‘Good Shepherds’ from the Vatican (fig.1).\(^{91}\)

![Sarcophagus with Good Shepherds](image)

**Fig. 1.** The fourth-century AD sarcophagus with three Good Shepherds, Museo Pio Christiano, (191/inv. 31554)

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\(^{89}\) The brilliant article by Schüler (1966), in which he aims to prove that the Jews also used biblical images on gold glass was never really followed up.

\(^{90}\) E.g. a famous statue of *Hermes Kriophoros* by Kalamis, now in the Museo di Scultura Antica Giovanni Barracco in Rome. On the development of the ram-bearer iconography see Muller (1944) 87-90.

\(^{91}\) Sarcophagus of Iulius Achilleus (c. 290 AD) now in Museo Nazionale Romano in Koortbojian (1995) 83, fig. 45, the sarcophagus with three Good Shepherds in Koch (2000) 17, pl. 10.
The decoration on those sarcophagi presents only ram-bearers in a rural context and is not accompanied by any characteristically Christian images. A similar example is provided by the late third-century so-called Sarcophagus of the Shepherds found near Isola Sacra necropolis, and decorated with five figures of shepherds, each differentiated by pose and age (from the left: the first one is bearded and sits on a rock, the second one is young and is standing and involved in a conversation with the first shepherd, and the third is young and depicted in a pose of *kriophoros*, the fourth is standing and leaning over a staff, and the fifth one is also sitting on a rock). \(^{92}\) The coffin was identified as 'Christian' only due to the presence of the central figure represented as a Good Shepherd. While it is likely that this design was chosen by a Christian for his/her final resting place, it is also possible that the decoration was commissioned or chosen by a non-Christian, who understood it as a reference to a peaceful, bucolic life (of afterlife). \(^{93}\)

The figures of shepherds appeared on non-Christian sarcophagi until at least the first half of the fourth century, of which the best example is a sarcophagus dated to the Constantinian era from The Museo Nazionale Romano (Inv. 407) depicting Dionysus, the seasons and typically bucolic images. \(^{94}\) However, on this monument all of the figures are naked, while on other sarcophagi a ram-bearer is usually depicted wearing a short tunic. The depictions of shepherds, both as ram-bearers and in other poses, appear very frequently on sarcophagi with images depicting the seasons, \(^{95}\) Endymion, \(^{96}\)

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\(^{92}\) Calza (1940) 216-18.

\(^{93}\) Another example is a late third-century strigilated sarcophagus from Cefalù with two figures of ram-bearers flanking the coffin on either side. The rustic character of the design is supported by a small figure of a farmer ploughing a field depicted underneath the central medallion. See Bielefeld (1997) 103, no. 22. I shall discuss some aspects of beliefs in the afterlife in the following chapter.


\(^{95}\) E.g. Kranz (1984) nos. 39 (270’/280’AD), 75 (early fourth-century), 219 (satyr depicted as the *kriophoros*; probably late third-century), 586 (with Graces, late third-/early fourth-century) or 588 (late-Severan with a scene of *dextrarum iunctio*).

\(^{96}\) Here the shepherds are sitting, sleeping or resting on a staff, which emphasizes the peaceful character of the scenes: e.g. a fragment of a late second-century sarcophagus from the Museo Nazionale in Naples, see Sichtermann (1992) 108, no. 34, the late second-century Endymion sarcophagus from New York (inv. 24.97.13) in Sichtermann (1992) 112, no. 48.
cupids (especially working in vineyards)\textsuperscript{97} and even those decorated with scenes from the \textit{vita privata}.\textsuperscript{98} They are absent, however, from the decoration of coffins with hunting or battle scenes, or dynamic and noisy Dionisiac scenes.\textsuperscript{99} It is, therefore, evident that the figures of the shepherds were intended to emphasize the peaceful and/or rural nature of the decoration.\textsuperscript{100}

The figures of ram-bearers appear on the decoration of sarcophagi around the mid-third century.\textsuperscript{101} Before that time the usage of this design in Rome is well attested from the numerous oil lamps mass-produced around the Empire. The terracotta Shepherd Lamps, of which over one hundred examples survived, were manufactured around the late second and early third century.\textsuperscript{102} As argued by Finney, these lamps must have been produced for a wide spectrum of clients that most likely also included the early Christians.\textsuperscript{103}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{lamp.jpg}
\caption{The Berlin lamp now in Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst inv. 2354.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{97} E.g. the early fourth-century sarcophagus from Museo Arqueologico Provincial in Gerona (inv. 1056.1057), see Kranz (1984) 194, no. 35. Cupids can also be viewed as an allegory of a peaceful idyll, see Ferandi-Gruénais (2001) 191-4.
\textsuperscript{98} A fragment of the late third-century sarcophagus of C. Aemilius Sosthenes from the catacomb of Novanziano decorated with a scene of four men seated behind a counter in a rural tavern. The scene is flanked by several figures of shepherds (two on the left and three on the right). The rural character of the scene is emphasized by the depiction of a milestone.
\textsuperscript{99} With the exception of the fragment of the previously discussed sarcophagus from the Museo Nazionale Romano (inv. 407). Here, however, the scene represents a peaceful moment of sleep, therefore the figure of a shepherd is appropriate for such a representation.
\textsuperscript{100} Zanker and Ewald (2012) 166-9.
\textsuperscript{101} One of the earliest examples is the mid-third-century strigilated sarcophagus from the Louvre (inv. 2982) in Stroszeck (1998) 109, no. 46.
\textsuperscript{102} Finney (1994) 116-17.
\textsuperscript{103} Finney (1994) 226.
However, Finney also uses the example of the Berlin lamp (Wulff 1224) which he identifies as a late second-century undeniably Christian object (fig. 2).\textsuperscript{104} His interpretation and dating are, however, questionable: firstly, images of Helios and Selene with stars appeared frequently in Jewish synagogues,\textsuperscript{105} while the only example in a (potential, yet still debatable) Christian funerary decoration comes from the Tomb of the Julii in the Vatican Necropolis.\textsuperscript{106} Similarly, as outlined above, the origin for the Jonah cycle should also be sought in Jewish imagery. As to the image of a bird standing on top of a box, which presumably is to symbolize the story of Noah in the ark, such representation is not attested anywhere else in early Christian art and this interpretation appears to be somewhat stretched in order to strengthen the Christian character of the object. As to the dating of oil lamps this is a difficult matter as the same forms and techniques were used over several centuries, and workshops could also continue to operate for several decades. It is true that Florentius’s workshop, in which the Berlin lamp was made, was mostly active in the late second and early third century, but this does not prove for certain that the Berlin lamp is a second-century object.\textsuperscript{107} Some scholarly opinion considers the Berlin lamp to be an eighteenth-century forgery.\textsuperscript{108} Nevertheless, the Berlin Lamp possibly provides the earliest known representation of the Jonah story, regardless of whether it was produced for a Christian or Jewish user.

Similarly, a painted figure of a shepherd should not be considered as an indication of the Christian religion. One example comes from the catacomb of Domitilla in Rome, where the early third-century Hypogeum of the Good Shepherd had been pronounced as belonging to Christian owners due only to the presence of an image of a shepherd in the main cubiculum.\textsuperscript{109} However, the style of the remaining decoration of the complex, which contains only bucolic images, such as birds, garlands of flowers and countryside scenes – images so standard in Greco-Roman funerary art - does not support further correlation

\textsuperscript{104} Finney (1994) 130.
\textsuperscript{105} E.g. mosaics in Beth Alpha or Hammath Tiberias, see Zanger (2012).
\textsuperscript{107} Bailey (1980) 95 and 346.
\textsuperscript{108} Schumacher (1977) 95.
\textsuperscript{109} E.g. Fiocchi Nicolai (1999) 100-1; Pergola (1975) 65-96.
with the Christian religion. Moreover, there are at least two representations of sea-monsters in the discussed cubiculum, though Jonah himself is not pictured, which suggests that these depictions were not linked to the stories of the biblical hero.\textsuperscript{110} The Jonah cycle had been known and utilized by the time the ‘Good Shepherd’ hypogeum was decorated, and the choice of some ‘neutral’ images, which were popular in contemporary funerary art could be simply recognised as made by owners who wanted to adorn their final resting place with symbols of a happy, bucolic existence, which might have suggested a peaceful afterlife.\textsuperscript{111} In addition, as observed by Borg, the hypogeum was designed for a large community, which could have included people of different backgrounds (though all egalitarian) and religions, while the main cubiculum was originally intended solely for sarcophagus burial.\textsuperscript{112} The use of neutral imagery on the hypogeum decoration would therefore be a natural choice. Hence, the lack of any further clues, such as inscriptions, or any specific symbols, does not allow any positive religious identification (including Christian) of the Hypogeum of the Good Shepherd.

There are several iconographical motifs and figures, such as orants (individuals praying), philosophers, mourners, shepherds, fishermen, fossores or diners that appear equally often in both Christian and non-Christian funerary contexts. They are often referred to as ‘neutral’; however, their meaning and character may change according to the background in which they were placed.\textsuperscript{113}

It is fair to say that an interpretation of a monument that contains a combination of ‘neutral’ figures within its decoration may also prove to be quite problematic. An example of an ongoing discussion as to whether an object should be understood as Christian or not, is provided by the ‘Via Salaria’

\textsuperscript{110} Some very similar representations of sea-monsters have been recently found in the famous Domus Aurea in the centre of Rome, see Gurgone (2015). Interestingly, even a sea-monster swallowing a person may not necessarily refer to the story of Jonah: a representation of Kethos eating a small cupid/ a child depicted on an early fourth-century sarcophagus of eight-year old Florentius D. Marinianus from Viale Regina Margherita in Rome, may allude to the premature death of a young boy rather than the story of the biblical hero, see Kranz (1984) 213, no. 112.
\textsuperscript{111} Borg (2016).
\textsuperscript{112} Borg (2013) 223.
\textsuperscript{113} Finney (1994) 187-91.
sarcophagus from the Museo Pio Cristiano, which contains an image of a seated philosopher, a shepherd, a female orant and a seated and veiled woman (fig. 3).\textsuperscript{114}

![Fig. 3. Late third-century 'Via Salaria' sarcophagus, now in the Museo Pio Cristiano (inv. 181), Vatican](image)

Although for some scholars\textsuperscript{115} a combination of a shepherd and an orant is a clear indication for a Christian interpretation of the scenes, other researchers recognise that those images are of ‘neutral’ character, i.e. could have easily been used in either Christian or non-Christian contexts.\textsuperscript{116} Therefore, the lack of any specifically Christian symbols or figures, combined with rustic iconography (including \textit{kriophoros}) should be understood as a standard repertoire from the second- to early fourth-century Roman funerary art.\textsuperscript{117} Consequently, taking into account only one image or symbol (such as a shepherd, a sea monster or a sleeping youth) or a combination of some ‘neutral’ images leaves the interpretation open.

\textbf{0.3.2.2. Christian or not: a summary}

From the discussion above it is evident that criteria for the identification of some monuments and artefacts as being Christian should be a combination of the depictions of the biblical stories and specifically Christian images, such as the symbolic representations of miracles performed by Jesus or scenes from

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{114} Deichmann (1967) fig. 66.
\item \textsuperscript{115} E.g. Kitzinger (1980) 142 or Dinkler (1979) 397.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Carder (1979) 518.
\item \textsuperscript{117} E.g. a mid-second-century AD sarcophagus from Camposanto, Pisa, in Koortbojian (1995) 78-84; Zanker and Ewald (2012) 166-9.
\end{itemize}
Jesus’s life. Only such a variety of depictions can avoid uncertainty about the religious affiliation of the object’s commissioner. Thus, looking at the third-century sarcophagi and cubicula from the Roman catacombs, only a few can be identified as certainly Christian. For instance, the mid-third-century cubiculum A3 from the catacomb of San Callisto (no. 41) contains not only the set of biblical scenes showing Abraham and Isaac and the three episodes from Jonah’s cycle, but also scenes from Jesus’ life: his baptism and the healing of a paralytic.\textsuperscript{118} In addition, there are some neutral images, such as birds, flowers, two fossores, a banquet scene and a picture with some kind of offering (sacrifice?). Similarly, a late third-century sarcophagus from the Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican (inv. 119) is decorated with the three stories of Jonah, Noah in the ark, the resurrection of Lazarus, and Moses (or Peter) striking the rock combined with neutral images of a fisherman and a shepherd.\textsuperscript{119}

There are also examples of funerary monuments, especially sarcophagi, where only one biblical scene was combined with some neutral figures, such as a shepherd or an orant. Such an arrangement may also be considered to have been commissioned by Christians. For instance, the famous late third-century strigilated sarcophagus of Baebia Hermofile from Rome (no. 117) is decorated only with an image of a seated shepherd (below a large clipeus with a portrait of a couple), while its lid contains a very shortened version of Jonah’s story (a small boat with two sailors – one seems to be Jonah himself raising his hands as an orant, a sea monster and Jonah sleeping under a pergola) shown on the left side of an inscription panel, and a meal scene depicted on the right. Even though the inscription on the sarcophagus does not provide any indication that the commissioner (in this case Valerius Valentinianus) was Christian, the decoration itself is quite indicative.\textsuperscript{120}

To summarise: looking at third- and fourth-century AD funerary decoration, it is evident that the identification of a monument or object as Christian is only possible when either at least one scene contains a specifically

\textsuperscript{118} Fiocchi Nicolai (1999) fig. 15; Nestori (1975) 102, no.22.
\textsuperscript{119} Deichmann (1967) fig. 35.
\textsuperscript{120} CIL VI 37231, see Appendix 1, no. 117.
Christian!meaning,!i.e.!a!biblical!image!or!a!scene!from!Jesus’s!life,!the!biblical
images!are!combined!with!dining!scenes,!or!the!imagery!is!accompanied!by!a
definite!Christian!epitaph. The!appearance!of!any!images!from!the,!so-called,
‘neutral’!repertoire!alone!is!not!a!criterion!for!a!Christian!classification!and
monuments!with!such!decoration!should!be!examined!with!wariness!and
cautions.

0.3.3. Visibility of funerary art

The!final!methodological!problem!regards!the!perception!and!visibility!of
funerary!art!in!the!Roman!world. In!this!section!I!shall!discuss!the!interior
decoration!of!the!mortuary!monuments!rather!than!the!tombs!themselves,!as
the!display!of!the!external!decoration!is!unquestionable.

The!question!about!visibility!relates!not!just!to!the!object!itself!but!to!the
decoration!of!an!object!or!a!monument!and!to!potential!viewers,!i.e.!interpreters
of!the!decoration. This!is!especially!important!in!the!discussion!of!the!purpose
of!such!decoration!and!its!meaning. For!instance,!as!I!will!discuss!in!the!next
section,!the!common!seventeenth-century!belief!that!early!Christians!used!the
catacombs!as!shelters!from!persecutors!would!suggest!that!during!a!certain
epoch!people!must!have!used!the!underground!cubicula!as!temporary!homes.
According!to!this!idea!the!paintings!would!have!been!viewed!on!a!daily!basis!by
relatively!large!groups!of!people. Moreover,!until!the!late!twentieth!century
scholars!believed!that!early!Church!officials administered!the!Christian
catacombs,!that!the!cemeteries!were!used!exclusively!by!Christians,!and!so!on.
This!would!imply!substantial!religious!influence!on!the!catacombs’!decoration.
On!the!other!hand,!if!we!accept!that!the!graves!and!tombs!were!used!and
controlled!by!families,!collegia!and!individuals,!we!can!perceive!the!decoration
as!carrying!private!religious!rather!than!official!religious!meaning. In!this!way,
the!decoration!reflects!beliefs,!practices!and/or!decorative!taste!and
preferences!of!much!smaller!groups!or!communities. To!take!it!even!further,
looking!at!dining!scenes!found!in!the!Christian!funerary!context!-!these!should
not!necessarily!be!considered!as!images!referring!to!the!Eucharist,!as!this!rite
was performed during official Church ceremonies and not during private family or collegia meetings.\textsuperscript{121}

Despite a large number of people visiting cemeteries on different occasions throughout the year, there must still have been a limited number of people allowed to enter a funerary property.\textsuperscript{122} This, of course, varied as there were tombs designed for individuals or small families, but also monuments intended for large families and collegia that could have accommodated tens of graves inside.\textsuperscript{123} A similar variety of tombs can also be found in the catacombs.

In addition, there is also the question as to whether the decoration of tombs and funerary monuments erected inside them was visible to passers-by and, if so, to what extent? The main difficulty with investigating this subject is the problem of rather limited preservation of the original archaeological material. Even though there are a relatively large number of tombs still standing in and around Rome, and many cubicula still preserved in the catacombs, there is scarce evidence of doors. This is due not only to the poor preservation of wood (which the majority of doors would probably have been made from)\textsuperscript{124} but also the fact that doorways and windows are the most perilous architectural parts of any construction: in the majority of cases of discovered ancient tombs these parts are now supported by modern structures or were even rebuilt in order to avoid collapses and further damage. There are, however, certain indications that at least some of the tombs did, indeed, have doors of some kind. For example, there are rectangular cavities in the marble doorframe in tomb B6 from the Porta necropolis in Ostia in which door hinges must have been installed.\textsuperscript{125} The presence of doors seems logical, as it would prevent robbery or any illegal intrusion into a private tomb. In addition, even if there were any

\textsuperscript{121} Chapter 1, section 1.3.2.
\textsuperscript{122} Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.1.
\textsuperscript{123} Not to mention columbaria designed for hundreds of graves.
\textsuperscript{124} Ulrich (2007) 178-98; Diosono (2008) 44 and 68. Though, several examples of marble doors are still visible in the Street of the Tombs in Pompeii. Two beautiful marble openwork door slabs are now in the Museo Ostiense and (probably) come from the Porta Romana Necropolis in Ostia: personal observation.
\textsuperscript{125} Also in, e.g. Tombs 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 26, 28, 30, 31 or even tiny Tomb 57 in Isola Sacra Necropolis, though here the doorframe was constructed from travertine: personal observation.
windows in the tombs, they were most likely narrow and placed high above ground level to prevent break-ins.\textsuperscript{126} Hence, apart from the days when a tomb was visited by the family or collegia members the doors would be shut and the decoration locked away from the view of passers-by. This also points to the private character of the inner décor, in particular the wall-paintings, while the display of the external decoration would be sufficient to showcase the status of the tombs’ owners.

Unlike the wall paintings in private tombs, which were visible only to the visitors and users of a particular property, sarcophagi and their decoration were potentially more noticeable.\textsuperscript{127} These were usually placed individually either on private plots of burial ground or inside tombs and catacombs. The visibility of the first group is unquestionable, while the other needs more explanation. The display of the caskets definitely mattered to their owners, which is well documented by the archaeological evidence.\textsuperscript{128} There are several examples where special benches and shelves had been installed inside the tombs in order to accentuate the installed sarcophagi and make them more visible for visitors.\textsuperscript{129} On the other hand, there are also various examples, especially during the late third and fourth century, where sarcophagi were buried underground or placed within narrow structures, which prevented their viewing after the internment.\textsuperscript{130} Nevertheless, it is possible that sarcophagi were displayed during funerals, which would make their decoration visible for all that gathered for the ceremony.\textsuperscript{131} However, after the funeral those monuments that were placed inside the tombs became visible only for a limited number of relatives, hence invisible to anybody from the outside world.\textsuperscript{132} Therefore, it is likely that

\textsuperscript{126} E.g. Tombs 46, 50, 54 or 55 in remarkably well preserved Isola Sacra Necropolis.
\textsuperscript{127} Especially those displayed on free-standing platforms at the cemeteries, see Borg (2013) 43-7.
\textsuperscript{128} Borg (2013) 236-40.
\textsuperscript{129} Borg (2013) 69-70 and 236.
\textsuperscript{130} As, for instance, the previously discussed sarcophagus of Baebia Hermofile, see Ghizlansoni (1912) 230-33. More examples in Borg (2013) 229-35. For the later examples see Dresken-Weiland (2003) 185-98.
\textsuperscript{131} Borg (2013) 237-40.
\textsuperscript{132} Zanker and Ewald (2012) 24-6.
the images were intended for the deceased, and their role was to honour the dead.\footnote{133}{Zanker and Ewald (2012) 26; Dresken-Weiland (2003) 197-8.}

Finally, the catacombs provide yet another case study. While the visibility of the decoration in private \textit{cubicula} can be considered in a similar way to the decoration of private surface tombs,\footnote{134}{To my best knowledge, there is no publication on doorways and/or doors in the catacombs. From personal observation I have seen some evidence for hinges in several \textit{cubicula} in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, which confirms the usage of doors in private tombs.} there are also several \textit{arcosolia}, \textit{loculi} and corridor ceilings decorated with paintings. These must have been visible for any passer-by in the same way as were some sarcophagi placed in the corridors or \textit{arcosolia} alongside the tunnels. However, these graves should also be considered as private spheres even though the decoration was visible for passers-by. The painted corridor ceilings, on the other hand, may suggest that either those particular parts of the catacombs were intended for small communities or for some wealthier clients. During the time when the catacombs were used primarily for funerary purposes (i.e. third and the first half of the fourth century) they were relatively small to medium size, and usually private establishments. By the time the catacombs expanded into large cemeteries and certain parts of the networks became places of pilgrimage controlled by the Church officials, the original users of the tombs were long gone. This also confirms that the early decoration must have been designed to express personal rather than official religious beliefs.

To conclude, modern visitors to the Roman catacombs, cemeteries (those few available to tourists) or museums around the world see the ancient funerary decoration from a different perspective to how they were actually viewed in antiquity. The images are available on line and in numerous catalogue publications, which allows relatively easy access to Roman funerary imagery. Scholars can compare the monuments from different periods of time, discuss the evolution of decoration and try to guess the meaning of the images. However, it is important to approach the images from a different perspective – how they were used by, and what they meant for, the contemporary user of the
tombs. Only in such a way it is possible to discuss images’ functions and why they were chosen for one’s funerary decoration.

0.4. Location: The catacombs of Rome

I have already mentioned catacombs and their art several times, therefore it is crucial at this point to examine them in more detail. The most natural way of starting a discussion of the catacombs is to provide a comprehensive definition. However, this task is not easy as our understanding of the catacombs has changed dramatically over the last few decades. The only element that remains unquestioned is that they are underground networks of tunnels and chambers that were used for burials.\(^\text{135}\) The graves were excavated from the walls and, depending on their shape and size, are called either loculi – rectangular shelves, arcosolia – arched niches, or, kokhims – larger cavities found in certain Jewish catacombs.\(^\text{136}\) After the funeral the grave, containing the dead body, was shut with a long tile or a slab of marble, sealed and occasionally decorated with a simple inscription or more elaborate religious symbol.\(^\text{137}\) The burial chambers are called cubicula and some of them were decorated with frescoes.\(^\text{138}\)

The name ‘catacombs’ comes from the Greek words κατὰ κύμβας meaning ‘at the hollows’, which referred to the old tufa quarries outside the city walls of Rome on the Via Appia Antica.\(^\text{139}\) At the beginning of the second century AD the quarries were no longer in use and the whole area was adopted for funerary purposes. During the next three centuries the site extended to a considerable size and became one of the main places of Christian veneration in Rome. In the Middle Ages the term ‘catacomb’ replaced the original Latin cryptae and has been commonly used since. The most famous catacombs are in

\(^{135}\) Murray (1996) 93.

\(^{136}\) Though, as rightly pointed out by Dello Russo (forthcoming), this type of grave does not necessarily indicate Jewish burials, as they have also been commonly found in many non-Jewish cemeteries around the Mediterranean. See also Pergola, Barbini (1997).

\(^{137}\) Borg (2013) 260-3 with references.

\(^{138}\) Borg (2013) 255-63. There are several catalogues of the catacomb paintings, e.g. Wilpert (1903), Deckers (1987) and (1994). See also a photographic catalogue of the Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra on-line: http://www.archeologiasacra.net/pcas-web/fototeca.

the vicinity of Rome, where around sixty have been discovered to date (fig. 4); other important ones can also be found in Naples, Sicily, Malta, North Africa and in Syria.\textsuperscript{140}

According to the most recent studies the catacombs originated around the beginning of the third century from the subterranean expansion of some private hypogea, and the first underground systems of galleries correlate with the layout and size of the burial plots above.\textsuperscript{141} The subterranean expansion was inevitable due to two main factors: the general shift of funerary practices from cremation to inhumation, which occurred in the course of the second century and required more space for burials, and secondly a rapid increase in land prices.\textsuperscript{142}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig4}
\caption{Location of the catacombs around the City of Rome. Adapted after Stevenson (1978)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{141} Borg (2013) 75-107.  
The conducive feature of the bedrock (volcanic tufa), which was easy to dig and hardened in contact with the air, made underground exploration more possible. In many cases, however, the *fossores* (gravediggers) used the abandoned water cisterns or quarries, which were then more accessible due to the lower level of the groundwater.\textsuperscript{143} The subterranean expansions of the surface tombs had been practised prior to the establishment of the catacombs, yet to a much smaller extent.\textsuperscript{144}

While there is no argument about the basic characteristics of the catacombs, their history and nature has been vigorously debated since their ‘rediscovery’ at the end of the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{145} In May 1578 an unexpected discovery of a previously unknown catacomb,\textsuperscript{146} of which several *cubicula* were decorated with Christian images, triggered not only a further extensive search for and exploration of the underground cemeteries, but also an ongoing dispute as to the religious affiliation of the monuments. The discovery was especially important as it provided the basis for the establishment of Christian archaeology.\textsuperscript{147} For that reason, I shall lead my discussion in a non-chronological order presenting the history of the catacombs’ research first; the history and development of the underground cemeteries will then be discussed in the light of the most recent investigations and results. The main purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the understanding of the catacombs’ development has changed during the past four centuries.

0.4.1. History of catacomb research

\textsuperscript{143} Borg (2013) 118.
\textsuperscript{144} E.g. Such practice is evident in the second-century Mausoleum X on the Via Appia Antica (now underneath the catacomb of San Sebastiano), see: Borg (2013) 150-3; or in the Hypogeum of the Aurelii on Viale Manzoni in Rome discovered in 1919, which expanded from a small surface family tomb, see Chapter 3, section 3.1.3.3.
\textsuperscript{145} The term ‘rediscovery’ may be misleading as some of the catacombs had been known and visited before that time, see: Hirschfeld (2008) 14, Gaston (1983) 144-7. Osborne (1985).
\textsuperscript{147} Hirschfeld (2008) 17.
The catacomb discovered in 1578 in the Vigna Sanches on the outskirts of Rome, or, more accurately, the Christian images found in some of its chambers,\textsuperscript{148} were quickly used by the Catholic Church authorities as an argument against the movement of the Reformation and Iconoclasm.\textsuperscript{149} The freshly discovered images provided the papacy with an advantageous weapon to fight the 'heresy',\textsuperscript{150} while the newly discovered catacomb sparked a remarkable interest amongst certain Roman scholars, who initiated a search for further remains of the early Christians.\textsuperscript{151}

The investigation of the underground corridors led to a new conviction that the catacombs were not only cemeteries but also the settings for both persecutions and the performance of the liturgy.\textsuperscript{152} This is not surprising, as the explorers of the crypts were wandering mainly through the remains of underground chapels and corridors, which were developed in the late fourth, fifth and sixth centuries to enable the veneration of the martyrs and saints. The sixteenth-century belief is best represented in the words of one contemporary - Giovanni Severano: the catacombs are

\begin{quote}
the very images and pictures that portray with immediacy the early Church. [They are] theatres and circuses where the true and holy gladiators of Christ trained and prepared themselves so as to gain victory and the eternal crown. [They are]
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{148} It is worth noting here, that some of the \textit{arcosolia} and \textit{cubicula} in the Anonymous catacomb of Via Anapo are decorated with neutral designs, which, combined with the presence of many non-Christian inscriptions and sarcophagi, suggests that the cemetery was used not only by Christians. Therefore, referring to it as ‘a Christian catacomb’ [e.g. Hirschfield (2008) 17] may be rather misleading.

\textsuperscript{149} Apart from the visible proof that the early Christians used some sacred images, the human remains found in the catacombs were also believed to be of saints and martyrs and were sourced to replace the relics damaged or destroyed during the outbreak of the Reformation, see Koudounaris (2013) 23 with references. Iconoclasm actually began in antiquity, see Jensen (2005) 9-30. One of the main sixteenth-century iconoclastic works is Calvin (1559), who wrote: (I.XI.13) ‘For about the first five hundred years, during which religion was still flourishing, and a purer doctrine thriving, Christian churches were commonly empty of images. Thus, it was when the purity of the ministry had somewhat degenerated that they were first introduced for the adornment of churches […]’, in Finney (1994) 7.

\textsuperscript{150} Hirschfield (2008) 18.

\textsuperscript{151} Worth noting: Ciacconio (Alfonso Chacon, 1540-1599), Philip van Winghe (d. 1592) and Macarius (Jean L’Heureux, 1540-1604), see: Hirschfield (2008) 18, Gaston (1983) 144 with references. Ciacconio employed six copyists who were not used to the style of early Christians and often reproduced the images using their own imagination, see Stevenson (1978) 50.

\textsuperscript{152} Ottavio Pancioli ([1600] 18). This has long been rejected: see, e.g., Borg (2013) 73.
arsenals, where [the martyrs] armed themselves for combat against the heretics and particularly against the iconoclasts who impugn sacred images which abound in the catacombs.\textsuperscript{153}

Severano was the editor of the first systematic and non-apologetic work on the architecture and art of the catacombs, written by Antonio Bosio and published after the author's death. Interestingly, the post-mortem publication contained no more than sixty percent of the original manuscript, as the rest was considered inappropriate for a Catholic reader, or it was thought that it would provide a counterargument for the Protestant polemicists.\textsuperscript{154} Severano, for instance, removed the whole of book one, in which Bosio described the origins of some Christian ceremonies and rites that evolved from both Jewish and Roman rituals. Also deemed unsuitable was a chapter describing the practice of mixing the martyrs' bones with those of camels and asses carried out by the fourth-century persecutors – such an account would provide an excellent argument for the Protestant scholars writing against the Catholic Christian cult of relics.\textsuperscript{155} The holiness of the Christian catacombs was emphasized by the rare finds of images depicting martyrdom; the need for more evidence initiated a search for specific pictures or relics. Some of the paintings, however, were interpreted according to prevailing expectations. One example is an image representing the baptism of an adult in which Bosio saw a depiction of a saint standing in a tub of boiling water.\textsuperscript{156}

This picture of the uniqueness of Christian catacombs and their separation from Jewish cemeteries was further accentuated by Paolo Aringhi in his not-very-accurate, late seventeenth-century translation of Bosio's work into Latin. In the preface of the new version one can read that the purpose of the

\textsuperscript{153} Bosio (1632) note to the reader, in Ditchfield (1997) 352; also in Rutgers (1994) 9.
\textsuperscript{155} Ditchfield (1997) 355. Remarkably, Severano decided to include a chapter about the Jewish catacombs, which gave the first account of non-Christian catacombs in Rome. However, the description of Jewish catacombs was added only to separate them from sacred Christian cemeteries: ‘[...]so that it will be known that our cemeteries have never been profaned nor contaminated by the bodies of either Hebrews or Gentiles’, in Bosio (1632) 141; a discussion of Bosio’s discovery in Dello Russo (2010).
\textsuperscript{156} Bosio (1632) 579; in Ditchfield (1997) 355.
publication was to help those ‘who aspire to God in their orthodox faith’. Aringhi added a new chapter describing a direct link between the tradition of inhumation in the graves of the Biblical Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and burials in early Christian catacombs, in which there was no space for the profane Jewish graves.¹⁵⁷

The Latin Roma Subterranea Novissima of Aringhi became very popular amongst European scholars, unleashing prompt criticism from the Protestant side. One of the main opponents of the Catholic version of the history of the catacombs was a French pastor named Jacque Basnage (1653-1723), who stated that it was impossible to distinguish the relics of orthodox martyrs from those of schismatics and heretics, and that considering the archaeological remains from the catacombs, the practice of Christian burial must have originated in ancient Roman rituals.¹⁵⁸ Moreover, Basnage made an assumption, strongly supported by the evidence from ancient inscriptions, that the major building works in the catacombs started no earlier than the beginning of the fourth century AD – an idea absolutely unacceptable to a contemporary Catholic scholar.¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately Basnage never visited the Roman catacombs; his work was purely theoretical and done solely for the sake of argument with the Catholic Church. His critical analysis of Bosio’s publication was, therefore, discounted as being the work of an “ignorant outsider”.¹⁶⁰

During the course of the eighteenth century the catacombs became the most important source of holy relics, which led to their plunder and devastation.¹⁶¹ This resulted in the establishment of an office for guarding sacred cemeteries, which was held by many famous scholars such as Fabretti, Boldetti, and Marangoni.¹⁶² However, their work and publications were not systematic and did not change the general perception of the catacombs.

¹⁶² Stevenson (1978) 53. In some cases, the work of the custodians of the catacombs led to legal plundering of the monuments. Worth mentioning here is an eighteenth-century scholar and inventor Séroux d’Agincourt, who decided to remove some of the Christian paintings from the original walls.
Probably the greatest explorer of the underground cemeteries in Rome was Giovanni Battista de Rossi – an archaeologist responsible for the nineteenth-century methodological excavation in the catacomb of San Callisto that led, for instance, to the re-discovery (and reconstruction) of the famous Crypt of the Popes (fig. 5).\textsuperscript{163} His work was strongly influenced by the Jesuit Giuseppe Marchi, who was De Rossi’s tutor and companion in their visits to the cemeteries.

Marchi argued that the construction of the catacombs began in apostolic times and that they were first created purely by and for Christians.\textsuperscript{164} While the first concept was not original, as it was an assumption made by Bosio’s contemporaries, the second idea about the Christian origins of the catacombs was new. According to Marchi it was not possible that the first Christians adopted old quarries and sandpits to create their cemeteries; rather the catacombs arose from an original concept, careful planning and the hard work of the religious community.\textsuperscript{165}

and put them in a ‘safer’ place. Unfortunately, this idea, being widely and successfully practised in the present time, resulted in the eighteenth century in a total and irreparable destruction of those images, see Mondini (2008).
\textsuperscript{163} The crypt was discovered in 1854, see Hirschfield (2008) 20-2; Baruffa (1994) 49-54.
\textsuperscript{164} Northcote (1869) 27 and 63-82 respectively.
\textsuperscript{165} Northcote (1869) 319-332. One of the arguments given to support this thesis was based on his assumption, that the ancient authors of Liber Pontificalis mistakenly used the word arenarium (a sand-pit) to describe places for the burial of martyrs.
De Rossi, on the contrary, during the years of systematic archaeological excavations, gathered vast epigraphic evidence to move the beginning of catacomb building activity forward to the late first or early second century AD. However, the idea about the Christian origins of the catacombs remained unchanged. De Rossi planned a complex excavation in every catacomb of Rome; unfortunately, due to the immensity of the material, *La Roma sotterranea cristiana* contains evidence only from the catacomb of San Callisto, mentioning other relevant cemeteries as comparisons. Nevertheless, De Rossi provided a proper chronology of this catacomb and correctly identified early Christian places of veneration of both the martyrs and the popes that were buried in the Crypt of the Popes.

Even though the work of De Rossi is considered as a great development for understanding the funerary rites of Late Antiquity, it affected the archaeology of the catacombs in a way that was not so constructive. For almost a century scholars and popular writers based their ideas and theories on De Rossi’s publication and copied his methods and manners, which were no longer suitable for twentieth-century research. An example worth mentioning is the work of the German priest and archaeologist Josef Wilpert, who confirmed the dating of the catacombs’ origin to the late first century AD and argued their purely Christian provenance. Wilpert’s work (despite his conclusions no longer being considered accurate) is of great value as it provides an excellent compendium of catacomb pictorial decoration, which in parts has now almost completely faded, but was still visible at the beginning of the twentieth century.

The change in the understanding of the catacombs’ development came with an important discovery that took place in the city of Rome in the middle of

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166 Rossi (1864) 83-93.  
167 Apart from the Jewish catacombs, which De Rossi considered of lesser importance and pledged to the Papal Commission of Sacred Archaeology to deny any care to, see Dello Russo (2011) 1.  
169 Wilpert (1903) 121-35 and 140-50.  
In 1955, builders working at the corner of Via Dino Compagni and Via Latina accidentally uncovered an ancient underground corridor, and the excavation of a unique catacomb started later that year. The significance of this discovery was that it provided evidence of early Christian images co-existing with Roman art. The catacomb was relatively small and was in use between c. 315 and 370 AD (fig. 6). After the discovery scholars finally accepted the idea of Greco-Roman origins for early Christian art, and that both Christians and non-Christians could have been buried in one cemetery.

The discovery of the unknown catacomb initiated a new series of excavations in the previously explored underground cemeteries. This time scholars approached the problem using modern archaeological techniques (e.g. radiocarbon dating), which resulted in several new finds that led to an overall change in the definition of the catacombs. The known catacomb of SS. Pietro and Marcellino, for instance, was re-excavated by Friedrich Deichmann in 1956, then by the French School at Rome in 1970’s and 80’s led by the great archaeologist Jean Guyon, and was also explored by Johannes Georg Deckers in the 1980’s. Guyon provided a correct chronology of the catacomb and found evidence that

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171 Other major, though secret, archaeological excavations were led under the basilica of San Pietro in the Vatican in the 1940’s. The archaeological research resulted in the discovery of cemetery remains, which were originally situated along the ancient Via Cornelia, see Apollonj et al. (1951) and Toynbee, Perkins (1956).


174 The latter idea was confirmed by an excellent article by Johnson (1997).
some parts of the cemetery originated from the adoption and modification of a system of natural water tunnels.\textsuperscript{175} Deckers, in turn, published a compendium of the paintings from that catacomb.\textsuperscript{176}

As mentioned before, almost throughout the entire twentieth century, catacomb scholars were strongly influenced by, and based their research on, the extensive work of De Rossi. As some of the previous understanding has changed thanks to the discoveries of a few intact cemeteries, the major improvement on De Rossi’s theory came thanks to a careful study of some ancient texts. After years of research De Rossi had inferred (based on a freshly discovered text of Hippolytus) that in 199 AD deacon Callixtus was appointed by Bishop Zephyrinus to take care of a cemetery (εἰς τὸ κοιμητήριον),\textsuperscript{177} which could only have meant the famous catacomb on the Via Appia Antica.\textsuperscript{178} According to this archaeologist, it was the first cemetery in Rome controlled by the early Christian authorities. In addition, two other texts confirmed the usage of a word \textit{coemeterium} regarding the Christian burial practices in Rome – the sixth-century \textit{Liber Pontificalis} mentioning Bishop Fabian (bishop of Rome between 236 and 250) who ‘\textit{multas fabricas per cimeteria fieri iussit},’\textsuperscript{179} and Bishop Dionysus (259-268) ‘[…] \textit{cymeteria et parrocias dioecesis constituit’}.\textsuperscript{180} This actually allowed De Rossi to suggest that by the mid-third century the Church possessed and administered most of the catacombs.\textsuperscript{181} De Rossi’s theory was commonly accepted and had become the basis for subsequent research on the catacombs of Rome.\textsuperscript{182}

However, this theory has been recently amended by a modern French scholar, Eric Rebillard, who rightly observed that De Rossi’s idea was based on his own interpretation of the Greek word \textit{κοιμητήριον} meaning ‘a cemetery’.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{175} Guyon (1987a) 37-50; Guyon (1987b) 92-117 and 108 respectively
\item \textsuperscript{176} Deckers (1987)
\item \textsuperscript{177} Hippolytus, \textit{Refutatio omnium haeresium} 9.7.13-14: ‘Zephyrinus, having had Callistus as a coadjutor in the management of the clergy, honoured him to his own detriment; and sending for him from Antium, set him over the cemetery’ [tr. Legge (1921) 128]
\item \textsuperscript{178} Rossi (1864) vol.1, 197 ff.; Rossi (1866)
\item \textsuperscript{179} \textit{Liber Pontificalis}, 21.2-3
\item \textsuperscript{180} \textit{Liber Pontificalis}, 26.2
\item \textsuperscript{181} De Rossi acknowledged the existence of Jewish catacombs as well.
\item \textsuperscript{182} E.g. Ferrua (1958)
\end{itemize}
Rebillard argued that the first known literary source containing a Latin word *coemeterium* comes from the late second-century text by Tertullian (*De Anima 51.7*) and it refers to a single grave not a communal burial ground.\(^{183}\) If this interpretation were correct then Callixtus would have been appointed to supervise the development of a grave or a tomb, not the whole catacomb, while Bishop Dionysus would have been given the martyrs’ graves back from the Emperor Gallienus, and not the entire cemeteries.\(^{184}\) That, in turn, would reduce the role of the Church in administrating Christian graves, shifting the task towards the families, funerary colleges and religious communities, as had been commonly practised in the Roman world.\(^{185}\)

The latter argument has been recently supported by Barbara Borg, who scrupulously examined the available archaeological material and confirmed the lack of the Christian authorities’ involvement in the development of the catacombs.\(^{186}\) Even though some of the early- and mid-third-century subterranean cemeteries were in fact developed or supervised by groups of Christians (though there is no way of determining whether they were used exclusively by Christians), they, most likely, were built on private plots of burial ground and were not controlled by the Church officials until much later.\(^{187}\)

Despite the modern development of catacomb research there is an ongoing tendency to call certain subterranean cemeteries ‘Christian’ in order to distinguish them from the Jewish monuments. As mentioned before, the origins of the majority of the catacombs are not specifically Christian and are only recognised as such due to the evidence of extensive religious activities in the late fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. The so-called Jewish catacombs, on the


\(^{184}\) As argued by Lampe [(2003) 26-7] the burial ground, on which the cemetery was established, most likely was the private property of Zephyrinus, who donated the subterranean space for his Christian fellows, though, being the owner of the property was buried in the surface tomb *‘in cymiterio suo, iuxta cymiterium Calisti, Via Appia’* in *Liber Pontificalis*, 1.139.


\(^{186}\) Borg (2013) 72-121.

\(^{187}\) Borg (2013) 75-9; Rebillard (2006).
other hand, developed in a different way, though also on private properties.\textsuperscript{188} In contrast to the ‘Christian’ monuments the Jewish cemeteries demonstrate much stronger community or family affiliation, where certain groups of Roman Jews showed a preference to be buried near one another from a much earlier date than the Christians.\textsuperscript{189} The unity of the Roman Jews is well demonstrated through the example of the catacombs of Villa Torlonia, on which site a Jewish cemetery existed until at least the thirteenth century.\textsuperscript{190}

Both the ‘Christian’ and Jewish catacombs have been carefully and systematically explored, though for different reasons: the Christian cemeteries have been searched for martyrs’ remains, while the Jewish ones, since their rediscovery at the beginning of the seventeenth century,\textsuperscript{191} have been examined firstly to prove that the Jews copied Christians in their burial practices, and recently to demonstrate quite the opposite.\textsuperscript{192} Four out of the five known Jewish catacombs in Rome were discovered during the immense subterranean exploration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their investigation was possible only through the financial support of the private landowners, yet again, unlike the ‘Christian’ monuments,\textsuperscript{193} exploration of which has been sponsored by the Vatican.\textsuperscript{194} In 1984 the Vatican authorities passed responsibility for the administration of the Jewish subterranean

\textsuperscript{188} Borg (2013) 110.
\textsuperscript{189} The idea that Roman Jews were buried in particular catacombs according to their association with certain Synagogues [Leon (1960) 54], i.e. each was controlled by a certain religious office, was questioned by Williams [(1994) 165-82] who, based on the epigraphic evidence from Rome, indicated that members of different congregations could have been buried in the same cemetery. For discussion see Borg (2013) 110. Leon’s theory that the Roman Synagogues controlled the burial of their members was often used as a supportive argument for the role of the Church in the administration of the ‘Christian’ catacombs; this was invalidated by Rebillard (2006) 44-7.
\textsuperscript{190} A mons Judaearum on the Via Nomentana is mentioned in the 1264 purchase document, see Dello Russo (2012) 8.
\textsuperscript{191} Bosio discovered the Monteverde catacomb in December 1602 [Leon (1928) 299]. The Monteverde cemetery was mentioned in the Itinerary of Benjamin of Tudela, who travelled through Rome in the twelfth century, see Hirschfield (2008) 28 with references.
\textsuperscript{192} For the Christian origins of the Jewish catacombs see Marchi (1844) 19-21. For the opposite, see Rutgers, De Jang, Borg (2002) and Rutgers (2005).
\textsuperscript{193} The Hypogeum of Via Appia Pignatelli, which was recognised by Müller (1886) as Jewish, due to its proximity to the Vigna Randanini Jewish catacomb, is now acknowledged as a private hypogeum the religious affiliation of which is impossible to establish, see Pergola, Barbini (1997) 192-3.
cemetaries to the Italian government,\footnote{Hirschfield (2008) 34, Dello Russo (2012) 16.} which, in turn, began to sell certain cultural sites to private investors.\footnote{This almost ended in a total destruction of the Villa Torlonia catacomb, which was to be transformed into an underground parking lot, see Hirschfield (2008) 36.} It is therefore evident that a different emphasis has been placed on the exploration and preservation of the ‘Christian’ and Jewish sites.

From the available records and maps it is evident that the five known Jewish cemeteries were compatible with relatively small communal establishments and contained no more than a few thousand graves each.\footnote{The largest known Jewish catacomb is that of Villa Torlonia, which was constructed of two separate nuclei and contained a total of 3703 graves, see Rutgers (2006) 348, tbl. 1 (this number does not include sarcophagi, of which some would have been placed alongside the galleries). Based on this, Rutgers proposes, the number as 7436 burials in total in all known Jewish cemeteries over 300 years. For more on Jewish catacombs see Dello Russo (2010a), Dello Russo (2010b), Dello Russo (2010c), Dello Russo (2010d), Dello Russo (2012).} There is also some evidence of Jewish items found in other catacombs in Rome, which suggests that the Jews were probably also buried alongside their non-Jewish neighbours.\footnote{E.g. Elsner [(2003) 116, fig.1] discusses a gold-glass disc decorated with Jewish images found in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino (now in the Vatican Museum; or an inscription found in the area of the catacomb of Pamphilio: CII 3, in Kraemer (1991) 149.} Bearing in mind that, according to at least some calculations, the Jewish population living in Rome during the imperial period could have varied between 10,000 and 60,000 funerary evidence of the Jewish community is relatively scarce.\footnote{Williams [(1994) 180] argues that during the second century the number of Jews living in Rome could have been higher than 60,000 people. On the contrary, based solely on the available archaeological material, Rutgers [(2006) 354-6] calculates the number to be around 600 people (or 144 families) on average living in Rome. Despite Rutgers’ efforts it is hard to accept such a low number, as he does not take into account any probability of past existence of other Jewish burial sites (now lost) or potential Jewish burials at other, not-specifically-Jewish cemeteries.} Another negative outcome of the separate exploration of the Christian and Jewish catacombs and tombs was the strict division of the epigraphic material from Rome into two distinctive works: the Inscriptio\textae Christianae Urbis Romae, with ‘Christian’ material and the Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum containing epitaphs from the Jewish catacombs. The problem is especially striking when comparing the number of entries in the catalogues: 27668 inscriptions in \textit{ICUR} and only 529 in \textit{CIJ} from Rome, from the same period of time! These numbers clearly suggest that the Christian population in Rome was
over fifty times larger than the Jewish one between the third and the fifth century AD. Such calculations are unacceptable, and a major mistake is especially evident after a careful investigation of the ICUR catalogue’s entries, which clearly contain a mixture of pagan, Jewish and Christian epitaphs. As to the CIJ catalogue, it includes only those inscriptions that, firstly, are evidently Jewish (i.e. accompanied by specifically Jewish symbols, such as menorah, shofar, lulag, etc.; epitaphs written in/ or partly in Hebrew; identifying the deceased as a Jew, or including formulas, such as ἐνθὰδε κεῖται, εἴς θεός, or θάρσι, οὐδείς ἀθάνατος, etc.), and secondly, were known in the 1930’s. This, in turn, means that not all of the inscriptions found in the Jewish catacombs were included in this catalogue, as some were either already lost, or did not match the criteria.

The short analysis of the history of the exploration of the catacombs was intended to demonstrate how the belief in Christian superiority over other religions has dominated catacomb scholarship. As a consequence of the huge interest in the search for the remains of early Christianity, in 1851 Pope Pius IX established the Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra, an organisation responsible for the protection and legal scientific exploration of the catacombs.201 As indirectly pointed out by Hirschfield, the role of the appointed institution has also been ‘a potential obstruction to certain types of research that might be perceived as contrary to the aims of the Church’.202 This may explain the unfavourable treatment of the Jewish catacombs, which proved not only to exist prior to any of the Christian cemeteries, but also confirmed that the integration of the Jewish community in Rome was much stronger than amongst Christians. In addition, as De Rossi’s research in catacomb development was officially sponsored by the Vatican and his results provided an interpretation geared towards a Christian viewpoint, it is not surprising that it took over a century to amend his theories and establish a more realistic definition of the

201 Ferrua (1968).
202 Hirschfield (2008) 35; she continues: ‘A modern scholar can productively consider, especially in light of the history of catacomb studies, whether any tension might exist between pastoral appreciation of the catacombs and scholarly research’.
Roman subterranean cemeteries. The next section will present the current version of the catacombs’ development in the light of the most recent scholarly research.

0.4.2. The development of the Roman catacombs

As previously mentioned, the general shift in the funeral practices from cremation to inhumation that occurred in the course of the second century AD combined with the great expense of the burial ground resulted in the subterranean expansion of the existing tombs. It is likely, yet still impossible to determine for sure, that the very first catacombs were created by the Roman Jews, who may possibly have used the underground systems of corridors with graves cut in the walls for two centuries longer than the Christians.\textsuperscript{203} It is certain that the earliest catacombs, both Jewish and ‘Christian’ were established on private plots of burial land, and, as indicated earlier, the first plans of the subterranean galleries fit into the boundaries of the properties above ground.\textsuperscript{204}

The first Christian establishments (which, most likely, were used exclusively by and for members of certain Christian communities) can be dated to no earlier than the beginning of the third century.\textsuperscript{205} These are Area I in the catacomb of San Callisto (fig. 7),\textsuperscript{206} the earliest part of the catacomb of Novaziano,\textsuperscript{207} and, probably, the hypogeum of Calepodio.\textsuperscript{208}

\textsuperscript{203} The radiocarbon dating of some parts of the Villa Torlonia Jewish catacomb presented by Rutgers (2009), which would place the beginning of the cemetery sometime between the first century BC and the first century AD, is, as rightly pointed out by Borg [(2013) 109], rather unsatisfactory as it does not explain the correlation of the samples with the third-century plaster found in the same area. More radiocarbon results of the Jewish catacombs in Rutgers, De Jang, Borg (2002). For more general information on the Jewish catacombs see Rutgers (1995) 50-67, Pergola, Barbibi (1997) 130-2 (Villa Torlonia), 161 (Via Labicana), 185-7 (Vigna Randanini), 216 (Vigna Cimarra), 229-30 (Monteverde).

\textsuperscript{204} Including imperial property, in Borg (2013) 75 – 112; Osiek (2008).

\textsuperscript{205} Borg (2013) 75-9

\textsuperscript{206} The area developed from two independent nuclei, which were connected at some point during the first half of the third century, see Borg (2013) 75, Bisconti (2009), Fiocchi Nicolai, Guyon (2006), Spera (1999) 101, UT 150, Pergola, Barbini (1997) 196-203.

\textsuperscript{207} It is likely that the cemetery was established for the followers of the ‘schismatic’ bishop Novatianus (†257/8), the rival of Roman bishop Cornelius (250-253), see Borg (2013) 76-7; Rocco (2006); Pegola, Barbini (1997) 151-3.

\textsuperscript{208} The early nucleus contains the grave of Bishop Callixtus (†222). As indicated by Borg [(2013) 77-9], the egalitarian character of the hypogeum (the majority of inscriptions suggest the burials of slaves) may confirm that the crypt was used by a group of Christians. However, considering the lack of any
There are also several hypogea, *loculi* and sections of subterranean corridors that were evidently used by groups of Christians. However, this does not prove the complete Christian ownership of the entire cemeteries.\textsuperscript{209} On the contrary, burial in the hypogea and catacombs located on both imperial and private land was organized in the main by certain *collegia* associated with imperial staff or members of particular *familiae*.\textsuperscript{210}

Fig. 7. Area 1 in the catacomb of San Callisto.

Considering the size of certain funerary properties (e.g. the plot on which the catacomb of Pretestato originated) it is evident that they must have belonged to the imperial family or the wealthiest members of the Roman elite. Due to the high cost of land it is simply impossible that the Church authorities

\textsuperscript{209} E.g. *cubiculum* Gb in the catacomb of Pretestato [Borg (2013) 87-8], *cubiculum* Sd in the catacomb of Domitilla [Borg (2013) 93-4], the so-called *Capella Graeca* and *Velata cubiculum* in the catacomb of Priscilla [Borg (2013) 98-105].

\textsuperscript{210} I.e. the catacomb of Pretestato originated on an imperial property and included burials of, for instance, members of a *collegium cocorum Augusti nostri quod consistit in Palatio*, the catacomb of Panfilio contains majority of graves of *milites*, while the catacomb of Priscilla was created on private land, which belonged to the patrician family of Acilii Galabriones, included, e.g., a *cubiculum* used by a *collegium mercatores vinarii*, for these and more see Borg (2013) 91-105.
would have accumulated enough resources to fund the purchase of such an immense burial ground.\textsuperscript{211}

Additionally, a statistical analysis of the burials found in Rome, presented by Bodel, demonstrates that, assuming the exclusively Christian ownership and usage of the catacombs and accepting almost total loss of the surface graves, this religious group would be largely over-represented.\textsuperscript{212}

Finally, Johnson convincingly argued that there was no apparent reason, nor any law, requiring that the Christian deceased should be buried separately until the late eighth century, when Charlemagne issued the \textit{Capitulatio de Partibus Saxoniae}, in which, amongst other rules, he forbade burying non-Christian immigrants in Christian churches.\textsuperscript{213}

The three studies presented above, combined with Rebillard’s argument that the involvement of the Church in the administration of the catacombs decreased, clearly constitute evidence of the non-Christian origins and the non-exclusiveness of Christian usage of the Roman catacombs. However, it is essential to note here that none of the above studies dismisses the possibility of Christian graves being present in the subterranean cemeteries, of which evidence is well documented from the early third century.

As to the catacombs, the expansion of the underground corridors and hypogea began shortly after the creation of the original nuclei. The first establishments of such a kind also correlated with the plots of burial land above.\textsuperscript{214} Soon after, however, new corridors violated the boundaries of the \textit{sub divo} allotments and connected existing nuclei into systems of tunnels and \textit{cubicula}.\textsuperscript{215} Such a breach of the law\textsuperscript{216} could only be possible if the area above

\textsuperscript{211} Borg (2013) 79-91.
\textsuperscript{212} Bodel (2008) 184-5 and 238-42.
\textsuperscript{213} Johnson (1997). In 785 the Council in Paderborn also banned Christian burials in ‘pagan mounds’, see Hefele (1910) 3.994.
\textsuperscript{215} E.g. The Area 1 and the Area called St. Miltiades were connected by two separate galleries; or the second expansion of the Hypogoeum G and the creation of Hypogeeum F in the catacomb of Pretestato, see Spera (2004) 58-63, Borg (2013) 88.
\textsuperscript{216} The famous doctrine \textit{cuius est solum ejus est usque ad coelum et ad inferos} [see Goudy (1913) 229ff] dates to medieval times, however similar rules can be detected from Roman law: Venuleius, \textit{Interdicts}, Book II in Justinian’s \textit{Digest} 43.24.22.4: \textit{Si quis proiectum aut stillicidium in sepulchrum}
ground was in fact administered by 'one landlord (or his appointees), who permitted and regulated the excavation of galleries and burial within them' (i.e. an emperor). This would explain the rapid growth of the majority of Roman catacombs, which originated in the third century, and proves that the biggest known subterranean cemeteries were located on imperial properties or land of some wealthy members of the elite.

Apart from the large subterranean cemeteries, a number of smaller catacombs and hypogea belonging to families or collegia were established over the course of the third and fourth centuries. One of the best examples of such development is the hypogeeum on Via Dino Compagni (fig. 6), also known as the Via Latina catacomb. This relatively small cemetery was built in several phases during the fourth century and was richly decorated with both pagan and Christian images. Although the hypogeeum was, most likely, originally designed as a closed complex intended for members of one family or a collegium, it is now certain that it was eventually connected with some other funerary nuclei alongside the Via Latina. According to Ferrua’s calculation, the cemetery accommodated 325 graves with approximately 400 people buried, of which the majority were simple loculi situated in the galleries with only few burials placed in the decorated cubicula.

The Hypogeeum on Via Dino Compagni is especially interesting due to the beautifully preserved decorations with interspersed pagan and Christian paintings. The uniqueness of certain images representing some unusual Old

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1. Immiserit, etiamsi ipsum monumentum non tangeret, recte cum eo agi, quod in sepulchro vi aut clam factum sit, quia sepulchri sit non solum is locus, qui recipiat humationem, sed omne etiam supra id caelum: eoque nomine etiam sepulchri violati agi posse, or Ulpian, Opinions, Book VI in Justinian’s Digest 8.4.13.1: Si constat in tuo agro lapidicinas esse, invito te nec privato nec publico nomine quisquam lapidem caedere potest, cui id faciendi ius non est: nisi talis consuetudo in illis lapidicinis consistat, ut si quis voluerit ex his caedere, non aliter hoc faciat, nisi prius solitum solacium pro hoc domino praestat: ita tamen lapides caedere debet, postquam satisfaciat domino, ut neque usus necessarii lapidis intercludatur neque commoditas rei iure dom [ed. Scott (1932)].
3. I.e. the catacombs of Prastestato, San Sebastiano, Domitilla, Pamphilio, SS. Pietro e Marcellino and (most likely) Coemeterium Maius.
4. I.e. the catacomb of Priscilla and Comodilla.
5. A comprehensive study in Pergola, Barbini (1997).
Testament episodes permitted a suggestion that they might have been based on some lost illustrated Jewish manuscripts. In addition, Snyder identifies several similarities between the Christian paintings in the Hypogeum on Via Dino Compagni and the preaching of Ambrose. Due to the predominance of biblical images in the Hypogeum’s decoration it was previously acknowledged as ‘Christian’ and the pagan images were interpreted in such a way as to suit this interpretation. The majority of scholars, however, accept that the Hypogeum was used simultaneously by pagans and Christians and the decoration of each cubiculum reflected the belief of particular patrons.

Most of the Roman catacombs were of similar size or slightly larger than the Hypogeum on Via Dino Compagni. The epigraphic evidence suggests that the catacombs were created and maintained by the fossores, the gravediggers, who sold the individual graves on behalf of the owners or landlords without any intervention from the clergy at least until the mid-fifth century. It is also essential to note here that the overwhelming majority of burials in the catacombs occurred in the fourth and fifth century when the cemeteries were rapidly enlarged and modified according to demand. The popularity of certain catacombs, and their swift expansion were due to the growing cult of the martyrs and the common belief that burial in the proximity of a Christian hero guaranteed protection in the afterlife. From the early fourth century onwards, in addition to the subterranean development of the cemeteries, several surface imperial mausolea and/or burial basilicas were built above the martyrs’ graves.

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224 Kötzsche-Breitenbruch (1976) 17-19 and 107-8. Tronzo (1986) additionally points out the similarities between the images from cubiculum C and the iconography from the Dura Europos Synagogue.


227 Ferrua (1990) 159: the hypogeum belonged to one extended family whose some members were still pagans and some have already converted. Wright (1983) 69-71 argues for the family members to ‘agree to disagree’ in the choice of the funerary decoration.


229 Osborne (1985) 279.

to allow more space for graves of wealthier Christians.\textsuperscript{231} The funerary basilicas must also have been funded by members of the imperial families.\textsuperscript{232}

The veneration of saints in Rome began at some point in the third century and is well attested in, for instance, the catacomb of San Sebastiano in the mid-third-century region of Memoria Apostolorum.\textsuperscript{233} Constantine I initiated public commemoration of saints by establishing richly decorated shrines above the legendary graves of the apostles Peter and Paul and also St Laurence.\textsuperscript{234} However, the biggest impact on the cult of the martyrs, which led to major reconstruction and expansion of the catacombs, was due to Bishop Damasus (366-384 AD), who not only ‘discovered’ forgotten burials of many martyrs, but also renovated and decorated their graves creating more spaces for Christian veneration.\textsuperscript{235} Damasus also composed epigrams to honour the martyrs, which were later engraved by the famous Furius Dionysius Filocalus and placed in the vicinity of commemorated graves.\textsuperscript{236} The majority of the epigrams venerate selected clergymen, whose life and martyrdom corresponded with the Damasian ‘propagandistic program’ and emphasized his struggle to become a bishop of Rome and to keep the peace in the contemporary Church.\textsuperscript{237} Damasus’ work in the catacombs (i.e. creating subterranean shrines for Christian martyrs) is especially important while considering the moment of the rediscovery of the catacombs in the sixteenth century, when explorers came across Christian places of veneration from Late Antiquity and assumed a purely Christian provenance for the cemeteries.

The largest number of burials in the Roman catacombs occurred between c. 350 and 450 AD, followed by a steady decrease of internments in the subterranean cemeteries and an increase of burials in the surface graves and

\textsuperscript{231} Meneghini, Valenzani (2000) 263; MacMullen (2010) 597-601. See also Krautheimer and Corbett
\textsuperscript{232} Borg (2013) 79-80, Brandenburg (2005) 20, 55 or 70.
\textsuperscript{233} Sághy (2000) 274 with references. For the Memoria Apostolorum see Spera (1998) 14-20 with references. For the archaeological evidence of the cult of the martyrs see: Spera (2003) and Spera (2005b).
\textsuperscript{234} Sághy (2000) 275.
\textsuperscript{235} Grig (2004b) 127-34; Sághy (2000) 276 with references; Spera (1994).
\textsuperscript{236} For the epigrams, see Ferrua (1942); for the commentaries, see Brown (1981) 93-105.
\textsuperscript{237} Grig (2004b) 127; Sághy (2000) 278-87.
funerary basilicas. The last recorded burial in the catacombs dates to 535 AD and comes from the catacomb of San Sebastiano. Sometime in the sixth century people living in Rome also began to bury their deceased within the city walls which was probably triggered by the Ostrogothic sieges of Rome in 537/8, 546 and 549/50 AD. It is known from literary sources that several suburban cemeteries and churches also suffered destruction, and archaeological material provides evidence for a number of restorations that followed.

After burials in the catacombs ceased, the subterranean cemeteries and shrines were still visited frequently due to the presence of martyrs’ graves. The catacombs, full of relics, became a popular destination for pilgrims and the first itineraries for visitors were compiled around the mid-seventh century. During that time some parts of the catacombs containing graves of the most important martyrs were reconstructed, enlarged and embellished under papal patronage in order to host liturgical services at the sites.

In the second half of the eighth century the remains of some of the martyrs were removed from their original burial sites and transferred to a number of churches inside the city of Rome. This was probably due to the damage caused to the catacombs during the siege of Rome in 756 by the Lombards who plundered the cemeteries in search of holy relics. This triggered a steady decline in the pilgrimages to the suburban cemeteries as the veneration was shifted to the more accessible city shrines. In addition, not all relics were housed in Rome - a large number of relics were transferred to churches located to the north of the Alps. The great demand for relics began

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238 Osborne (1985) 280-1.
239 ICUR 13123 in Osborne (1985) 280. Osborne also mentions a potential burial in the catacomb of Santa Felicita dated to 541 AD.
241 Liber Pontificalis, 60.8: Nam et ecclesias et corpora martyrum exterminatae sunt a Gothis.
242 Osborne (1985) with references.
244 Osborne (1985) 286.
245 The first mass-removal of the relics was executed by Pope Paul I (757-767), see Liber Pontificalis 95.29-34, followed by Paschal I (817-824), see Liber Pontificalis 100.IX and Sergius II (844-847), see Liber Pontificalis 104.XXVIII, in Osborne (1985) 287-94. See also Birch (1998) 99-102.
much earlier, which is best illustrated by a letter written by Pope Gregory I (590-604) to Empress Constantina with a refusal to fulfil her request for ‘the head or any other part of the body’ of St Paul.\textsuperscript{247} In the late eighth and ninth century the process of translation of relics was undertaken on a much larger scale.\textsuperscript{248} Moreover, the illegal obtaining and selling of relics proved to be a rather lucrative business as clients belonged to the aristocracy, higher ranked clergy or even royal families.\textsuperscript{249} The most famous purveyor of relics was a Roman deacon Deusdona, who, for instance, in 827 supplied remains of Saints Peter and Marcellinus to Einhard, a Frankish scholar and servant of Charlemagne.\textsuperscript{250}

By the mid-ninth century at least some of the catacombs were in ruins, which is well documented through the restoration works that were carried out in some of the cemeteries.\textsuperscript{251} According to Liber Pontificalis (107.LIII) Pope Nicholas I established a monastery on the site of the catacomb of San Sebastiano on the Via Appia, which must have promoted this particular cemetery as a major place of veneration during the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{252} Several medieval sources, such as guides around Rome or travel journals, confirm that many catacombs were known to visitors in the twelfth and thirteenth century, but it is impossible to estimate to what extent the subterranean corridors were accessible to explorers at that time.\textsuperscript{253} By the end of the fourteenth century most of the catacombs were neglected and forgotten due to the shortage of clerics who could maintain services in the venerated shrines,\textsuperscript{254} however, several graffiti written by

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\textsuperscript{247} Registrum Epistolarum IV, 30 in McCulloch (1976) 147-50.
\textsuperscript{248} McCulloch (1976) 151-3.
\textsuperscript{249} Osborne (1985) 294.
\textsuperscript{250} Geary (1978) 51.
\textsuperscript{251} Geary (1978) 52-9.
\textsuperscript{252} Osborne (1985) 295-6 provides examples of Pope Benedict III’s repairs in the catacomb of Balbina and Pope Nicholas I’s renovation works in the catacombs of San Felice, and of San Ponziano on the Via Portuense and of San Sebastiano on the Via Appia.
\textsuperscript{253} Osborne (1985) 296. See also Pesci (1945).
\textsuperscript{254} Osborne (1985) 297-8.
\textsuperscript{255} E.g. ‘MCCCCLXVII quidem Scoti hic fuerunt’ found by De Rossi in the catacomb of San Callisto, see De Rossi (1864) 3.
sporadic visitors to the subterranean cemeteries prove that at least some parts of the tunnels were still available to curious travellers.\textsuperscript{255}

To summarise the above, it is evident that when the sixteenth-century explorers re-discovered the Roman catacombs they saw mainly evidence of veneration of saints and martyrs in Late Antiquity, which overwhelmed the earlier, non-Christian material. This combined with the contemporary debate between the Catholic Church and the Protestants, in which the catacombs were used as a weapon against the movement of the Reformation, explains why the subterranean cemeteries were perceived as purely Christian developments until the late twentieth century (and are still perceived as such today by the majority of people outside academia).

0.5. **Summary**

As I demonstrated in the introduction, the interpretation of ancient funerary art can be biased due to political, religious and personal reasons. A strict classification has been applied to different communities living in the Roman world, though it is evident that there were no solid boundaries between religious groups, and religion formed only a part of people’s identities. When it comes to funerary art, in the majority of cases scholars try to provide some general conclusions and often separate the images into strict categories. As presented above, the archaeological, epigraphic and literary evidence all lead to different interpretations: funerary art was designed to express personal beliefs and/or showcase the status of the deceased, and the catacombs did not originate as a Christian establishment, and they were not controlled by Church officials until at least end of the fourth century. What is more, funerary art should be viewed as an expression of private beliefs rather than officially recognised religions, while the images were intended to be seen by a limited number of tomb visitors.

A similar picture of shared funerary practices emerges from an investigation of pagan, Jewish and Christian literary and archaeological sources.
The following chapter will focus on different aspects of dining which was an essential part of both funerals and commemorative rites.
Chapter 1. Textual and archaeological evidence for dining in a funerary context in the Greco-Roman World

“Βεβρωκέναι, μὴ δεδευπνηκέναι σήμερον”
/Plutarch, Quaestiones conviviales, 697C

While eating can be considered a necessary part of everyday existence, the process of eating together, either as part of a celebration, a specific rite, or just for pleasure, is a social event which has been practiced throughout human history. When Plutarch quoted a common Roman saying ‘I have eaten, but not dined today’ (above) he referred to a custom of convivial meals that ‘always require friendly sociability for seasoning’.256 Dining that accompanied either private family events such as funerals and weddings or public festivals, communal rites and ceremonies was frequently practiced in Roman times and its origins can be traced back to Greek and Etruscan cultures.

In this chapter I will look at one particular aspect of convivial dining – one which occurred during funerals and commemorative events, both private and public. I will also investigate differences in mortuary practices and customs in the Greco-Roman world, with special regard to Jewish and Christian communities living in the Empire. Despite the fact that the focus of this thesis is on early Christian funerary practices it is essential to discuss this subject in a much wider setting and seek the origins for the Christian customs in Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts. The investigation will be based on literary and archaeological evidence for funerary and commemorative dining. The depictions of dining in a mortuary context will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is important to start the discussion by presenting Roman funerary dining and commemoration of the dead in detail. I shall follow this by presenting evidence of certain Jewish mortuary customs and their relevance to

256 Plutarch, Questiones Conviviales 697C/D: ‘The Romans, Sossius Senecio, are fond of quoting a witty and sociable person who said, after a solitary meal, “I have eaten, but not dined to-day”, implying that a “dinner” always requires friendly sociability for seasoning. […] But most truly godlike seasoning at the dining-table is the presence of a friend or companion or intimate acquaintance – not because of his eating and drinking with us, but because he participates in the give-and-take of conversation’ [tr. Minar (1961) 5].
some early Christian practices. Finally, I will investigate Christian funerary rites and meals organised in honour of the deceased. I shall also discuss a potential analogy between biblical images found in early Christian tombs and the earliest known written funerary prayer, which comes from the eighth-century *Sacramentary of Gellone*.

1.1. The Romans

Dining, understood here as convivial events, was an important part of life in Rome, and well documented through extensive literary and pictorial evidence found all over the Empire. The archaeological examples which relate to dining or represent meal scenes come from state monuments, private and imperial houses, tombs and gravestones, and private convivial paraphernalia.\(^{257}\) The hundreds of dedicatory and commemorative inscriptions that refer to events sponsored by Roman office holders, wealthy citizens and all sorts of *collegia* are an excellent source for Roman collective dining.\(^{258}\) Texts also describe a variety of events that occurred in both the private and public spheres, such as communal meals that were organised either for religious or state ceremonies,\(^{259}\) private convivial banquets,\(^{260}\) funerary meals or feasts held to commemorate the dead. As the focus of this thesis is on dining in a funerary context in this chapter I shall only discuss Roman mortuary customs and private meals that were organised in memory of the deceased.

\(^{257}\) E.g. a late sixth-century BC terracotta plaque found on the Palatine Hill, with two reclining couples entertained by a musician and served by three attendants, see Dunbabin (2003) 32-2. More examples will be discussed further in the text.

\(^{258}\) For the most comprehensive discussion of the epigraphic material referring to public dining see Donahue (2004).

\(^{259}\) E.g. Livy 24.16.16.18: *Pilleati aut lana alba velatis capitis volones epulati sunt, alii accubantes, alii santes, qui silum ministrabant vescebanturque.* In: Dunbabin (2003) 74; or Plutarch, Crassus, 12.2: 'Crassus made a great sacrifice in honour of Hercules, feasted the people at ten thousand tables, and made them an allowance of grain for three months' [tr. Perrin (1932) 351]; D’Arms (1999) 305, Roller (2006) 85.

The earliest texts that mention Roman dining in a mortuary context refer to communal banquets, which were held during some opulent aristocratic funerals. There are several descriptions of such events: in 328 BC ‘a dole of meat was given to the people by Marcus Flavius, at the funeral of his mother’,261 or in 183 BC ‘on the occasion of the funeral of P. Licinius a public distribution of meat took place, and one hundred and twenty gladiators fought, and funeral games were held for three days, and after the games a banquet’.262 From the latter example it appears that a distribution of meat was most likely part of a communal banquet. Cicero, on the other hand, provided an example of a public funerary meal that ended badly for one of its organisers – Quintus Tubero, who ‘covered the Punic couches with shabby goat skins and set out Samian crockery more appropriate for the death of Diogenes the Cynic than a banquet to honour the death of the mighty Africanus’. Such a mistake cost him his office as ‘the Roman people loathe private luxury, but they love public splendour’.263

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Bearing in mind the number of written sources that refer to Roman public feasts it is rather surprising that only one pictorial example of a communal banquet which most likely belonged to a state monument of a non-mortuary kind, has survived to date; the small, possibly first-century AD, fragment of a relief depicts six Vestals resting on a couch (kline couches arranged into a triclinium) with a rectangular table in front of them and at least five figures standing behind (servants?) (fig. 8).264 While the banquet represented in this fragment can be positively identified as being part of a public ceremony or a sacrifice (by the fact that the Vestals wear formal dress) the origin of the fragment itself has only been speculated upon.265 Nevertheless, it provides visual evidence of how public dining might have occurred. I shall discuss Roman communal and private, domestic and funerary meal scenes in the next four chapters.

1.1.1. Roman funerary dining

Evidence for Roman funerary practices can be found in both literary and pictorial sources.266 The main purpose of this section is to carefully examine private family and collegia banquets that took place during funerals as part of mortuary rites. I shall start by investigating literary evidence for funerary activities associated with convivial dining.

Roman written sources mention two different occasions during which a meal could have been organised within the mourning period: the first was a sacrifice of a sow to the goddess Ceres (porca praeuentanea)267 near the grave

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267 Festus, De significacione verborum, 16, QU.XII, 20. 25-29: Presantanea porca dictur, ut ait Veranius, quae famlieae purgandae causa Cereri immolator, quod pars quaedam eius sacrifice fit in conspectus mortui eius, cuius funus instituitur [ed. Muellero (1839) 250]. Interestingly, Varro (de Vita
just before or after the entombment of the body or cremated ashes, which was most likely accompanied by three libations, and then followed by a meal called *silicernium*. The second sacrifice was performed at the grave on the ninth day after the funeral and was called the *novemdiale sacrificium*.

1.1.1.1. *Silicernium:*

The earliest example of the word *silicernium* which referred to a funerary meal comes from Varro’s poem *Meleagris* written sometime at the beginning of the first century BC and recorded by Nonius Marcellus around five centuries later. Varro specifically describes the meal as being held in the vicinity of the grave (ad sepulchrum) in order to say ‘farewell’ to the departing deceased (*Quo pransi discendentes dicimus alius alii: vale*). Interestingly, the passage (‘to the now departing diner we all say: farewell’) strongly suggests that the meal occurred sometime before or after the entombment of the body rather than during the sacrifice on the ninth day after the funeral, which was suggested by Lindsay; it also indicates that the deceased, described as the ‘diner’ was believed to be one of the meal’s participants. Moreover, Nonius's annotation rejects Terrence’s second-century BC usage of the word *silicernium* as 'Drybones’, or, ‘curved stones of old men’ (*senectute curuus silices*) as it was understood by Terrence’s *Populi Romani* lib.III) mentioned a sacrifice called *porca praecidanea* to be made by a family, whose deceased was not properly buried (*quod humatus non sit, heredi porca praecidanea suscienda* Telluri et Cereri. *Alter familia pura non est*): in Nonius Marcellus, *De honestis et nove veterum dictis*, 163 M, 17-20 [ed. Lindsay (1964) vol.1, 240]; also in Festus, *De significacione verborum*, 13. QU. XI, 3.17-24: *Praecidanea porca product syllaba secunda pronuncianda est.* [ed. Mullero (1839) 218]. About the Roman law of sacrificing a pig to legalise a grave: Cicero, *De legibus* 2.22.57: *nec tamen eorum ante sepulchrum est, quam iusta facta et porcus caesus est* [tr. Walker Keyes (1988) 440].

Scheid (2007) 270 argues that the sacrifice to Ceres was practiced until the times of Cicero, and later on it was replaced by libations.

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270 ‘Drybones’ is an invented word used by Terence’s translator Sargeaunt (1983). It was to be an offensive term meaning someone old (like the bones of the ancestors).
commentator Aelius Donatus in the mid-fourth century AD. However, the latter meaning could be interpreted as referring to the funerary monuments that contained old human remains, which would explain the connection of the word *silicernium* to something that occurred or happened at a graveyard.

A comment made by Nonius, vital for our understanding of the ancient rites, was the comparison of the Latin term *silicernum* with the Greek *περίδειπνον*. The same connection was made by Festus (*Silicernium dicitur coena funebris, quam Graeci περίδειπνον vocant*) in the second century AD and then repeated in the eighth century by Paul the Deacon. Tertullian, on the other hand, compares the *silicernum* to feasts organised in honour of a deity, which suggests that certain rituals or invocations must have been involved in observing both types of events. Festus also suggests seeking the origin of the word *silicernium* in a type of sausage, which was used to purify a family after the death of one of its members (*cibi genus, quod nos farcimen dicimus, quo purgabatur letum familia, silicernium dici*). This argument has been commonly accepted in modern scholarship mainly because of Paul the Deacon’s eighth-century AD interpretation of Festus’s writing (*Silicernium erat genus farciminis, quo fletu familia purgabatur. Dictum autem silicernium, quia*

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272 περίδειπνον was organised on the third day after the death of a family member; a funerary meal was held at home after the family returned from the grave, e.g. Hegesippos, *Adelphoi* 11-16: ‘Whenever I turn my talents to the perideipnon. As soon as they come back from the ekphora, all in black, I take the lid off the pot and make the mourners smile’ [tr. Kurts, Boardman (1971) 146]; Meander, *Aspis* 233: ‘perhaps he’ll stay until the funeral lunch?’ [tr. Arnott (1929) 41]. A second-century AD reference to a Greek περίδειπνον comes from a satirical work by Lucian, *De Luctu* 24: ‘As the finishing touch to all this, there is the funeral feast, and the relatives come in, consoling the parents of the departed, and inducing them to taste something. The parents themselves, I must say, do not find it disagreeable to be constrained, but are already done up with three days of continuous fasting’ [tr. Harmon (1953) 129]. See also Burkert (1985) 190-94; Kurtz and Boardman (1971) 146-147; Alexiou (1974) 4-23, Johnston (1999) 36-46; Garland (2001).


275 Lindsay (1998) 72 states that Festus quoted a certain Flaccus Veranius, however it is not supported by the original source, but appears in the work of Paul the Deacon.

276 E.g. Lindsay (2000) 167: ‘the silicernium was a funerary meal […] and consisted of a sausage’
cuius nominae ea res instituebatur). However, it is more likely that it was the sausage that took its name after a funerary ritual rather than the other way round. It would be tempting to follow Lindsay’s suggestion that the previously mentioned sausage ‘undoubtedly had some primitive ritual significance’; this statement, however, is no more than an assumption and is not supported by any written or archaeological evidence. It is also impossible to determine whether the sausage was offered to the dead, or constituted simply as a part of the meal shared by the living.

Moreover, from the literary examples that provide any information about funerary sacrifices, libations and meals that follow the mortuary rituals it is still impossible to determine whether the food sacrificed during funerals was offered to a deity or the dead, or whether the food was burnt or eaten as part of the meal. However, it is likely that because part of the ritual was a sacrifice to Ceres (and, over time, other domestic gods) the food was portioned and shared between the participants, the goddess and the deceased during the meal that followed, unlike the sacrifices offered to the Underworld gods, which must not be eaten by any living person and were therefore completely burnt. This hypothesis may be supported by multiple archaeological finds of partly-burnt food remains (grain, cakes, animal bones) near the graves, as well as the presence of cooking installations and fragments of pottery found at the cemeteries. It is, of course, possible that the archaeological remains might have originated during multiple post-funerary commemorative rites; however, we cannot exclude the possibility that the mourners might have consumed at least part of the food during funerals.

As to the libations (profusiones), the practice of pouring liquids is well documented from plentiful archaeological evidence of pipes inserted into the ash chests and sarcophagi, or into holes in the tombs’ floors which enabled the

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277 Lindsay (1998) 72.
280 See section 1.1.2.1.
offering of refreshment to the dead.\textsuperscript{281} It was also mentioned by the second-century satirical author Lucian, who wrote that the dead ‘get their nourishment, naturally, from the libations that are poured in our world and the burnt-offerings at the tomb’.\textsuperscript{282} None of the sources, however, provide any more detailed description of the practice, although it is likely that libations were offered not only during funerals, but also at several other events, as the souls of the departed demanded regular commemoration by the living.\textsuperscript{283}

This takes us to one of the main reasons for such a lengthy discussion of Roman funerary meals; the very common practice of overinterpreting ancient sources by modern scholars. An example is provided by the work of Lindsay, who recently discussed Roman funerary meals.\textsuperscript{284} After a careful examination of the sources provided by Lindsay it is clear that the author invented a menu for a typical Roman funeral feast, which was supposed to include ‘eggs, vegetables, beans, lentils and salt’.\textsuperscript{285} Among the quoted passages one (Plutarch, \textit{Questiones conivivales VII}) does not mention any kind of funerary meal, and one (Tacitus, \textit{Annales} 6.5) uses the term \textit{novemdi}, which will be discussed later in this chapter, and which cannot be connected to a funerary meal. Another example provided by Lindsay from a satire by Juvenal, indeed mentions ‘crayfish hemmed in by an egg, a funereal supper on a tiny plate’, which, taken out of context, may suggest usage of such food during a funerary meal.\textsuperscript{286} However, bearing in mind the satirical character of Juvenal’s work, this passage should be read as a comparison of the food that is being given to some important guests (lobster with asparagus) with a poorer version of the meal served for the minor guests (eggs stuffed with crayfish). Therefore, Juvenal’s description of ‘a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{281} Borbonus (2014) 53; E.g. multiple intentional holes in the mosaic covering the floor of Mausoleum F in the Vatican Necropolis (personal observation); or the famous Sarcophagus of Lot (fig. 46) from a mausoleum discovered underneath the basilica of San Sebastiano in Rome, which still contains terracota pipes inserted into one of its sides for the purpose of offering libations for the dead, see Rutgers (2013) 516. See also Potthoff (2017) 99-100.
\item \textsuperscript{282} Lucian, \textit{On Funerals} 9 [tr. Harmon (1953) 119].
\item \textsuperscript{283} Trumbower (2001) 17. Also see below section 1.1.2.1.
\item \textsuperscript{284} E.g. Graham and Hope (2016).
\item \textsuperscript{285} Lindsay (2000) 167.
\item \textsuperscript{286} Juvenal, 5.85: \textit{sed tibi dimidio constrictus cammarus ovo ponitur exigua feralis cena patella}. (tr. Ramsay (1924) 76).
\end{itemize}
funerary meal’ should not be taken literally.\textsuperscript{287} As for the funerary context, it is important to read the fragment as evidence of the modesty and simplicity of the meals held by the family during the mourning period.

Among the two remaining texts used by Lindsay as references to funerary meals one (Horace, \textit{Sermons} 2.6.63)\textsuperscript{288} is about the delights of the countryside and describes a convivial party that the author dreams he will be able to take part in someday; while the other (Lucian, \textit{The Downward Journey, or the Tyrant} 7) provides yet another description of the offerings for the dead rather than a menu for a funerary meal.\textsuperscript{289}

The aim of the detailed and long discussion above was to demonstrate two major facts: firstly, that it is very easy to misinterpret written sources by taking passages out of the overall context of the text; and secondly, that it is impossible to fully reconstruct the meal that was held during a Roman funeral. It is quite possible that there was no set menu for a funerary meal: the food provided for the funeral varied according to people’s status, financial resources, local customs and family tradition. The majority of literary sources emphasize only the modesty of the food that was served.

\textbf{1.1.1.2. \textit{Novendiale}:}\textsuperscript{290}

The second sacrifice performed at the graves was offered on the ninth day after the funeral and, as the remaining sources are not very clear, it is

\textsuperscript{287} Eggs were indeed used in purification rites, however, not connected with funerary customs: Juvenal 6.518. A similar analogy was made by Plutarch in his work on Crassus (19.5) in which he wrote that ‘when their rations were distributed to the soldiers after the crossing of the river, lentils and salt came first, which are held by the Romans to be tokens of mourning, and are set out as offerings to the dead’ [tr. Perrin (1932) 372]. This passage definitely does not refer to a funerary meal, as was suggested by Linsday, but to the mourning period, during which a family should abstain from opulent dining. Lentils and salt, according to Plutarch, were used as offerings to the dead, therefore were not supposed to be served to soldiers. In comparing the two Plutarch’s intention was to emphasise Crassus’s vices and lack of manners.

\textsuperscript{288} Horace, \textit{Satires} 2.6.60-67: \textit{o rus, quando ego te adspiciam quandoque licebit/nunc veterum libris, nunc somno et inertibus horis /ducere sollicitae icunda oblivia vitae? /o quando faba Pythagorea cognata simulque /uncta satis pingui ponentur holuscula lardo? /o noctes cenaeque deum, quibus ipse meique /ante Larem proprium vescor vernasque procacis /pasco libatis dapibus} [tr. Fairclough (1947) 214].

\textsuperscript{289} Lucian, \textit{The Downward Journey, or the Tyrant} 7: ‘here with us there is nothing but asphodel, libations and funeral-cakes and offerings to the dead’ [tr. Harmon (1915) 4].

\textsuperscript{290} Notice different spelling of the term in different ancient sources: \textit{novemdiale} or \textit{novendiale}. 
impossible to determine whether any offerings for the dead were given during this rite.

The term *novemdiale* literally means something that happens 'over nine days' or 'on the ninth day'. It most often referred to a ritual (*novemdiale sacrum*) that was to be performed after the occurrence of some kind of misfortune or natural disaster.291 This term was also used in funerary contexts, however, there is only one known written source which refers to a sacrifice that was performed on the ninth day after a funeral: Pomponius Porphyrio’s second-century *Commentum in Horati Epodos* (*nam novemdiale dicitur sacrificium, quod mortuis fit nona die, qua sepultura est*).292 The sacrifice was probably performed at a cemetery, an indication of which could be found in one of Horace’s epodes, where the author condemned the destruction of the graves (*in sepulcris pauperum prudens anus novemdialis dissipare pulvers*).293 Horace’s usage of the phrase *sepulcris novemdialis* may suggest that the grave had been freshly consecrated by the ninth-day sacrifice.

Unfortunately, none of the remaining sources provide any further information about the character of the performed ritual: who was it for and what was sacrificed? In addition, there are some texts that mention *novemdiale*, but in the context of a meal that might have occurred after a family returned from the cemetery. One of the examples comes from Tacitus’ *Annales* as a reference to the food served during funerary banquets. In this fragment Tacitus mentions a certain Cotta Messalinus, who compared a meal served during a birthday party with a *novemdiale*.294 Here again the aim of the comparison was

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291 For example, in Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 1.31.4: *Romanis quoque ab eodem prodigio novemdiale sacrum publice susceptum est*; or Livy, *Ab urbe condita* 26.23.7: *ea prodigia hostiis maioribus sunt procurata et obscuratio in unum diem populo indicta et novemdiale sacrum*; or Festus, *De significacione verborum* 13. QU.IX.26.27-31: *novemdiales feriae dicuntur institutae a Tullo Hostillo rege, ex monitu haruspicum ... is nono die in feris ... sive quod in more Albano lapidibus pluisset, sive quod vox esset exaudita, ut Albani suo ritu facerent, quae omissa erant sacra. nam ab his eadem sacra fieri di voluerunt, quae missa crate a poene funditus delata negligere temporibus ineuntibus coepissent.*

292 Pomponius Porphyrio, *Commentum in Horati Epodos* 17.48.2 [ed. Meyer (1874) 187].


294 Tacitus, *Annales* 6.5: *et cum die natali Augustae inter sacerdotes epularetut, novemdialem eam cenam dixisse* [ed. Jackson (1963) 160]. In modern literature a phrase *cena novemdiale/-is* appears quite commonly; presumably it was taken from this particular passage. However, such a term is a
to present the party in a negative light – Cotta complained that the banquet was either as sad or as poor as a meal held during the mourning period.

Perhaps the best explanation of the term novemdiale comes from the late fourth-century commentary of Virgil’s Aeneid written by Servius, who describes the rite as ‘games celebrated to honour the dead’. In this case ludi could also be understood as ‘a festival’, which would include both a sacrifice and a meal to be practiced on this occasion. It is, therefore, possible that novemdiale was a generic term to describe the rites that were performed on the ninth day after the funeral or, even more generally, during the period of the nine days after the entombment of the body.

To summarize, literary sources provide some important information about Roman funerary practices, which definitely included a meal (silicernium) shared during funerals in the vicinity of the graves, and certain rituals and sacrifices that were held during the following nine days after the funerals (novemdiale). As the definitions in literary sources vary it is likely that the mortuary practices also differed according to local customs, social status and family traditions. The lack of any specific details of the rituals also suggests that they must have been commonly known to contemporary readers and there was, therefore, no reason to describe them.

1.1.2. Commemoration of the dead: collegia and families

The second important aspect of the mortuary customs is the commemoration of the departed observed several times throughout the year. However, before discussing the rites and festivals related to such practice, it is worth examining who was responsible for organizing the events and maintaining the cult of the dead.

In the Greco-Roman world the arrangement of both funerals and commemorative rites was primarily the responsibility of the family of the...
deceased. As explained by Scheid, the ‘familial autonomy’ during the funerals reflected the common perception of religious life in the Greco-Roman world, where ‘each family had its own religion, created by the familial ancestors’ with the father, or oldest male family member, fulfilling the role of the ‘family priest’. It was his duty to lead any domestic ceremony, including funerals. In addition, the pontiffs and priests were not allowed to attend funerals unless the deceased was their own family member.

A very interesting inscription that describes the commemoration of a woman by her family members comes from a third-century funerary monument from Satafis in North Africa. It is worth quoting the full text as it provides an excellent reference to Roman commemorative dining practices:

To the memory of Aelia Secundula: We all have already spent much, as is right, on the burial, but we have decided furthermore to put up a stone dining chamber where Mother Secundula rests, where in we may recall the many wonderful things she did, while the loaves, the cups, the cushions are set out, so as to assuage the sharp hurt that eats at our hearts. While the hour grows late, gladly will we revisit our tales about our virtuous mother, and our praises of her, while the old lady sleeps, she who nourished us and lies forever here in sober peace. She lived 72 years. Dated by the province’s year 260 [AD 299]. Statulenia Iulia set up [the memorial].

There are several vital pieces of information included in the epitaph. Firstly, the family of Aelia Secundula installed a permanent stone table at her grave (lapideam mensam) which they used for meals during which they

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296 Unless the matter concerned an Emperor or another important public figure then the funerals were usually organized by the Senate: see Polybius 6.53 in Scullard (1981) 218-221. About family involvements in the funerary practice see Graham (2011), 91-109, Hope (2009), 65-96 and 121-182, Lindsay (2000), 152-173.
297 Scheid (2011) 541.
298 Scheid (2011) 541.
300 CIL VIII 20277 = ILCV 1570: Memor[i]ae Aeliae Secundulae / funeri multa quid[e]m condigna iam misimus omnes / insuper ar[a]equ(e) deposite Secundulae matri / lapideam placuit nobis ad ponere Secundulae matri / in qua magna eius memorantes plurima facta / dum cibi ponuntur calicesq(ue) et co(o)pert(ur)ae / vulnus ut sanetur nos rod(ens) pectore saevum / libenter fabul(as) dum sera red(d)imus hora / castae matri bonae laudesq(ue) vetula dormit / ipsa a(uae) nutri(i)to iaces et sobra es semper / v(xit) a(nnos) LXXV a(nno) p(rovinciae) CCLX Statulenia Iulia fe/cit [tr. MacMullen (2009) 58].
commemorated the deceased. Secondly, the family members brought their own cups, food and wine to be shared during the dinners, and cushions that were placed on the stone benches for reclining. Finally, the commemoration itself included reciting stories about the deceased and praising her for all the good things she had done (memorantes plurima facta dum cibi ponuntur). The meals were held to heal the wounds that still remained in the family members’ hearts and Aelia Secundula did not take part in them; she was asleep and forever sober (sobra es semper). Interestingly, the inscription has been recognised as Christian due to the apparent presence of the word deposita, which is rather illegible on the monument itself. Even so, looking at the epitaph it is clear that, when it came to commemoration of Aelia Secundula, religion was not their main focus. They gathered at her grave to praise Aelia’s deeds and remember her according to their family tradition.

On many occasions the responsibility for burial and commemoration fell to the members of a collegium with which the deceased had been associated. The clubs drew together individuals according to their profession or religion and often provided burials as a benefit of membership. There is overwhelming archaeological and epigraphic evidence for tombs and burials around the city of Rome which belonged to, and were used on a regular basis by local collegia. Moreover, as stated by Richard S. Ascough, voluntary associations were also responsible for the commemoration of deceased members on certain occasions, such as the annual remembrance of one’s death or Roman festivals for the dead.

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301 I will discuss this formula and why it should not be taken as an indication of Christian belief in Chapter 2, section 2.6.2. Aelia Secudula recognized as a Christian in, e.g., MacMullen (2009) 58.
302 Perry (1999) 97-159. E.g. CIL XI 1436: D(is) M(anibus) / Venuleia / Pelagia / hic adq(uiescit) / fill(us) matr(i) pi(i)ss(imae) / M(arcus) Naevius M(arci) f(ilius) / Gal(eria) Restitutus / mil(es) coh(artis) X praet(oriae) h(ic) a(d)q(uiescit) / qui reliq(uit) testam(ento) coll(egio) / fabr(um) nav(alium) Pis(anorum) stationi / vetustiss(imae) et piiss(imae) HS III(milia) / n(ummum) ex cuius reeditu pa/rental(ia) et rosar(ia) quot/ann(is) a<d=T> sepu/lt(um) / suum celebr(um) quot / si factum ab eis non / esset tunc ea ipsa con/dicione fabr(i) tig(nari) Pis(an) / accept(is) pro poena a / fabr(is) nav(alibus) HS III(milia) n(ummum) ipsi / celebrare deb(ebunt).
1.1.2.1. Commemorative festivals

There were at least three Roman festivals that can be associated with the cult of the dead: *parentalia, lemuria* and *rosalia.* All the festivals belonged to the private family or *collegia* sphere and no public sacrifices were organized during these events. The festival of *parentalia* is relatively well known as it was poetically described by Ovid in his *Fasti,* As stated by the author, during the eight days of *parentalia,* which took place every year between the 13th and 21st of February, families performed several rites to honour the *manes.* The festival concluded with *feralia,* a day intended for the relatives and friends to visit the tombs and bring modest offerings for their deceased. Most importantly, the term *feralia* can also be understood as referring to a meal that was organized by family and/or *collegia* members at the cemeteries during the final day of *parentalia.* It is quite likely that the menu consisted of modest offerings brought to the graves. Festus provides additional information about the sacrifice of a sheep that was offered to the dead during that day.

In contrast to the *feralia* (understood as feasts for the dead), a day after the *parentalia* other feasts, called *caristia,* were arranged privately by families

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306 For *parentalia* see Dolansky (2011); similarities between *lemuria* and *parentalia* in Scheid (1984) 132-6; *rosalia* in Hoey (1937).
307 Scullard (1981) 75. Dolansky (2011) 128-9 mentions a sacrifice performed by Vestal Virgins, which, even if it was associated with the observance of *parentalia,* should also be perceived as a private, rather than a public, offering to the spirits.
308 Ovid, *Fasti:* 2.533-616.
311 Raccanelli (1996) 28; Scullard (1981) 74. Additionally, several dedicatory inscriptions confirm that the rites of *parentalia* were also observed by *collegia:* e.g. a funerary epitaph of Caius Attius, who left 1000 sertertii to the *collegium centonariorum* in Mevania (modern Bevagna in Perugia) so that the members would annually observe the commemorative festival at his grave: CIL XI 5047: C(aius) Attius (mulieris) / libertus / januarius / Vivri s(acris) f(acundis) Villuir Val(etudinis) / hic collegio suo cento/nnariorum legavit HS (mille) ex / cuius reedit quod annis / die parentaliiorum ne minus / homines XII ad rogam suum / vescerentur / cura collegii cent(onariorum).
312 Varro, *Logistoricon Libri,* 6:13 derives the name *feralia* from *ferre* [to carry] as the offerings were carried to the tombs: quod ferent tum epulas ad sepulcrum, in Scullard (1981) 75.
313 Festus, *De Significatione Verborum,* IV, 85.11: Ferialia – diis manibus sacrata festa, a ferendis epulis, vel a feriendis pecudibus appellata.
in order to celebrate the living.³¹⁴ According to the writer Valerius Maximus, a contemporary of Ovid, the meal was organized to prevent any disagreement among the kinsfolk ‘amidst the rites of the table and the good cheer, in the company of those fostering concordia’.³¹⁵ The fact that the celebration of the living came just after the festival for the dead is very interesting and represents an explicit need to separate the two worlds. Such vivid contrast between the characteristics of the mortuary rites has also been observed by Scheid, who suggested that the post-funeral sacrifice to the Penates (the household deities) offered by family members at home after returning from the grave must have been ‘the definite mark of the separation’ between the living and the dead.³¹⁶

The commemorative character of the parentalia was understood in the same way four centuries after Ovid by the poet Ausonius, who named one of his books Parentalia in order to show ‘the loving respect’ to his ancestors.³¹⁷ Both Ovid and Ausonius sought the origins of the festival in the mythical past of Rome: according to Ovid, the parentalia was initiated by Aeneas, while Ausonius believed it to have been instituted by the legendary king Numa. Regardless of the factual origin of the festival, it is evident that it must have already been an ancient and well-established tradition for both authors.

The second festival that was definitely connected with the cult of the dead was celebrated for three (non-consecutive) days in May,³¹⁸ and was called lemuria after ‘the Lemures – the wandering spirits of the dead, considered especially mischievous and dangerous to the living’.³¹⁹ According to Ovid, it was yet another occasion for descendants to visit their ancestors’ graves and bring

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³¹⁵ Valerius Maximus 2.1.8 Conuiuium etiam sollemne maiores institue rint idque caristia appellauerunt, cui praeter cognatos et adfines nemo interponebatur, ut, si qua inter necessarias personas querella esset orta, apud sacra mensae et inter hilaritatem animorum et fautoribus concordiae adhibitis tolleretur; in McDonough (2004), 363; more on caristia in Raccanelli (1996), 27-57.
³¹⁸ According to Scullard (1981), 118 it was held on the 9th, 11th and 13th of May.
³¹⁹ Frazer (1931), 424; also in Thaniel (1973), 182-7.
offerings to their ashes. The second ritual involved in the celebration of lemuria was performed at home at midnight, when the head of the family threw black beans behind his back and recited a short formula asking the ancestors’ spirits to leave him and his family in peace. There is no information in Ovid’s Fasti, however, about any kind of meal that would be associated with the festival of lemuria.

The last celebration that was often connected with the cult of the dead was the festival of rosalia (or rosaria). It is known mainly through some funerary or dedicatory inscriptions, and only in the context of commemorative meals that were to be held on those days. The inscriptions provide various dates for rosalia, which either suggests that the festival was observed on different days in different parts of the Roman Empire, or that it was not a festival per se, but rather a celebration or a custom that, according to one’s need, could become part of a festival (such as parentalia or birthdays), or could be performed on certain days during the year. The celebration of rosalia included decorating various monuments with roses and organising

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320 Ovid, Fasti, 425-6: *iam tamen extincto cineri sua dona ferebant, compositique nepos busta piabat avi.* [ed. Frazer (1931), 290-2].
323 E.g. CIL VI 10248 (a funerary inscription) or CIL VI 10234 (the dedicatory inscription on the collegium of Aesekulapi et Hygiea).
324 E.g. CIL VI 10234: V Id Mai, CIL VI 10239: XII Kal Jun or X Kal Jun in Callendar of Philocalus: in Paulys-Wissowa, Rosaria 1112.
325 E.g. CIL V 4410: D M / Clodiae Ac/hilee sive Cy/ryle quae vixit / ann(os) XXVIII men(ses) XI / di(a)es VI L(ucius) Vettius / Ursinarus maritus / uxori incorporabili / qui dedit coll(egio) VVvir(orum) soc(c)ior(um) HS m(ummos) ](mille) ut ex / usus [ae]orum profus(iones) [ae]ei ta<m=N> parent(alibus) ta<m=N> ros(alibus) / quodannis celebrant.
326 E.g. CIL V 7454: V(ivus) f(lecit) / T(itus) Vettius / T(it)l libertus Hermes / seplasiarius / mater genuit / matera(ue) recepit / hi horti ita uti o(ptimi) m(aximi)/que sunt cineribus / servite meis nam cu/raores substitutam / uti vescantur ex ho/rum hortorum redi/tu natale meo et per(I) / rosam in perpetuo / hos hortos neque divi/di volo neq(ue) abalienari.
327 E.g. Dolansky (2011) 127 places rosalia in May/June.
commemorative meals, therefore the character of such events was perfectly suitable for the cult of the dead.328

Apart from explicit literary sources, Roman funerary and commemorative dining is also well documented through archaeological and architectural material. The most comprehensive study is provided by Sarah Braune, who discusses not only the architectural arrangements for dining at the graves, such as triclinia, biclinia and spaces designed for stibadia, but also archaeological finds of wells, ovens and sacrificial altars discovered all over the Roman Empire.329 Finds of food remains (especially burnt seeds, cereal, fruit, bread and pastry) unearthed at the North-African gravesides and inside some Gallo-Roman cremation burials also confirm the modesty of sacrifices offered to the dead and/or simplicity of food shared by the relatives at the graves.330

Both literary and material evidence indicate that funerary and commemorative dining played an important role in Romans’ lives. But why was honouring the dead and the subsequent preservation of the memory of the deceased through the annual celebrations so important for Roman society? The answer comes from a fourth century work of Ausonius (Parentalia, Praefatio) who stated that ‘the loving respect of the living has, indeed, no more sacred office it can perform than to call to mind with due reverence those who are lost to us’.331 Ausonius continued with an explanation of the importance of the commemoration:

The funeral tribute is offering enough to the departed. O Dirge, so ready to do service with plaints for the dead, forget not thy yearly tribute to these silent ones – that tribute which Numa ordained should be offered year by year to the shades of our relatives, according as the nearness of their death of kinship demands. For the buried, as for those who lack earth to cover them, one rite suffices: to call on the soul by name counts for the full ceremony. Our dead ones laid to rest rejoice to hear their

328 Paulys-Wissowa, Rosaria, 1111-5.
331 Ausonius, Parentalia, Praefatio: [...] nec quidquam sanctius habet reverential superstition, quam ut amissos venerabiliter recordetur [tr. Evelyn White (1919) 57].
names: and thus even the lettered stones above their graves would have us do. Even he who lacks the sad urn of burial will be well-nigh as though interred, if his name be uttered thrice.\(^{332}\)

Therefore, it is evident that it was the relatives’ duty not only to provide a funeral for the deceased but also to regularly pay tribute to his/her soul in order to ensure a peaceful existence of the *manes* in the after-world.\(^{333}\) Only through hearing their names being called three times were the dead able to ‘rest in peace’. As noted by Dolansky, ‘the decision to observe the Parentalia was motivated by *officium* and *pietas*, which are likewise connected with obligation and reciprocity’.\(^{334}\) Hence, funerary and commemorative dining, during which family or *collegia* members gathered at the graves of their deceased relatives and friends, enabled the preservation of the memory of the dead. However, as the concept of the ‘ancestral memory’ itself has been commonly acknowledged by modern scholars, its significance and role in Roman society is still debatable.\(^{335}\) It is, therefore, essential to investigate why Romans commemorated their dead and what they believed happened after death.

1.1.2.2. **Roman perceptions of the afterlife**

While the concepts of life after death in ancient Greek, Christian and Jewish religions have been widely researched and commented on, modern scholarship is rather cautious about Roman perceptions of the afterlife.\(^{336}\) As stated by Valerie Hope, ‘there is no simple or short answer to the question’ of


\(^{334}\) Dolansky (2011) 147.

\(^{335}\) For the discussion on ‘collective identity’ and ‘ancestral memory’ see e.g. Davies (1997) 49-52; Koortbojian (1996) 210-34, or Gee (2008).

what the inhabitants of the Roman world believed happened after death.\footnote{Hope (2007) 210-11.}
However, it is evident that there was a kind of relationship between the living and the dead, and, as I discussed above, the dead ‘demanded’ regular commemoration.\footnote{Toynbee (1971) 61-4; Oesterdiekhoff (2009) 267-8.} The following section is intended, first of all, to briefly outline the discussion which divides scholars between supporters and opponents of Roman beliefs in the afterlife;\footnote{I do not intend to provide a detailed discussion on the subject as this topic alone requires a separate scholarship, which I leave to further researchers.} and, secondly, to discuss the specific sources and ideas that might have influenced the commissioners of the decoration of certain Roman tombs which include images representing dining in the afterlife.

The Romans referred to their dead as the manes, or the dii manes, which implies that the souls of the departed were deified and belonged to the world of Roman gods.\footnote{Cicero, De Legibus 2.22: Deorum Manium iura sancta sunt; King (1998) 116-24; King (2009); Turcan (2000) 26.} The importance of the cult of the departed souls is especially visible in funerary epitaphs, of which the majority begin with the dedication to the divine manes. The manes were most often understood in a collective form; though other Latin words meaning ‘spirits’ also appear in written sources, e.g. lares, anima, or umbra.\footnote{Meadows (2014) 114, King (2013).} As I discussed above, the dead were worshipped and commemorated during several festivals and anniversaries over the year.\footnote{See sections 1.1.2.1.}

Roman literary sources provide different, often contradictory, visions of people’s fate after death: from a sceptical approach towards any kind of afterlife as discussed by Seneca in his philosophical letters,\footnote{E.g. Seneca, Ad Marciam 26. See Smith (2014) 360. See also the discussion of the monument of Flavius Agricola in Chapter 2, section 2.5.} to Virgil’s detailed poetic description of the Underworld and the pleasures of the Elysian fields in his Aeneid.\footnote{Virgil, Aeneid 6. 384- 897.} A similar diversity of beliefs or disbeliefs in an afterlife emerges from the study of funerary epitaphs: some describe death as a person’s final fate, while some seek hope that the soul of the deceased remains immortal.\footnote{Harkness (1899); Lattimore (1942) 31-55.}
However, some researchers have questioned the idea that funerary epitaphs which quote literary sources such as Virgil or Ovid (those included in *Carmina Epigraphica Latina*) might have reflected Roman beliefs in the afterlife, claiming that the authors of the inscriptions used the sources for pure poetic effect.\(^{346}\)

Due to the variety of ideas about life or oblivion after death presented by ancient Romans, modern scholarship is also divided between supporters and opponents of the idea that Romans had a specific view of the afterlife, and its representation in art. The most vigorous debate began in 1942 with the publication of Franz Cumont’s *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*, in which the author discussed the decoration of Roman sarcophagi and gravestones in the light of Greek and Roman mythological sources seeking deep funerary symbolism in pretty much every single detail of the iconography.\(^{347}\)

The criticism of such an approach followed soon after with a commentary from Arthur Nock,\(^{348}\) which initiated an ongoing discussion of Roman funerary beliefs and symbolism, as well as discussion (and criticism) of Cumont’s selective methods.\(^{349}\)

Another major issue is in regard to the different models of the Roman afterlife, which were also applied by Cumont in his *After Life in Roman Paganism* published in 1922.\(^{350}\) In this work Cumont attempted to separate various funerary beliefs into strict categories, suggesting that the Romans saw their dead as residing either in the tombs, or in the Underworld or in the Sky.\(^{351}\) Here again Cumont’s ideas were based on carefully selected epigraphic and literary sources, which has led to strong criticism from scholars who oppose such methods.\(^{352}\) Most noticeable has been the subsequent tendency to separate Greek descriptions of the Underworld from late-Republican Roman sources that mention the astral apotheosis, with the conclusion that the Romans understood

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\(^{346}\) Tolman (1910) 104; Zarker (1961).

\(^{347}\) Cumont (1942).

\(^{348}\) Nock, Beazley (1946). See also Elsner (2016) for recent review of Cumont’s work and his commentators.

\(^{349}\) For the recent comentators of Cumont see e.g. Zanker, Ewald (2002) 20; Balty, Balty (2015). See also: Koch, Sichtermann (1982) 583-617.

\(^{350}\) Cumont (1922).

\(^{351}\) Cumont (1922) 44-69, 70-90 and 91-109 respectively.

\(^{352}\) See the discussion in King (1998) 125-60 with references.
Greek visions of the afterlife as ‘fables’ not really believing in the Greek Netherworld.353 This, in turn, eventuated in the development of an idea that the Romans believed in the apotheosis of the immortal soul, based mainly on philosophical works of Cicero and Seneca.354 As to the belief that the souls of the departed were residing in the tombs, this concept also proved to be ambiguous as the funerary inscriptions and literary sources, on which this particular idea had been based, do not allow a single interpretation, and vary greatly accordingly to the personal beliefs of the tombs’ users.355 In fact, the epigraphic evidence strongly suggests that there was a very blurred division between ideas for final places for the dead, whose physical remains were often commemorated at the grave, but whose funerary inscriptions suggested that they were now in the starry sky, or in the Underworld, or were wandering around as shades.356

However, despite the strong criticism of Greek visions of the Underworld ever being included in Roman beliefs in the afterlife, it is undeniable that references to Elysium and the gods of the Netherworld do appear on Roman funerary epitaphs, e.g. *et tulit Elysium viginti*, or *vivis in Elysium*.357 There are

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353 E.g. Fowler (1911) 390-1; Ogilvie (1969) 86 or Liebeschuetz (1979) 177-80.
356 E.g. CIL VI 10097: D(is) M(anibus). / Ti(berius) Claudi(ius) Esquil(inus) Aug(ustianus(?)) Tiberinus / hic situs est; fecit Tampiae Hygia mater filio pientissimo. / Tu, quicumque mei veheris prope limina busti, / sopprime festinum, quaeso, viator, iter. / Perlege! Sic numquam doleas pro funere acerbo ! / Invenies titulo nomina fixa meo. / Roma mihi patria est, media / de plebe parentes. Vita fuit null’i’ is tunc violata malis. / Gratus eram populo quondam notusque favore; nunc sum defleti parva / favilla rogi. Quis bona non hilari vidit convivia volto, / a dque meos mecum pervigilare locos / Quondam ego Pierio vatum / monimenta canore doctus carmina versu dicere, Cesareo / carmina nota foro; / nunc amor et nomen superest de corpore toto, / quod spargit lacrimis / maestus uterque parens. Serta mihi floresque novos, mea gaudia, ponunt; / fusus in Elysia sic ego valle meu / meat in stellis Delphin, / (quot) Pegusus ales, / tot mea natales fata dedere mihi.
also several tombs located in the vicinity of the City of Rome which are decorated with scenes depicting journeys to the Underworld and/or Elysian picnics, e.g. the mid-second century Tomb of the Nasonii on the Via Flaminia, Tomb N or Tomb F from the Isola Sacra Necropolis, or the Tomb of the Pancratii on the Via Latina in Rome.\footnote{These and more in Casagrande-Kim (2012). See also the examples in Chapter 3, sections 3.1.1., 3.1.2.2. and 3.3.} What is more, it is also undeniable that at least some people living in Rome (whether they called themselves ‘Roman’ or were of any other origin/ethnicity) were followers of various ‘mystery religions’, the majority of which offered initiates rather tempting visions of the afterlife similar to, if not directly taken from, those described by the Greek authors,\footnote{The subject of ‘mystery religions’ has been extensively researched; for more general sources see, e.g., Goodwin (1981), Burket (1987). Mithraic afterlife: Gordon (2016); Orphic afterlife: e.g. Bernabé, San Christóbal (2008); Isiac afterlife: e.g. Gasparini (2016).} not to mention the Jewish and Christian concepts of a blissful afterlife in Paradise, which were all closely related to the Greek visions of Elysium.\footnote{For instance, a late-fourth century Christian funerary epitaph of a ten-year-old girl from Carthage clearly refers to her final resting place in Elysium, see Dresken-Weiland, Angerstorfer, Merkt (2012) 204-5, no. V.5. See also Potthoff (2017) 26-48.} Therefore, the Greek (or rather, Eastern) versions of life after death were commonly known in Rome, and it should not be surprising that at least some people living in Rome were attracted to these particular visions of the afterlife. As dining itself was considered a privilege and a pleasure, it must also have been imagined as the best way of spending eternity. Hence, it is not surprising that at least some people living in ancient Rome believed in, wished for or visioned the afterlife as a place of luxury, comfort and pleasure.

As to Roman literary sources describing Elysium, despite being based on Greek examples, they appear quite commonly throughout the centuries of Roman Empire. The vision of the judgement of the departed and, if they are worthy, their subsequent happiness in Elysium, is a well-known Platonic vision of the afterlife based on much older Homeric tradition.\footnote{Bernabé and Cristóbal (2008) 174-8.} According to Plato, the Netherworld contained ‘the region of the pious’ located in a flowery meadow, where the souls of the blessed take part in banquets, celebrations, musical

\textit{co(n)s(ulibus); or CIL XII 2124: Hoc iacet in tumulo sacra qui(I) mysti/ca semper divisit populis pietate / honore decorus / quem nemus [A]elysium Marinum / conclamat omne.}
performances and dances. A similar vision of blissful banqueters enjoying the afterlife was provided by Virgil in his *Aeneid* (‘others he sees, to right and left, feasting on the sward, and chanting in chorus a joyous pean within a fragrant laurel grove’). A beautiful vision of the Elysian Fields is also given by the Roman poet Tibullus in the late first century BC:

Venus shall lead me to the Elysian fields;
There songs and dances reign, and through the sky
Birds with sweet voices chirrup as they fly.
The earth untilled bears cassia; all around
Sweet roses flourish in the generous ground.
The ranks of boys mingling with young girls play;
There wars begun by love are fought all day.
These whom Death snatched because of love live there
Wearing proud wreaths of myrtle in their hair.

References to Elysium also appear in, for instance, Plutarch’s *Moralia*:

But after this a marvellous light meets the wanderer, and open country and meadow lands welcome him; and in that place there are voices and dancing and solemn majesty of sacred music and holy visions ... a garland upon his head, and [he] converses with pure and holy men.

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362 Plato, *Axiochus*, 20: ‘There are they [Pluto, Minos and Rhadamanthus] seated as judges to sift each of the comers as to what life he had led, and in what pursuits he had dwelt in the body; and that to tell a falsehood is out of his power. On such then as a kind daemon has breathed during life, these are located in the region of the pious. There without stint the seasons bloom with every kind of produce, and fountains of pure water flow; and everywhere are meadows made beautiful by flowers of varied hues, and places of discussions for philosophers, and theatres of poets, and cyclic choirs, and the hearing of music, and elegant banquets, and feasts self-furnished, and an unmixed freedom from pain, and a delightful mode of living.’ [tr. Burges (1881) 53-4]. Homer, *Odyssey* 24: ‘Past Ocean Stream, past the White Rock, past the Gates of the sun and the region of dreams they went, and before long they reached the meadow of Asphodel, which is the dwelling-place of souls, the disembodied wraiths of men’ [tr. Rieu (1969) 351].


365 Plutarch, fr.178 (Sandbach).
They can also be found in Ovid’s *Amores* (‘Yet, if aught survives from us beyond mere name and shade, in the vale of Elysium Tibullus will abide. Mayst thou come to meet him, thy youthful temples encircled with the ivy’).\(^{366}\) a later work of Lucian’s *On Funerals* (‘These receive the good, just men who have lived virtuously, and when many have been collected, send them off, as if to a colony, to the Elysian Fields to take part in the best life’),\(^{367}\) or even in a work of a late fourth/early fifth century Christian bishop Synesius (‘may I weave for thee this garland /from the sacred meadows’).\(^{368}\) It is, therefore, evident that the idea of a happy existence of the deceased in Elysium, imagined as a flowery meadow, must have been well known in the Greco-Roman world.\(^{369}\) As I shall discuss in Chapter 3, the images representing Elysian picnics also appeared in the decoration of some Roman tombs from the first to the fourth century AD.\(^{370}\) However, as the earliest representation decorates a columbarium that contained over 500 burials, it is impossible to determine whether all users of the tomb did indeed believe in this particular vision of the afterlife, or the images reflecting the Underworld were placed there for aesthetic effect.\(^{371}\) The private *arcosolium* of Vibia, on the contrary, are likely to represent the funerary beliefs of the tomb’s owners.\(^{372}\)

Therefore, it is more than likely that at least some inhabitants of the Roman world did believe in some kind of life after death, which may explain why the commemoration of the dead that included regular offerings intended to nourish the deceased souls played such an important role in Roman society. A similar picture of the significance of the commemoration of the dead emerges while investigating Jewish and Christian funerary practices, which will be discussed in the following sections.

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368 Synesius, *Hymn 3: To the Father and Son* 37 [tr. Fitzgerald (1930) 380].
369 References to flowery meadows in Elysium can also be found in Greek sources, e.g. Aristophanes *Frogs* 449: ‘Let us go forward to the flowery /meadows full of roses, /frolicking in our style /of beautiful dance /which the blessed /Fates array’ [tr. Henderson (2002) 85]. For more examples see Bernabé and Cristóbal (2008) 175.
370 See Chapter 3, sections 3.1.1. and 3.3.
371 Borbonus (2014) 203
372 See Chapter 3, section 3.3.
1.2. The Jews: Jewish funerary customs and dining

As I argued above, the investigation of early Christian funerary practices must also include a discussion of Jewish mortuary customs, which, as I will demonstrate in this section, must have influenced or provided a basis for Christian rites. In a similar manner to my discussion of Roman mortuary dining in the previous section, I will focus mainly on Jewish meals held after the funeral and the commemoration of the dead. Evidence for Jewish funerary practices, found in several textual sources, will be discussed in the first part of this section. It will be followed by an investigation of some relatively modest archaeological evidence of Jewish mortuary and commemorative dining found around the Roman Empire.

According to Jewish tradition, the mourning period lasted for seven days after the passing of a family member. It is important to notice that during the first day relatives and friends organized a funeral procession in order to bring the body of the deceased to the cemetery. The actual burial occurred several days after the death.

A funerary meal is mentioned many times in *Ebel rabbati* ('Tractate on Mourning'), also known as *Šēmahot* ('Rejoicing'), which was written down around the middle of the eighth century AD, though most certainly contains much earlier material that refers to some older traditions. In the case of the Jewish mortuary feast, which was called *se’udath habra’ah*, it was prepared just after the funeral by neighbours and friends of the deceased in order to comfort the mourning family, though the banquets were restricted to male

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373 For further reading on Jewish burial practices see Hachili (2005), or McCane (2003).
374 *Ecclesiasticus*, 22.12: 'Mourning for the dead is for seven days: but for the fool and the unbeliever it is for all the days of their life' [tr. Frank (1974) 30].
375 E.g. *Šēmahot*, IX.13: '[...] he may join in the procession of another funeral in town [...]’ [tr. Zlotnick (1966) 69], or *Šēmahot*, X.4: 'The dead should not be carried for burial close to the time for the recitation of Šēma’ – the procession must begin some time earlier or later' [tr. Zlotnick (1966) 73]
376 *Šēmahot*, VIII.1: ‘One may go to the cemetery for thirty days to inspect the dead for a sign of life, without fear that this smacks of heathen practice. For it happened that a man was inspected after thirty days [from his death] and he went on living twenty-five years [...]’ [tr. Zlotnick (1966) 57]; *Šēmahot*, X.1: 'So long as his dead lies unburied [...]’ [tr. Zlotnick (1966) 72].
participants. Most importantly, the text of Śēmahot specifies that a meal was held at a mourner’s house after their return from the cemetery, and it also provides a detailed description of the sequence in which food and drink were taken during such meals. The source also indicates that the meal was held for the bereaved the day after a death occurred in a family, but before the actual entombment, which took place several days after death. In this way, the Jewish funerary meals differ from the Greco-Roman examples of mortuary dining, which were held in the presence of the dead. Interestingly, Jewish funerary feasts were prohibited for families of criminals executed by the court.

Jewish literary sources also inform us about the family obligation of lamentation and the performing of daily prayers for the dead during the twelve months after the passing of the deceased. It was also necessary to commemorate the dead on the anniversary of both their birth and their death. Although the earliest written example of a Jewish commemorative prayer, the hazkarat neshamot (also known as yizkor) comes from the eleventh

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379 Śēmahot, XI.2: “... The mourners’ meal should be prepared for a man in mourning, not for a woman in mourning. ‘If she has small sons’, says Rabbi Judah, ‘the mourners’ meal may be shared with them’.” [tr. Zlotnick (1966) 77].

380 Śēmahot XIV. 13-14: ‘Everybody may bring cakes, meat and fish to a mourner’s house, and in the presence of the habar ‘ir, beans and herbs. Rabbi Simeon ben Gamaliel says: “If it is a local custom, even a dish of cooked grits”. One should drink ten cups of wine in the mourner’s house: Two before the meal; five during the meal; and three after the meal: one for the mourners’ blessing, one for comforting the mourners and one for acts of kindness.’ [tr. Zlotnick (1966), 88] Interestingly, a passage of Tractate Baba Bathra 16b provides an explanation of using lentils during the funerary meals: ‘... that was the day on which Abraham our father died, and Jacob our father made a broth of lentils to comfort his father Isaac. Why was it of lentils? — In the West they say in the name of Rabbah b. Mari: Just as the lentil has no mouth, so the mourner has no mouth [for speech]. Others say: Just as the lentil is round, so mourning comes round to all the denizens of this world. What difference does it make in practice which of the two explanations we adopt? — The difference arises on the question whether we should comfort with eggs.’ [ed. Epstein (2005) 5997].

381 Śēmahot, II.6: ‘The mourners’ meal should not be prepared for them as it is said, Ye shall not eat over him whose blood has been shed (Lev. 19:26).’ [tr. Zlotnick (1966), 34]. This particular passage closely resembles Sanhedrin 63a, which confirms much earlier origin of this custom.

382 Kiddushin 31b: ‘[…] He must honour him [his father] in life and must honour him in death. […] ‘In death’, e.g., […] he should say: ‘Thus said my father, my teacher, for whose resting place may I be an atonement’. But that is only within twelve months [of his death]. Thereafter he must say: ‘His memory be for a blessing, for the life of the World to come.’ [ed. Epstein (2005) 4905]; Patai (2013) 14.

383 A funerary prayer called the Mourner’s kaddish was recited regularly three times a day for the first eleven months after the passing of a family member and then every year on several occasions: Abrahams (1914) lxxviii, 77 and 321. For the variations of the Kaddish see Lehnardt (2002) 16-43.
century, it is very likely that it was based on a much older literary tradition. While it is impossible to imagine that the bereaved performed daily rites at the family graves for a year after the departure of the deceased, the prayer must have been recited at home or during one’s daily routine and it is likely that the cemeteries were visited on important family anniversaries and/or religious festivals. These sources indirectly confirm epigraphic evidence: Jewish burials and funerary rites belonged to a private sphere and were not controlled or organised by any official religious congregations (i.e. synagogues). In addition, as demonstrated by Dennis Smith, despite certain ‘distinctive features in the Jewish tradition, the form taken by Jewish meals in the Greco-Roman period on any particular occasion or in any particular setting was that of the Greco-Roman banquet’.

There is also significant evidence for Jews being members of some professional collegia. An interesting example is provided by a late second-or early third-century funerary inscription of Publius Aelius Glykon Zeuxianos Aelianus from Hierapolis, which clearly demonstrates that the owner was associated with two collegia (the purple-dyers and the carpet weavers) and it was their members’ responsibility to decorate Publius’s grave during two Jewish and one Roman festival. Publius Aelius Glykon, a Roman citizen, and also a practising Jew, did not ask for support from a local synagogue, with which he must also have been affiliated. On the contrary, he asked his fellow collegia members to commemorate him in a Greco-Roman way.

Torrey Seland convincingly argued that the professional collegia in the Greco-Roman World did attract and involve the Jews, and, despite the fact that they were condemned by some Jewish writers, there was no official Jewish

384 Memorbuch commemorating the victims of the 1096 massacre, in Gross (2014) 20.
387 Williams (1994) 173.
law to forbid Jews joining the guilds.\textsuperscript{391} What is more, the inscription also informs us about the commemorative practices that occurred at the cemeteries. It is likely that the custom of decorating the grave might have been accompanied by a meal shared by those who visited the cemetery on these occasions, which clearly illustrates that the Jews did not refrain from Roman practices;\textsuperscript{392} on the contrary, the Roman way of commemoration of the dead was acceptable and regularly performed by at least some Jews. On the other hand, there is also evidence that some Jews chose their synagogue colleagues to honour their graves.\textsuperscript{393} This indicates that even amongst the Jews there were no set rules and that commemoration was a personal matter: religious affiliation was stronger for some than for others.

As for the archaeological material that could indicate specifically Jewish funerary or commemorative dining in Rome, the majority of physical evidence has been lost due to the illegal excavations in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and subsequent neglect of known Jewish cemeteries in Rome.\textsuperscript{394} However, careful inspection of the available sources may provide certain indications that Roman Jews could have practiced some sort of mortuary dining/offertory rites at their sepulchres. For instance, just beneath a staircase which led from the Via Appia at the entrance to the catacomb of Vigna Randanini, archaeologists discovered a room, with a narrow stone bench running along the walls, decorated with a geometric design. The fact that this room does not contain any burials may point to its ceremonial function.\textsuperscript{395} Similarly, a six-metre-deep well was in use in gallery F, just outside cubiculum ‘m’ near the Via Appia Pignatelli entrance to the catacomb of Vigna Randanini,\textsuperscript{396} not to mention the discoveries of several cooking pots found inside the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{391} Seland (1996) 125. For the argument that members of different religions were associated in one collegium, see Harland (2003) 208.
  \item \textsuperscript{392} See the discussion of rosalia above section 1.1.2.1.
  \item \textsuperscript{393} E.g. CJ 775 and CJ 776 also from Hierapolis. For synagogues acting as collegia see Last (2016).
  \item \textsuperscript{394} E.g. Dello Russo (2011) provides a detailed discussion of the history of excavations in the Jewish catacomb of Vigna Randanini.
  \item \textsuperscript{395} Laurenzi (2013) 48.
  \item \textsuperscript{396} Dello Russo (2011) 5 with references.
\end{itemize}
cemeteries.\textsuperscript{397} However, as the 'Jewish' catacombs were not used exclusively by the Jews, and the archaeological material indicates that several pagan and even Christian individuals were buried alongside the corridors in the same catacombs, it is impossible to determine whether the dining/offering installations were also used by the Jews.\textsuperscript{398}

To conclude, according to literary sources, Jewish funerals did indeed differ from the Greco-Roman ones in, for instance, the number of days of mourning. Once a death occurred in a Jewish family, the body of the deceased would be taken to the cemetery on the same day and a funerary meal was held at home after the family returned from the grave. It is very likely that the funeral would have been primarily organised by the family of the deceased, however, the Jews did not refrain from involvement with professional collegia, and it is likely that if no family members could ensure the burial it would become the duty of collegium associates (if, of course, the deceased was indeed associated). Jewish funerals, similarly to Roman ones, belonged to the private family (or collegia) sphere and were not controlled by synagogues. As to commemorative rites, there is strong evidence that the Jews visited their relatives' graves on several occasions throughout the year, and the available archaeological evidence may suggest that some offering rites or even meals were performed at the cemeteries. The evidence provided above should, therefore, counter the idea of the Jews isolating themselves (or being isolated) from society and present them as active members of the wider Greco-Roman community of various religious traditions.

1.3. The Christians: shared practices

\footnotesize{397} Fasola (1976).
\footnotesize{398} E.g. painted rooms 1-2 in the Vigna Randanini catacomb are of pagan origin and, most likely, were connected to the already established complex, see Laurenzi (2004). In the catacomb of the Villa Torlonia a strigilated sarcophagus was found decorated with a figure of Dionysus and a naked youth taking a snake out of a basket, with a menead and a satyr flanking the design at both ends, see Goodenough (1953) III, fig. 833; Hachlili (1998) 289, no. 11. A fragment of a sarcophagus with a representation of St Peter striking a rock was also found in the Vigna Randanini catacomb, see Goodenough (1953) III, fig. 804.
Through the examination of early Christian funerary practices it becomes evident that our modern understanding of the rites performed in antiquity has been strongly influenced by the religious beliefs of the post-Reformation researchers of early Christianity. I have already discussed the problem of the current perception of the development of Roman catacombs and, generally speaking, the same issue surrounds funerary rites. The early Christians have been perceived as members of religious communities separate from their Roman and/or Jewish neighbours in all possible ways: from developing their own cemeteries to establishing their own sacred religious rites. However, as demonstrated in the discussion of the development of the catacombs, such theories should be thoroughly amended according to the current state of research into late antique Christianity.

In this section I will investigate three main questions that arise from the scholarship to date. First and foremost, did the Roman Christians bury the deceased in a different way from their pagan and Jewish neighbours? Did they perform the rite of Eucharist at the graves? And finally, is there any relation between the Christian funerary rites and the art found in the catacombs? To answer the first two questions I shall focus primarily on literary and archaeological evidence, while some pictorial material will also be considered in the final part of this chapter. In the next three chapters I shall investigate early Christian funerary images with reference to dining.

1.3.1. Christian burial and funerary dining

One of the earliest sources that has been frequently used to demonstrate early Christian separation from pagan funerary rites is a mid-third-century letter by Cyprian of Carthage, in which the Bishop condemns Spanish Bishop Martialis for burying his sons amongst the pagan members of a collegium. The text confirms that even a Christian bishop could have taken part in some
pagan guilds’ activities; by asking a collegium to perform burials for his sons and to provide traditional funeral offerings and banquets. As convincingly argued by Rebillard, this passage should be understood not as a condemnation of the Christians being buried alongside pagans, but as an attack on pagan rites. However, as many Christian bishops repeated similar condemnation of pagan rituals until the early fifth century,\textsuperscript{401} it is likely that many early Christians either did not pay attention to the official recommendations or did not even know about them.

Rebillard convincingly argued that the Christians might have associated themselves with, or even belonged to, some professional guilds.\textsuperscript{402} But it was Theodor Mommsen, who invented the term collegia funeratica, and strongly supported the idea of the early Church involvement in the burials of poor Christians.\textsuperscript{403} However, due to the enormous progress in our understanding of the status of Roman collegia, the idea of collegia funeratica can now be rejected, and it has commonly been accepted that burial was only one of benefits of belonging to collegia.\textsuperscript{404} The existence of professional and religious (pagan) collegia beyond the fourth century is well attested by certain legislation enacting the confiscation of associations’ property and funds.\textsuperscript{405} In addition, it has been proven that the Christian bishops often became patrons of some professional Roman collegia.\textsuperscript{406} In the light of such evidence it is very likely that ordinary Christians did not refrain from becoming members of professional associations and from receiving all privileges (and carrying duties) that such membership offered.

As I outlined in the previous chapter, while examining the funerary context, it appears that the Christians were an invisible group until the early

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\textsuperscript{401} See below, section 1.3.2.
\textsuperscript{402} Rebillard (2009) 47-56.
\textsuperscript{403} Perry (2006) 48. The theory that the early Church acted in a similar way to collegia and might have provided free burials for the associated believers was proposed by De Rossi (1864) I: 101-8 Rebillard (2009) 44. For collegia funeratica see above, section 1.1.2.
\textsuperscript{404} For collegia funeratica see above, section 1.1.2.
\textsuperscript{405} E.g. Codex Theodosianus 16.10.20.2: Ea autem, quae multiplicitibus constitutis ad venerabilem ecclesiam volumus pertinere, christianis si merito religio vindicabit, ita ut omnis expensa illius temporis ad superstitionem pertinens, quae iure damnata est, omniaque loca, quae ferediani, quae dendrophori, quae singula quaerentis et professiones gentiliciae tenuerunt epulis vel sumptibus deputata, possint hoc errore submoto compendia nostrae domus sublevare [ed. Haenel (1937) 1624]
third century, when the earliest evidence for Christian burials emerges in the Roman catacombs. What we know from some late second-century literary sources is that the Christians preferred the rite of inhumation, which must have adhered to the old Jewish burial practices. However, it is impossible to determine whether all Christians did indeed inhumed their deceased. As researched by Paul-Albert Février both epigraphic examples and archaeological evidence from the third-century Christian cemeteries suggest that, while taking part in funerals and commemoration of the dead, the early believers often performed the same traditional rituals as their pagan neighbours. In such a case, it is very likely that at least some Christians might have continued pagan burial customs, according to their family belief or collegia practices. Several texts that confirm shared practices will be discussed further in this section, which allows us to focus here on archaeological material.

1.3.1.1. Gold-glass vessels

The Christian funerary customs that might have reflected certain drinking or dining rites performed at the graves can be demonstrated, for instance, by the popularity of the gold-glass vessels commonly found in the Roman catacombs. However, there are also several examples of Jewish and pagan gold glass. The fact that this type of object has been commonly found in the Roman catacombs may indicate shared practices in a Greco-Roman funerary and commemorative context. Despite the fact that the gold-glass technique had been known since the third century BC, the majority of the surviving examples were found in a funerary context and it is likely that their secondary function was similar to the examples found in both pagan and Christian parts of the catacombs.

407 See the Introduction, section 0.4.2.
408 Minucius Felix, Octavius 34.10: Nec, ut creditis, ullam damnum sepulturae timemus, sed veterem et meliorem consuetudinem humandi frequentamus. [tr. Rendall (1984) 420].
410 Février (1996). However, not all of the examples provided by Février may indeed be Christian, as, for instance, the author implied that the catacomb provenance itself indicates Christian ownership of a tomb or object, which, according to modern scholarship, is a false assumption: see my discussion in the Introduction.
411 Despite different theories about the original use of the gold-glass vessels and linking the decoration with specific Jewish festivals or religious observances [Ben-Sasson (2009)] the majority of examples were found in a funerary context and it is likely that their secondary function was similar to the examples found in both pagan and Christian parts of the catacombs.
examples can be securely dated to the fourth century AD. Where the provenance of a gold glass is known it usually points to a mortuary setting. They were often found inserted in the mortar that sealed a grave, which may suggest that they were secondarily used as grave markers, protective amulets, memorials of commemorative libations and meals (refrigeria), or grave goods. However, before that, the gold glass vessels had been deliberately and carefully broken, and only the fragments containing the decoration were placed in the sealant. The primary use of the gold glasses has been vigorously debated; nonetheless, their connection with dining (either real or metaphorical) is unquestionable and confirmed by the multiple inscriptions pie zeses (‘Drink! May you live’) and bibas (‘Drink’). However, it is still uncertain, whether the vessels with gold glass decoration were used as personal gifts for particular festivals, as drinking cups during some funerary rites, or as dining vessels in a domestic context. Howells recently suggested that the gold-glass vessels must have been produced for the purpose of commemorative events that occurred in peoples’ lives. This would imply that the gold glass vessels were produced primarily as commemorative objects with no funerary

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413 Grig (2004a) 204.
414 Müller (1912) 68-70.
415 Denzey Lewis (2017).
418 Barag (1972) 607. The idea that they were designed as medallions, not vessels, was dismissed by Grig (2004a) 205.
419 For the most recent discussion see Howells (2015) 60-5.
420 Grig (2004a) 204. A Jewish example of a gold glass with pie zeses formula in Goodenough (1953) Ill, fig. 975 (Morey 114). Also Morey 426 (with menorah). There are also several with Old Testament scenes, which are equally likely to have belonged to Jewish or Christian owners, e.g. Morey 71 with Abraham sacrificing Isaak or Morey 47 with Adam and Eve. For the pie zeses formula and its variation see Vidman (1984) 215-18; Boon (1985) 14-16. The formula appeared most often in Greek, though evidence for Latin translations is also attested: e.g. the so-called Trivulzio cage-cup from Novara in north Italy is inscribed with a formula BIBE VIVAS MVLTIS ANNIS, see Auth (1996) 108.
421 For the Jewish gold glasses used as gifts during Roman festivals see Rutgers (1995) 84-5 with references. Generally also in Grig (2004) 205.
422 Février (1977).
423 Argued as such by Smith (2000) 179, despite the lack of any archaeological evidence, which could support this thesis.
function. An interesting theory, although unconfirmed by either archaeological or textual sources, was proposed by Rivka Ben-Sasson, who suggested that the Jewish gold glass vessels were in fact shallow bowls used for serving fish during Jewish festivals and funerary meals. It would be very tempting to follow Ben-Sasson's idea, however it cannot be proven through any of the available sources.

Despite the fact that the most common formulas inscribed on the vessels refer to drinking, it has been recently suggested that the vessels themselves were not designed as functional objects, and that the inscriptions should be understood as referring to the Roman, Christian and Jewish wish for a good life in the worlds to come, rather than cheerful toasts and invitations for drinking. Although the second hypothesis, understood as a reference to refrigeria, may be plausible the first statement appears to be rather surprising. Even though later examples of gold-glass vessels might have been produced as decorative objects designed for purely commemorative purposes and not used for drinking, the general shape of the vessels suggests that they must have been based on real shallow bowls commonly used for drinking. If the gold-glass vessels had been intended from the very beginning to be purerly decorative, it would have been much easier and more economical to produce them as flat medallions. For that reason, it is likely that the vessels originated as functional bowls, probably intended for wealthy clients. The fact that they were used in a different way does not negate their original functional design.

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425 This, however, seems to be a very general idea, and there are examples that may not fit into such categorization: e.g. a late fourth-century example from Rome with the depiction of Moses striking the rock and inscription IN DEO/HILARIS/CVM TVIS/PIE ZESES in Howells (2015) 104, no. 19. Howells translates the inscription ‘Joyfulness in God with you and yours, drink that you may live’, however, Hilaris may also be the name of a man for whom this particular glass vessel was intended, potentially as a gift for either of the worlds. Therefore, the inscription may also read ‘Hilaris in God, with yours drink that you may live’, which would refer to Hilaris being already deceased. The fact that the central medallion of the gold glass vessel was carefully broken off and (probably) inserted into the mortar in a catacomb may confirm its funerary function.
426 Ben-Sasson (2009) 34.
428 This is especially evident in the two Jewish vessels which contain representations of stibadia (nos. 131 and 132), see my discussion in the Introduction, section 0.3.2.1.2.
430 De Santis (2000) 240; I discuss the refrigeria further on in section 1.3.1.2.
There are several examples which contain typically Christian images and symbols accompanied by the formula *pie zeses*, though there are just as many that could have belonged to pagan owners, not to mention a few distinctly Jewish ones (fig. 9). The variety of religious affiliations of gold-glass owners clearly substantiates the shared practices. The popularity of such vessels should probably be understood as a contemporary fashion, rather than considered as an indication of any separation of religious practices. Scholarship to date provides many theories on how the Christians must have used the gold glass vessels (e.g. as liturgical vessels), and how it differed when it came to the Jews (e.g. peripheralia for the observance of the *sabbath* or other specifically Jewish festivals).

From the context of the archaeological finds, however, it is evident that, regardless of their primary use (domestic, sacred or commemorative), most of the vessels ended up in the cemeteries, either as *loculi* markers or grave...
 goods.\textsuperscript{436} Unfortunately, it is now impossible to pinpoint the exact locations of where the majority of the vessels were found.\textsuperscript{437} Yet, their importance in a funerary and/or commemorative cult, regardless of the religious affiliation of their users, cannot be underestimated. The fact that the \textit{pie zeses} formula can be found on Christian, Jewish, and many religiously non-identifiable gold-glass vessels accentuates the similarity, if not the unity, of certain customs.

1.3.1.2. \textit{Refrigerium}

Some epigraphic material from the Roman catacombs provides evidence for a type of funerary dining that has been commonly associated with the early Christians: the so-called \textit{refrigeria}.\textsuperscript{438} The term itself (\textit{refrigerium interim}) was adopted by Alfred Stuiber from the work of Tertullian to describe the blissful state in which the soul of the deceased awaits its resurrection into Heaven.\textsuperscript{439} Stuibers’ discussion, despite proving a strong connection between pagan and early Christian funerary practices and beliefs, has been criticised for lack of evidence and not taking other possibilities into account.\textsuperscript{440} Nonetheless, it has been the most comprehensive study of Roman and early Christian commemorative rituals to date.

\textit{Refrigeria}, interpreted as commemorative meals, have been especially associated with the Christian faith based on several graffiti which mention some actual mid-third-century rituals. These were discovered in the \textit{triclia} complex under the basilica of San Sebastiano on the Via Appia Antica in Rome.\textsuperscript{441} The fact that the graffiti were inscribed on the walls of a dining complex led the scholars

\begin{itemize}
\item[437] During the early exploration of the Roman catacombs masses of small finds, grave goods and ‘unimportant’ material were removed by contemporary researchers and custodians, see: Alchermes (1988) 349-54.
\item[438] Understood as ‘refreshments’. The word \textit{refrigeratio} was often used in Classical Latin to refer to something ‘cooling down’, e.g. Cicero, \textit{De senectute} C.XIV.46: \textit{minuta atque rorantia et refrigeration aestate, et vicissim aut sol aut ignis hibernus} in Marrou (1948) 2179.
\item[439] Tertullian, \textit{De Monogamia} 10.5: \textit{Enimvero et pro anima eius orat et refrigerium interim adpostulat ei et in prima resurrectione consortium et offert annuis diebus dormitionis eius}, in Stuiber (1957) 55.
\item[440] E.g. an extensive review by Toynbee (1958).
\end{itemize}
to believe that the term refrigerium refers to a meal. Interestingly, looking at the graffiti found in the triclia it is evident that neither of them mentions dining per se. They rather reflect a kind of honorific ritual, which may just as well refer to the libation performed at the grave, not necessarily the meal. The graffiti specify that some refrigeria were dedicated as refreshments to Paul and Peter,\textsuperscript{442} while some inscriptions mention the sponsor of the refrigeria, shifting the emphasis from the dead to the living.\textsuperscript{443}

However, not all of the six-hundred graffiti discovered in the triclia refer to Christian commemoration and some of them indicate the pagan cult of the dead.\textsuperscript{444} A very similar graffito is known from the early third-century Hypogeum of the Aurelii on Viale Manzoni in Rome, which proves that the concept of refrigerium as a rite held in honour of the dead was not a uniquely Christian idea.\textsuperscript{445} Refrigeria were also offered by collegia in memory of their deceased members: an inscription from Feltre dated to 323 AD was set by certain Flaminius, who gave a sum of money to collegium fabrum and collegium centonariorum in order to ‘refresh’ the memory of the donor by annual distributions offered by those guilds, presumably for the other collegia and community members, and to ‘refresh themselves’ in his memory during the festival of rosalia (\textit{per rosalia et memoriam eius refrigerare}).\textsuperscript{446} In this inscription the term \textit{eius refrigerare} should be interpreted in context of dining.

This clearly proves that offering nourishment in memory of, or for the deceased was not a distinctively Christian practice. In fact, the belief in the soul seeking eternal refreshment was well embodied in ancient funerary culture.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{442} For the cult of Peter and Paul in \textit{ad catacumbas} region see: Guarducci (1986).
\item \textsuperscript{443} E.g. At Paulu(m) et Pet(rum) refrigeravi, or Petro et Paulo Tomius Coelius refrigerium fecit or XIII Kal Apriles refrigeravi Parthenius in Deo et nos in Deo omnes in Eastman (2011) 74.
\item \textsuperscript{444} Guarducci (1986) 813.
\item \textsuperscript{445} Re[m]meus Celerinus | kal(endis) lunis refriger(i)um [fecit] | [in he]roum hono[re]m A[urelii] Epafro[dit] in Carcopino (1956) 97; Jastrzebowska (2012) 60. For the graffito and a discussion of the Hypogeum of the Aurelii see Chapter 3, section 3.1.3.3.
\item \textsuperscript{446} AE 1990, 0396: Severo et Rufino co(nss)scrips(ulis) / V K(alendas) Sept(embres) / acceperunt coll(egia) fab(rorum) et c(entonariorum) / [(denariorum) quingentamilia computata / usura anni un(ius) centensima u(na) / [(denariorum) LXXX(milia) de qua usura per singulos an(nos) / die V Idu(s) Ian(uar)ias natale ipsius ex usura s(upra) s(civili) / ad memoriam Hos(tili) Flaminini refriger(are?) / SEIII debunt et Illivi et sex principales? / et officiales) pub(lici) sp(ortulatorum) no(mine) aureos den(os) et sil(quam) / sing(ularum) neicnon et per ros(am) at(l) memor(iam) eius / refrigerar(e) deveb(unt) n(ummis) CCCLXXII in Leclercq (1948) 2179.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
which is evident from the common tradition of performing libations at the graves.\textsuperscript{447} Several funerary epitaphs, or even multiple inscriptions on gold-glass vessels confirm the hope that the soul of the deceased will be well nourished in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{448} There are indeed many inscriptions referring to the state of \textit{refrigerium} that reflect Christian faith (i.e. the state when the soul rests in the afterlife awaiting the final resurrection),\textsuperscript{449} however, there are also some that most likely belonged to non-Christian owners.\textsuperscript{450} What is more, the reading of some epitaphs has been altered in order to include them in the catalogues of Christian inscription. A perfect example of this is provided the epitaph of Mallius Tigrinus, which has been entered in the \textit{Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres} as it supposedly ended with the formula \textit{in pace}.\textsuperscript{451} However, the epitaph itself is broken and there is no way of confirming that such formula was indeed written in this inscription. Even the late date of the epitaph (371-400 AD) and its original location in the area of the cemetery of San Valentino does not confirm Christian ownership.\textsuperscript{452}

The funerary epitaphs referring to the state of \textit{refrigerium} in the afterlife often confirm the belief that the soul of the deceased is refreshed and is at peace (e.g. \textit{benemerenti in pace et in refrigerium, anima dulcis in refrigerio, privata dulcis in refrigerio et in pace}).\textsuperscript{453} In many instances the inscriptions express the


\textsuperscript{448} E.g. CIL VI 5601: \textit{Iunius Vale/ et Iunia Valeri/ Iuniae Florentina/ omniorum refrigeri/ tintinavellus;}

\textsuperscript{449} CIL VI 13224: \textit{M Aurelio / Secundo / filio dulciis/ imo qui vixit an/nis XXXVIII diebus / XLVIII refrigeri/ret spiritus;}

\textsuperscript{450} CIL XI 4342: \textit{Mallius Tigrinus/ ob refrigeri/um / domum aeterna/ / vivus fundavit.}

\textsuperscript{451} Gold glass, e.g. Morey 36: \textit{HILARIS VIVAS CVM TVIS FELICITER SEMPER REFRIGERIS IM PACE DEI.}

\textsuperscript{452} Jensen (2008) 122.

\textsuperscript{453} These and more examples in Marrou (1948) 2179-90.
belief that such refreshment would be provided by God, e.g. *Antonia anima dulcis in pace tibi deus refrigerit*, or *semp er refrigeris im pace dei*. This particular belief must have been, therefore, popular amongst the early Christians, yet even though they believed in God’s refreshment, archaeological evidence confirms the popularity of offering libations for the dead.

Providing liquid nourishment for the deceased is well demonstrated through the practice of offering glass vessels as grave goods. These were not necessarily the gold-glass bowls discussed above.\(^{454}\) Several glass beakers, unguent jars or flasks have been discovered either inside the *loculi*, or inserted in the sealants in such a way that a libation could have filled them or even been poured through onto the bones.\(^{455}\) Such a practice was also represented on several inscriptions combined with images of both the vessels themselves and people drinking or holding cups.\(^{456}\) It is very likely that such libations were offered during the *refrigeria* which were organised on several occasions during the year.\(^{457}\)

Thus, it appears that the term *refrigerium* may reflect both commemoratory offerings held by the family/friends for the deceased and martyrs, understood as the bereaved bringing refreshments to the dead, and also the celestial state of refreshment which hopefully awaits the deceased in the afterlife.\(^{458}\) It is also likely that the rite was performed by the family and friends of the deceased during a meal held in honour of the dead, which eventually adopted the name *refrigerium*, and with such an understanding the term will be used subsequently in this thesis.

Modern scholars researching early Christianity tend to connect *refrigeria* with early Christian charitable meals called *agape* (ἄγαπη).\(^{459}\) This idea was

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\(^{454}\) E.g. *cubiculum* Ib in the catacomb of Pamphilus on the Via Salaria in Rome was decorated with twelve shallow gold-glass bowls inserted in the mortar above the *arcosolium*, see De Santis (2000) 239, fig. 24.1.


\(^{456}\) E.g. ICVR III 6618 from the catacomb of Domitilla depicting the father of a deceased woman drinking from a beaker, or ICVR VI 15867 from the Via Latina cemetery depicting a femal orant holding a cup, in De Santis (2000) 241.

\(^{457}\) De Santis (2000) 240.

\(^{458}\) Hofmann (2011).

developed by Grossi-Gondi, who based his theory on Tertullian’s *Apologeticum* (39), which describes early Christian ἁγάπη:

> When the Salii dine, the money-lender will be needed. Actuaries will have to reckon the cost of Hercules’ tithes and banquets. At the Attic Apaturia, Dionysia and mysteries, conscription is proclaimed – for cooks. The smoke of a dinner of Serapis will fetch out the firemen. It’s only the banquet of Christians that calls for criticism.

> Our dinner shows its idea in its name: it is called by the Greek name for love (*agape*). Whatever the cost, it is gain to spend in piety’s name, for with that refreshment we help the needy. No, not as among you, parasites aspire for the glory of selling their freedom, authorised by the belly to fatten themselves at the cost of any insult. 460

> However, from the text itself it is evident that Tertullian referred to non-funerary gatherings, contrasting Christian ἁγάπη meals with Greco-Roman feasts organised in honour of a deity. The word *refrigerio* in the text should be understood simply as ‘refreshment’ – a snack (or drink?) provided for the poor, rather than the commemorative meal organised in honour of the dead. Hence the connection between the two types of meal is not as strong as Grossi-Gondi would have wished.

> The ἁγάπη meals, as charitable gatherings where provisions of food were shared with the poor, also originated from the Jewish Passover dining tradition, and similar meals were held by the Jews to commemorate their biblical kings and martyrs. 461 It is, therefore, likely that the Christians might have adopted such practices, as they fitted into the idea of private funerals and commemoration of their deceased outside the control of any Church officials. It

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461 Reicke (1951) 103-8 and 111-21.
is also possible that both ἄγάπη and Christian refrigeria shared similar formulae for dining organized (and sponsored) by the wealthy for community/association members; this would be supported by the graffiti mentioning the name of the person responsible for organising such meals. In this way some of the refrigeria could indeed have developed a charitable status. However, it is also likely that at least some refrigeria shared by Christians were simple family gatherings at the graves held according to the family tradition in honour of their deceased, or even martyrs, yet without the charitable aspect of the meal (i.e. supplying provisions for the poor). The fact that such private gatherings were often criticized by the Church officials supports such a thesis. I shall discuss this further in the next sections.

1.3.1.3. Dining installations in the cemeteries

As I outlined above, the Christian graffiti mentioning refrigeria were found on the walls of a dining complex (triclia) located in a funerary area on the Via Appia Antica. As the structure is not associated with any particular tomb it is likely that it was used by several small communities or families, which visited their relatives’ graves in the ad catacombas region. Similar communal installations of specifically designed platforms that were intended for dining were found in other funerary complexes in the Roman Empire, for instance in Malta and Tipasa. The size of the dining areas was relatively modest, which indicates that they would accommodate only a small number of participants. This also confirms the private character of such gatherings.

Nor was the idea of constructing places intended for the commemoration of the dead uniquely Christian. Another funerary complex which encompassed the so-called Villa Grande, previously recognised as a villa, and a smaller structure called ‘villa piccola’ was in use in the ad catacombas region, just next

462 E.g. Tomius Coelius known from one of the graffiti found on the walls of the triclia underneath the Basilica of San Sebastiano in Rome.
463 The importance of refrigeria as community meetings is discussed by Gonzalez (2014) 153-61.
to the *triclia* in the second century AD.\textsuperscript{466} The buildings, which included several ground level and underground rooms suitable for dining, must have been used by certain *collegia*, and potentially by families, for their gatherings connected with the commemoration of the dead.\textsuperscript{467} Interestingly, the complex was decorated with several pictorial representations, one of which depicts an outdoor meal with five diners resting on a *stibadium* placed directly on the ground (fig. 10).

The picnic takes place next to a city wall (or, perhaps, an aqueduct). A tall building depicted on the other side of the wall probably represents a tomb or a small temple. If the Villa Grande was indeed designed for observing mortuary rites then it would be possible that the banquet scene could represent one of the commemorative meals held at the cemeteries. The complex operated until the early fourth century,\textsuperscript{468} which suggests that it was in use alongside the *triclia* dining installations for at least a few decades.

Fig. 10. Fresco with a picnic scene in the ‘Villa Grande’ underneath the basilica of San Sebastiano in Rome

To summarise the above, archaeological and epigraphic sources confirm that the early Christians living in the third and fourth century buried their dead in a similar manner to their pagan and Jewish neighbours. They performed


\textsuperscript{467} For the presence of *collegia* at the *ad catacomb* region see: Borg (2013) 153; Jastrzebowska (1981) 53; Jastrzebowska (2010) 183-4.

\textsuperscript{468} Toccalite (2009) 160.
traditional libations for the dead at the graves and commemorated their deceased according to their family or collegia belief and tradition. The *refrigeria*, which had been previously recognised as Christian commemorative meals, were in fact a shared practice and a common aspect of the cult of the dead. Additionally, through the example of the fourth-century gold-glass vessels it appears that the Christians used the same type of grave goods as their pagan and Jewish contemporaries. This leads us to one of the most important questions regarding early Christian funerary practices – did the early believers observe the rite of Eucharist during the funerals, and how early did such a rite emerge?

**1.3.2. Early Christian funerary dining: the development of the funerary Eucharist.**

By contrast with the ancient Jewish texts that describe funerary meals in detail, only an indirect indication of similar practices can be found in the early Christian sources from the first four centuries AD. One of the earliest examples of Christian dining during the mourning period comes from the apocryphal text of the *Acta Iohannis*, which can be dated to the second half of the second century AD. Fragment 72 mentions a meal that was supposedly held in the vicinity of a grave during the third day after the body of the deceased had been laid there. The text, which specifically describes the meal as 'breaking the bread' has been frequently used by liturgical scholars to claim that even the earliest Christians used to perform the Eucharist as a funerary rite. In fact, as the text refers to events that happened in the late first century, it most likely relates to a Jewish custom, and could indicate that the Jews might have dined during the third day after the burial, and this could have been adopted into Christian practice by the mid-second century when the text was written. Moreover, as clearly indicated in *Acta Iohannis*, the companions of Andronicus gathered for a

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470 *Acta Iohannis* 72: ‘Now on the next day John came, accompanied by Andronicus and the brethren, to the sepulchre at dawn, it being now the third day from Drusiana’s death, that we might break bread there’ [ed. Junod and Kaestli (1983) 267].  
meal to comfort the mourner, which also confirms the Jewish origin of the practice. The practice of breaking the bread itself comes from the Jewish tradition of communal dining, which has been commonly accepted even by the most devoted Christian scholars,⁴⁷² therefore the fragment from Acta Iohannis cannot be accepted as the earliest testimony of a funerary Eucharist; it rather confirms the persistence of Jewish influence in the development of early Christianity.

The second fragment that could potentially demonstrate the existence of the funerary Eucharist amongst early Christian mortuary practices comes from the Didascalia Apostolorum, which was originally written somewhere in the eastern provinces in the third century,⁴⁷³ though its earliest surviving copy comes from the fourth-century Syriac text and the fifth-century Latin translation.⁴⁷⁴ The text is as follows:

[...] but do you, according to the Gospel and according to the power of the Holy Spirit, come together even in the cemeteries, and read the holy Scriptures, and without demur perform your ministry and your supplication to God; and offer an acceptable Eucharist, the likeness of the royal body of Christ, both in your congregations and in your cemeteries and on the departures of them that sleep - pure bread that is made with fire and sanctified with invocations - and without doubting pray and offer for them that are fallen asleep.⁴⁷⁵

The fragment clearly mentions a rite of the Eucharist (eucharistiam offerte) performed during the assemblies of early Christians at the graveyards but a careful inspection of the text, however, reveals two major problems. First and foremost, the character of the Didascalia is prescriptive rather than

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⁴⁷² Dix (1945) 58-70 with references.
⁴⁷⁴ Connolly (1929) xi-xx.
⁴⁷⁵ Didascalia Apostolorum, 61.1.5-13: ...vos uero, secundum evangeliun et secundum sancti spiritus uirtutem, et in memoris congregantes uos et sacrarum scripturarum facite lectionem et at Deum praecees indesinenter offerite, et eam quae secundum similitudinem regalis corporis Christi est regolem eucharistiam offerte tam in collectis uestriss quam etiam in coemiteris et in dormientium exi[n]tione: panem mundum praeponentes, qui per ignem factus est et per inuocationem sanctificatur, sine discretione orantes offerite pro dormientibus. [tr. Connolly (1929) 252].
descriptive. In other words, it would have been written in order to convince contemporary Christians to perform the Eucharist during the gatherings in the vicinity of the graves rather than to describe an existing local practice. Secondly, even if one can assume that some of the most devoted Christians in Northern Syria offered the Eucharist during certain rites connected with the cult of the dead, and the text of Didascalia was to set such custom out as an example for others, the phrase in memoria (used in the Latin translation to represent the sepulchres) refers, most likely, to the graves of martyrs that were visited and venerated by the early believers, and not to the normal cemeteries. The word memoria was commonly used to describe the venerated places, as, for instance, in Memoria Apostolorum that refer to the previously discussed triclia near the catacomb of San Sebastiano.\footnote{Eastman (2011), 71-84.} The phrase in memoria martyrum appears also in later sources, as, for instance, in Augustine's Contra Faustum 20.21 regarding the excessive drinking parties held at the martyrs' graves,\footnote{Augustine, Contra Faustum 20.21: Qui autem se in memoriiis martyrum inebriant, quomodo a nobis approbari possunt, cum eos, etiam si in domibus suis id faciant, sana doctrina condemnet? [ed. Migne (1845) 385].} which suggests that this was not a local (or short-term) understanding of that phrase.

In such case, fragment 61 of the Didascalia refers to the observance of the Eucharist during the commemorative rites held at the martyrs' graves and suggests that a similar practice should also be held in coemiterii – at the private graves, and/or during gatherings held after the death had occurred. It is, therefore, likely that in the third century, when the text of Didascalia was written, the Eucharist was not yet established as a mortuary rite, but was performed during some congregations, such as gatherings to commemorate the martyrs at their memorials.\footnote{An excellent overview of the cult of the Christian martyrs in Jastrzebowska (1981) 205-15.}

Several decades before an anonymous author wrote the text of the Didascalia, the division between private and communal funerary rituals in Carthage had already been noticed by Tertullian. In De Corona Militis the author clearly distinguishes between the rite of the Eucharist that was observed during the early Christian meetings held at dawn, and a sacrifice (oblatio) carried out...
annually during the commemoration of the dead.\textsuperscript{479} What is more, in \textit{De Monogamia}, Tertullian emphasises the importance of bringing refreshments to the relatives’ graves and performing annual sacrifices for the deceased, which strongly confirms that early Christians living in North Africa, at least until the early third century, performed the ancient traditional rituals in order to honour the dead.\textsuperscript{480}

The fact that the Christians performed traditional pagan funerary and commemorative rites until the late fourth or even early fifth century is well documented in the works of Saint Augustine. An interesting description of an early Christian sacrifice during a mortuary ceremony was provided by the bishop in an account of the funeral of his mother Monica in Ostia in the late fourth century:

And behold, whenas the corpse was carried to the burial, we both went and returned without tears. For neither in those prayers which we poured forth unto thee, whenas the Sacrifice of our Redemption was offered up unto thee for her, the corpse standing by the grave side, before it was put into the ground (as the manner there is) did I so much as shed a tear all the prayer time.\textsuperscript{481}

As in this particular work the author speaks directly to God, the words \textit{quas tibi fudimus, offeritur pro ea sacrificium pretii nostri} might have indeed referred to a funerary Eucharist performed at the gravesite in the presence of Monica’s body just before her entombment.\textsuperscript{482} These words, however, might equally have alluded to the traditional local sacrificial rites performed during

\textsuperscript{479} Tertullian, \textit{De Corona Militis}, 3.3.3: \textit{Eucharistiae sacramentum, et in tempore uictus et omnibus mandatum a Domino, etiam antelucanis coetibus nec de aliorum manu quam praesidentium sumimus. Oblationes pro defunctis, pro nataliciis, annua die facimus.} [ed. Currey (1854) 121].

\textsuperscript{480} Tertullian, \textit{De Monogamia}, 10.5-6: \textit{Enimvero et pro anima eius orat et refrigerium interim adpostulat ei et in prima resurrectione consortium et offert annuis diebus dormitionis eius. Nam haec nisi fecerit, vere repudiat, quantum in ipsa est, et quidem hoc iniquius, quanto quomodo potuit quia non potuit, et hoc indignius, quanto iam indignius, si quia non meruit.} [ed. Leopold (1839) 125].


\textsuperscript{482} As suggested by Rebillard (2009) 134.
funerals, which could easily be supported by the following phrase *sicut illic fiere solet*. Additionally, the word *fudimus* used by Augustine to describe the way the funerary prayer and sacrifice were offered may point to the traditional libations performed during funerals.

In another passage of *Confessiones* (6.2.1-6) Augustine writes about Monica being forbidden to perform sacrifices at, or to bring refreshments to, both the martyrs’ and her relatives’ graves as it closely resembled the Greco-Roman rite of *parentalia* and encouraged drunkenness.483 In this case the prohibition was issued by Bishop Ambrose and was enforced only locally in Milan.484 An official interdiction was promulgated by the Synod of Hippo in 393 AD and confirmed by the Council of Carthage in 401 AD.485 Several other Church authorities of the late fourth century, such as Bishop Zeno of Verona and Bishop Gaudentius of Brescia,486 condemned the popularity of commemorative meals held at the graves by early Christian families and voluntary associations. This kind of private celebration, however, needs to be distinguished from the collective commemoration of the martyrs, which, from the fourth century onwards, became increasingly controlled by the Church.487

The evidence for the *Parentalia* being still practised in the late fourth century is provided also by Ausonius, whose work was discussed earlier in this

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484 Augustine, *Confessiones*, 6.2.

485 Munier (1968), 16-29; Canon IV of the Council of Carthage 15th Aug 401 AD (confirmed by Canon LX of the 419 AD Synod at Carthage, the so-called ‘African Code’: ‘The Greek feasts must cease to be kept, because of their impropriety, and because they seduce many Christians, moreover they are celebrated on the commemorations of the martyrs.’ [tr. Percival (1900) 473].

486 Zeno, *Tractatus*, 1.25.6.11: *Non hi solum, qui tales sunt, displicent deo, sed et illi, qui per sepulcrum discurrunt, qui foetorosis prandia caddaueribus sacrificant mortuorum, qui amore luxurianti atque bibendi in infamibus locis lagenis et calicibus subito sibi martyres pepererunt* [ed. Löstedt (1971), 75].

487 MacMullen (2009), 76-89.
Ausonius was a Christian, yet commemoration of his deceased family members was still his duty and, as he believed, should ensure their happy existence in the afterlife.

Returning to the subject of the early Christian funerary Eucharist, a short statement possibly alluding to such practice was issued also by the Synod of Hippo. Canon IV forbade sharing Eucharist with, or giving baptism to, those who were already dead. This short law, however, does not provide clear evidence for the existence of Eucharistic rites during early Christian funerals, as it is equally possible that it may refer to the custom of giving viaticum to a dying person. Bringing the viaticum to those who were gravely ill was well established by the end of the fourth century, and it is quite likely that the early believers, for whom baptism and the Eucharist were the only guarantees for everlasting life in Heaven, used it also for the dead.

Finally, according to the account of Possidius, a sacrifice to God was made during the funeral of Augustine in 430 AD:

And in our presence, after a service was offered to God for the peaceful repose of his body, he was buried.

In this case it is very plausible that the Latin word oblata, indeed refers to the Eucharist, however, it may also reflect the same sacrificial rite, which Tertullian mentioned in his De Corona militis, and which is often attested to on some fifth-century inscriptions. According to Possidius’ account the sacrifice was offered at the cemetery. If Possidius really had the Eucharist in mind, why did he use the term oblatio, which was commonly used in pagan rites, rather than eucharistia, which he must have known?

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488 See above, section 1.1.2.1.
489 Canon IV of the 393 AD Synod at Hippo: ‘The Eucharist shall not be given to dead bodies, nor baptism conferred upon them’ [tr. Hefele (2014) 397].
490 It was interpreted as such by Munier (1968) 16-29, and followed by Rebillard (2009) 135.
491 Volp (2002), 166-72.
493 Possidius, Sancti Augustini Vita 31: [...] et nobis coram pro ejus commendanda corporis depositione sacrificium Deo oblatum est, et sepultus est [tr. Weiskotten (1919) 142].
494 E.g. a funerary inscription: CIL VI 41420a = ICUR II 4187; or a dedication: CIL X 5748.
To summarise, there is no evidence that early Christians performed the rite of Eucharist *per se* during funerals until, at least, the late fourth or early fifth century AD. They definitely held sacrificial and commemorative rituals for the dead, which must have reflected both their family tradition and/or their Christian faith. It is also likely that the pagan rite of *oblatio* was transformed or, to put it more accurately, adjusted, either by an appropriate prayer or gesture into a ritual that could have been performed by devoted Christians as well. Also, we cannot exclude the possibility that some Christians could have performed what they believed was the rite of Eucharist, which nevertheless did not include any priests, and was not necessarily correct according to ecclesiastical standards. However, it is also likely that at least some Christians performed pagan rites, as they were more relevant to their family tradition, or were practiced by other members of the *collegia*. Therefore, I suggest that we should not try to establish any clear definitions as eschatological beliefs are a personal matter and often differ greatly from officially established religious norms.

As stated before, Christian funerals, similarly to Jewish and Roman customs, belonged to a private sphere of the family and *collegia*, and Church officials did not control mortuary practices until at least the end of the fourth century. It is, therefore, very important to distinguish between the private family and *collegia* funerary rites and the official commemoration of the martyrs, which very gradually fell under the control of the early Church.\footnote{Février (1996).} However, the commemoration of the saints, i.e. performing sacrifices and organising *refrigeria* to honour their names, was observed in the same way as that of the ordinary deceased.\footnote{MacMullen (2010) 607.} The evidence suggests, therefore, that Christians, similarly to their pagan neighbours, carried out funerary sacrifices according to their family tradition and participated in some private commemorative meals organised at their relatives’ graves.

Carrying out traditional Greco-Roman rites, however, does not exclude the existence of some Christian prayers and formulas that most likely gradually developed in the context of mortuary and commemorative practices. As I
discussed in the previous chapter, sometime in the third century Christians began to express their beliefs through pictorial representations found in their tombs and it is very likely that the images emerged alongside special formulas that referred to their faith and rites. The next section will investigate a possible interpretation for such a phenomenon.

1.3.3. Christian funerary prayers and/or formulas

The earliest literary evidence for Christians praying for the souls of their departed comes from the works of Tertullian who refers to such custom several times: for instance, *pro anima eius orat* (in *De monogamia*), or *quot in oratione commemores* (in *De Exhortatione castitatis*). However, as stated before, Tertullian most likely describes traditional Greco-Roman commemorative rites as he also mentions *oblationes*. It is, therefore, likely that these prayers were based on some traditional pagan formulas, even though they might have encompassed certain aspects of Christian faith (i.e. *in prima resurrectione consortium*). Therefore, Rebillard’s suggestion that the commemorative offerings and prayers ‘explicitly refer to Eucharistic sacrifice’ may have been an over-interpretation of the sources. It is more likely that the adoption of practices and prayers occurred in the other way round from what has been previously suggested: i.e. the traditional practices and prayers were gradually incorporated into the Christian canon, rather than being invented by the Christians to separate themselves from pagan culture.

The Christian practice of recalling the names of the deceased, which was often mentioned in the works of several early Christian scholars, must have originated from the traditional Greco-Roman commemorative rites. In fact, according to Roman belief, recalling the name of the deceased guaranteed the

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497 Tertullian, *De monogamia*, 10.5-6 (above) and *De exhortatione castitatis* 11: [...] *pro qua oblationes annuas reddis. Stabis ergo ad dominum cum tot uxoribus quot in oratione commemores [...]* [ed. Leopold (1939) 109].
498 Tertullian, *De Monogamia*, 10.5-6.
500 E.g. Cyprian, *Epistulae* 1.2.2: *ac si quis hoc fecisset, non offerretur pro eo nec sacrificium pro dormitioine eius celebratur*, or Augustine, *Sermons* 297.2.3: ‘Why is it, as the faithful know, that the martyrs’ names are recited in their own place, quite distinct from the faithful; and that the Church doesn’t pray for them, but commends itself to their prayers?’ in Rebillard (2009) 153-75.
preservation of the memory of the dead and led to the survival of the soul.\textsuperscript{501} The fact that the practice of recalling the names of the dead was eventually included in the order of the Church services proves yet again that Church officials needed to integrate certain customs in order to control the spread of private cults. This is best demonstrated by the very detailed discussions held by some fifth-century Church authorities on the value of a prayer: who exactly would benefit from the practice of recalling names: the baptised Christians or the catechumens?\textsuperscript{502} As demonstrated by Rebillard, a community prayer during the Eucharist would be more adequate than a private ritual.\textsuperscript{503} It is, therefore, evident that the early Christians did pray for the souls of their deceased and, as the Church officials often intervened and commented on such practices, the prayers must have been based on some old formulas from traditional family beliefs.

A perfect example of the Christian adoption of prayers can be taken from an investigation of the earliest Christian funerary images. Looking at the decoration of early Christian graves from the third and fourth century one can clearly observe that some of the biblical images depicted on tombs or on sarcophagi were more popular than others. The Old Testament representations that appeared most often were scenes from the life of Jonah, Noah in the Arc, Abraham and Isaac, Moses striking the rock, three youths in the fiery furnace, Daniel in the lions' den and Susanna between the elders. The most popular New Testament images depicted the miracles performed by Jesus, such as curing the paralytic, resurrecting Lazarus, multiplying bread and fish or changing water into wine during the wedding in Cana. In the fourth century the common depiction of Moses striking the rock was often replaced by a similar composition with either Saint Paul or Saint Peter in prison performing a miracle in front of his fellow prisoners.\textsuperscript{504} The same set of Old and New Testament

\textsuperscript{501} Carroll (2011) 67 provides examples of funerary inscriptions, in which the deceased asked the passer-by to call out his or her name, which perhaps was originally connected with the rite of \textit{conclamatio} – calling name of the dead just after the occurring death.

\textsuperscript{502} Augustine, \textit{Sermons} 142.4 and \textit{Sermons} 172.2.

\textsuperscript{503} Rebillard (2009) 171-5 with the examples from John Chrysostom Homilies.

images was also frequently used in the decoration of the gold-glass dishes that were discussed above. It is evident that the depicted biblical stories share one soteriological (and eschatological) theme, which is salvation through faith in God.505

What is more, the very first written example of a Christian funerary formula, which has been preserved since antiquity also mentions the same biblical heroes. The prayer, known as *Orationis sup. Defunctu vel comendatio animae* comes from a mid-eighth-century *Sacramentary of Gellone*506 and repeats a phrase 'Lord, save the soul of [name] as you saved…' and lists Noah, Elijah, Moses, Job, Daniel, three youths, Jonah, Susanna and Peter and Paul.507 The stories of Job and Elijah also appeared in Christian funerary decoration, but no earlier than the fourth century.508 The function of representing biblical images on the early Christian mortuary monuments and chanting the stories of the biblical heroes who were saved by God is exactly the same – to emphasize the salvation of the soul through faith.509

Hence, it is likely that a similar formula for a funerary prayer existed as early as the third or fourth century and eventually developed into a known invocation included in the eighth-century *Sacramentary of Gellone*.510 It would be tempting to suggest that a Christian funerary prayer might have developed even earlier and led to the popularity of the representation of certain images on the mortuary monuments. It is very plausible, as the Christian formula itself

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505 Finney (1994) 283.
506 The oldest copy dated to second half of the eighth century: Dumas (1981) xvii (vol. 159A).
508 E.g. Elijah in *cubiculum* B and Job in *cubiculum* C in the Hypogeum of Via Dino Compagni.
most likely originated from a much older Jewish prayer called Mi she-‘ana.\textsuperscript{511} The Jewish prayer was formed from repeated verses of ‘May he who answered XX answer us!’, where XX stands for all biblical figures, whose prayers had received a positive response from the God.\textsuperscript{512} It would, therefore, be possible that the Christians adopted not only the formula of the prayer, but also some Jewish iconography relevant to the text.\textsuperscript{513}

Also of relevance is the so-called Podgoritza plate, which is decorated with a set of biblical images (Adam and Eve, the resurrection of Lazarus, St Peter striking the rock, Daniel between two lions, three youths in the fiery furnace, Susanna as an orant and the cycle of Jonah encircling the central medallion with Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac) and accompanied by relevant inscriptions (DIVINAN DE VENTRE QVETI LIBERATVS EST, ABRAM ETET EVAM, DOMNVS LAIARVM resuscitat, Petrus uirga perquouset fontis ciperunt quorere, DANIEL DE LACO LEONIS, TRIS PVERI DE ECNE CAMI, SVSANA DE FALSO CRIMINE).\textsuperscript{514} The similarities between the inscriptions on the Podgoritza plate and the passage from the Sacramentary of Gellone indicate that the text of the eighth-century prayer could indeed have been based on much earlier invocations, while the decoration of the plate itself could be understood as ‘the missing link’ between them. Unfortunately, the origin of the Podgoritza patera is not known, however it most likely came from fourth-century Dalmatia and was probably (secondarily) used in a funerary context.\textsuperscript{515}

The eighth-century text of the comendatio animae included in the Sacramentary of Gellone is not only the earliest written example of any Christian prayer performed at funerals, but also provides a clear distinction between a ritual that was held at a cemetery during the deposition of the body and a Eucharistic prayer that included a communion, which was performed in a church before the funeral.\textsuperscript{516} The division between the rites may also suggest

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{511} Lietzmann (1961) vol. 2, 143; Schüler (1966) 58.
  \item \textsuperscript{512} Solomon (2015) 284.
  \item \textsuperscript{513} As suggested by Leitzmann (1961) vol. 2, 143.
  \item \textsuperscript{514} Finney (1994) 284.
  \item \textsuperscript{515} Finney (1994) 284-5.
  \item \textsuperscript{516} Prayer at the cemetery is for all whose bodies lay there: \textit{Item alia mis in cimiteriis} 505, 2992: Deus fidelium lumen animarum, adesto supplicationibus nostris, et da omnibus fidelibus in christo quorum
that there was no tradition of performing the Eucharist at cemeteries during private funerals.

1.4. Summary

From the literary, epigraphic and archaeological material provided above it is evident that, when considering funerary and commemorative dining, early Christians observed the same traditional rites as their pagan and Jewish neighbours, who all were members of a wider Greco-Roman society. Funerals and the commemoration of the dead belonged to private family or collegia spheres and neither Greco-Roman priests, nor synagogues, nor early Church officials controlled or intervened in the mortuary rituals. The example of Bishop Martialis who in the mid-third century entrusted a professional collegium to bury his sons indicates that (at least) some Christians did not refrain from becoming guild members, and at least some believers were buried according to pagan rites.

Both funerals and commemoration of the deceased were the duty of the living relatives or collegia members, and, according to Ausonius, remembering the dead ensured their happy existence in the afterlife. The evidence suggests that, until the late fourth century, the majority of Christians performed funerary rites according to their family traditions, providing offerings for the dead and reciting prayers in order to ensure the salvation of the deceased’s soul in the afterlife.

The example of the funeral of Monica, Augustine’s mother, who was buried in 387AD according to the local Ostian custom that included pouring the libation as a sacrifice to God, demonstrates that even the most devoted Christians buried their dead in a traditional fashion. What made this a Christian

corpora hic requiescunt, refrigerii sedem, quietis beatitudinem, luminis claritatem. No communion (i.e. Eucharist) for the deposition of the body: 490 Item or ante sepulchro priesqua sepiliat. 2910-2915. Only prayer, e.g. 2910: Deus qui iustis supplicationibus nostris semper presto es, qui pia uota digneris intuere, da famulum tuum illi. cuius depositionis hodie officia prestamus, cum sanctis et electis tuis beati muneres portionem. [ed. Dumas (1981), 465-6]. Communion before a funeral (possibly in a church): 489 or ad mis prius mortuus sepiatur 2908: Deus qui in altis habitas et humilia respicis, da restorationem defunctis et resurgentibus in te largire pietatem, specialiter pro famulo tuo que in pacem adsumere dignatus es, da ut quia in te renouatus de hoc mundo migrauit, mors in eum secunda poenitus non habeat potestatem. [ed. Dumas (1981) 465].
funeral was the prayer that accompanied the sacrifice. Even though the formula of funerary prayers was adopted from the available pagan and/or Jewish sources, the early Christians adjusted the verses to fit their beliefs.

If the Church officials still battled with the pagan way of commemoration of the dead in the early fifth century, it is more than likely that in third and early fourth century, when Christianity was not yet an official religion, pagan and Jewish funerary rites predominated over the not-yet-established Christian practices. It is, therefore, likely that when considering third-century Christian burials, the funerary rites must have been even closer to the traditional Greco-Roman and Jewish customs.

What really mattered was the general idea of commemoration of the deceased which ensured the preservation of the soul in the afterlife, and which was comparable with all the religions of the Roman Empire. This idea was reflected in funerary art, and especially in the representations of communal dining, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, 4 and 5.
Chapter 2. Dining on Roman funerary monuments: kline scenes

After the discussion of literary and archaeological evidence for dining in an ancient funerary context it is time to look at the visual representation of convivial practices connected with mortuary and commemorative customs. The following chapters will focus primarily on evidence found on funerary monuments, such as tomb painting and mosaics, ash chests, funerary altars, grave stones and sarcophagi. However, in certain instances I shall also refer to non-funerary art in order to compare certain visual representations.

This chapter will focus on the kline scenes depicting individuals (or more rarely couples), which I shall differentiate from the representations of collective meals held on stibadia-type couches. The examples that will be presented in this chapter have been selected from a much wider range of images due to the immensity of available sources. However, I shall try to present evidence from all types of preserved funerary monuments and will include all known Christian monuments decorated with the kline motif.

The main purpose of this chapter is to investigate the significance of kline representations in funerary art, and the reason for its popularity. As I shall demonstrate, the kline scenes were designed to represent the status of the deceased by depicting them reclining for meals, which was one of the activities associated with the elite life style.

2.1. Stibadium vs. kline

In general, dining images can be divided into two main categories: those representing a single person (occasionally two or three people) reclining on a kline couch, or scenes with several participants gathered on a \(\cap\)-shaped long, soft cushion called a stibadium (or sigma).517 Both types were commonly used in both funerary and non-funerary contexts.

517 Amedick (1991) 25 differentiates stibadia (improvised sitting arrangements made from animal skin or rolled-up fishing nets used by shepherds and hunters) from sigma-type couches (where soft cushion would be placed on a wooden semi-circular platform). However, the proper identification of the sitting arrangements is often impossible. For that reason, I shall refer to all the \(\cap\)-shaped seating arrangements as stibadia.
The convivial images representing diners reclining on *kline* couches can be traced back as far as to mid-seventh century BC when the Assyrian king Assurbanipal was depicted dining in his famous gardens of Ninevah (fig. 11). The relief presented the king reclining and drinking from a cup, with his wife sitting on a separate chair near the *kline*. A tall three-legged table laden with dining paraphernalia was situated directly in front of the couch. The diners are accompanied by servants cooling them with fans, and bringing food for the meal. The couch is situated in the garden underneath a vine tree sheltering the banqueters from the sun.

![Fig. 11. Assurbanipal dining with his wife in Ninevah, now in the British Museum, inv. 124920](image)

Over time this particular design was included in the standard repertoire for imagery used in a funerary context in the Mediterranean region, and was especially popular in Greek and Etruscan funerary decoration. Its modern name, the *Totenmahl* motif, however, proved to be rather misleading, as it is impossible to determine whether the images do indeed portray a funerary meal,

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or perhaps present the deceased as dining during their life, or in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{520} Or indeed, they may not depict the deceased at all but should be viewed in a more allegorical way.\textsuperscript{521} In either case, it seems likely, that the images were commissioned to preserve his or her memory, if not a real likeness of the deceased, then at least a symbolic representation. I shall discuss the ambiguity of the \textit{kline} scenes later in this chapter.

Painted representations of scenes with \textit{kline} couches found in a Roman funerary context reached their zenith in the first two centuries of Imperial Rome, and seem to have ceased by the early fourth century AD, with the exception of a few images which appeared in Roman provincial funerary art in the late fourth century.\textsuperscript{522} In the case of sarcophagi, however, the \textit{kline} design was used in Rome until the end of the fourth century AD.\textsuperscript{523} The second type of dining scene - those arranged on a semi-circular soft cushion called a \textit{stibadium} - emerged in Italy probably around the beginning of the first century AD, evidence of which can be found in the works of contemporary writers.\textsuperscript{524} Convivial scenes with \textit{stibadia} couches originated in domestic decoration as representations of outdoor collective banquets and some images are preserved in the houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum (fig.

\textsuperscript{520} E.g. banquet scenes represented in Etruscan tombs may be viewed as representations of the elite life style rather than as depictions of any particular type of dining (daily meals, funerary or celestial meals). Examples, which provide the names of the diners, e.g. the Tomb of the Shields [see Pallottino (1952) 107; Steิงräber (1985) 341-3] may indicate that the portrayed diners are indeed the deceased people buried in the tomb. However, there are also more ambiguous scenes, e.g. in the tomb of the Leopards or Golini Tomb I from Orvieto [Steิงräber (1985) 319 and 278-9 respectively], where it is impossible to determine who and what situation is actually depicted there. The tombs with painted decorations belonged to upper class Etruscans and they should be viewed as statements emphasizing the elite life style (in either or both worlds).

\textsuperscript{521} As stated by Dunbabin (2003) 109: ‘the motif’s appeal may have been due, in no small part, precisely to its ambivalence and lack of single, clearly definable content; it was open to observers to interpret it as they thought fit, according to their cultural predispositions or their own individual preferences’. The review of different interpretations in: Dentzer (1982) 1-20.

\textsuperscript{522} E.g. the banquet scene on a mosaic from the Tomb of Mnemosyne in Antioch, in Dunbabin (2003) 184-5, pl. XIV.

\textsuperscript{523} E.g. the famous sarcophagus of Junius Bassus dated to 359 AD (no. 16).

However, the majority of collective dining images still represent the diners resting on kline couches, arranged in triclinia. In addition, it is evident that the banquets held on klinai represented both indoor meals and events held in the garden, where permanent dining installations were the normal places to dine. The stibadia scenes, in contrast, represent outdoor picnics, outside the city walls (as shown in fig. 12), where a soft cushion was temporarily placed directly on the ground and no permanent seating installation was needed. Therefore, it is likely that stibadia originated as seating arrangements for picnics or other types of al fresco meals in the countryside.

Fig. 12. Picnic scene with pygmies from the House of the Doctor, Pompeii. Now in the Museo Nazionale (inv. 113196), Naples

The collective scenes (both on klinai arranged in triclinia and on stibadia) represent reclining participants embracing their partners, drinking, holding cups or engaging in conversation. The atmosphere is always cheerful and relaxed; the diners wear loose clothes and some are half-naked which emphasise the sexuality and frivolity of the depicted moments. The number of vessels on the tables implies consumption of rather large quantities of wine. Such collective convivial images most likely, were not unique to this region, and were probably common in houses in other parts of the Roman Empire; while

525 For the full list of the painted representations of convivial scenes in Pompeii see Balch (2008) 230-6.
their most probable purpose was to decorate the rooms designed for convivial parties, rather than to depict real events.\textsuperscript{528}

The earliest depictions in funerary art of convivial events held on \textit{stibadia} can already be found in tombs of the mid- to late first-century; they became particularly popular from the mid-second century onwards, and disappear from funerary decoration towards the end of the fourth century AD.\textsuperscript{529}

The two types of convivial imagery seem to differ significantly not only in the form of their representation but also in their character and meaning. Nicholas Hudson convincingly argued that the two types of depictions reflect different styles of dining in the Ancient world: one based on the so-called ‘individual service’ (represented by the \textit{kline} scenes) and the other one on the ‘shared service’ (scenes with \textit{stibadium}).\textsuperscript{530} They originated from different traditions of convivial events: individual service was used during banquets, where not all of the participants were served the same food and/or drink the same quality wine, therefore, each person was served victuals on their own personal table.\textsuperscript{531} This practice was also illustrated on a mid-first-century relief, which was originally a part of a larger funerary monument from Amiternum (fig. 13).\textsuperscript{532} The relief portrays one convivial event, but with two distinct groups of banqueters: the first with four participants resting on \textit{klinai} arranged around a three-legged table, and the second group with six diners sitting on stools arranged around a similar three-legged table. Therefore, the scene should be

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{528} Wallace-Hadrill (2004) 117. Evidence for convivial scenes in a domestic context: e.g. a third-century floor mosaic representing dining gods was found in Tunisia, and is now in Musee National du Bardo, or a late-third century AD mosaic in the House of Orpheus in Sepphoris, see Dunbabin (2003) 166, pl. XII.
\textsuperscript{529} See Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{530} Hudson (2010) 666-72.
\textsuperscript{531} An example of such practice can be found in Pliny the Younger, \textit{Epistulae} 2.6.2: \textit{Nam sibi et paucis opima quaedam, ceteris vilia et minuta ponebat. Vinum etiam parvolis lagunculis in tria genera discrisperat, non ut potestas eligendi, sed ne jus esset recusandi} [tr. Radice (1972) 95].
\textsuperscript{532} Dunbabin (2003) 79, fig. 40; Ghedini (1990) 38, fig. 5; Jastrzębowska (1979) 60, no. 112; Giuliano (1963) pl. XII. Similar example is provided by a late third-century AD fragment of a sarcophagus’ lid which is now in the Galleria Chiaramonti in the Vatican Museum (no. 108), see Amedick (1991) 31 and 167, no. 280.
\end{footnotesize}
viewed as representing a clear distinction between social classes during a meal.\textsuperscript{533}

On the contrary, the ‘shared service’ meals were designed mainly for events in which everyone participated equally, and, occasionally, contributed in equal measure to a meal shared in common, i.e. food was placed on larger platters in front of all participants, who could choose the components of their meal.\textsuperscript{534}

![Fig. 13. Funerary relief from Amiternum, now in the Church of San Stefano in Pizzoli](image)

In many cases, the \textit{kline} couches were also used in this sort of communal dining, which can be seen on many representations from Pompeii.\textsuperscript{535} I shall discuss this design in more detail later on in this chapter. Over time, however, mainly due to reasons of practicality, heavy couches were replaced by the lighter and more comfortable cushion-type \textit{stibadia}, which could have been arranged in a similar fashion and were more readily adjusted to the available space.\textsuperscript{536}

\textsuperscript{533} Dunbabin (2003) 83. Roller [(2006) 163-5] also discusses meals, during which children sat around separate tables and were served a simpler menu, while the adults reclined separately at the \textit{convivia}. See also D’Arms (1990) and D’Arms (1999).

\textsuperscript{534} A tradition of communal meals was mentioned by Plutarch, \textit{Quaestiones conviviales}, 2.10.1: “Those [events] that Pindar describes are much better: ‘Where heroes mixed sat round the noble board’, because they maintained society and good fellowship; for the latter truly mixed and joined friends’, in Hudson (2010) 665.

\textsuperscript{535} E.g. a late first-century BC banquet scene with six participants resting on a \textit{triclinium} from the \textit{lararium} in the House of Obellius Firmus in Pompeii: Dunbabin (2003) 56-7, fig. 27.

\textsuperscript{536} Hudson (2010) 689.
Kline scenes were used not only to represent individuals while they were dining, but also while studying, sleeping or simply reclining without carrying out any specific activities. For instance, an early first-century AD kline monument, which was found in the Via Laurentina necropolis and is now in the Museo Nazionale Romano (inv. 61586), represents a boy sleeping. Another example is a late first-century BC funerary relief from Amiternum (now in the Museo Nazionale Abruzzese) depicts the funeral of a woman, who is also represented as reclining; finally, a reclining couple was represented on the lid of the famous mid-third-century AD sarcophagus of Balbinus found in the catacomb of Pretestato. In the latter, the Emperor and his wife are portrayed relaxing, maybe even dining (though no details have survived), which was associated with the lifestyle of the elite, in contrast to the representation of the Emperor dressed in military clothes depicted on the side of the sarcophagus. It is, thus, possible that the representations of reclining individuals (or, more rarely, couples) were intended to portray daily activities (including dining) of those, who could afford (or were allowed) to recline. Hence, in the case of kline scenes, it was the self-representation that mattered most. Stibadia scenes, on the other hand, represented only dining. As this dissertation focuses on funerary dining I shall discuss only those kline scenes which portray diners, leaving representations of figures who are merely reclining to other scholars.

Looking at funerary art, it is evident, that each type of convivial image carried a different message. While the kline scenes depicted individuals dining, the images with stibadia aimed to emphasise the communal aspect of convivia. For this reason, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to provide a single interpretation of the Totenmahl motif. It is clear, however, that the

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537 Wrede (1981) 123. New research into kline monuments that represent the individuals during activities other than dining is now undertaken by Jaś Elsner (I am very grateful to Prof. Elsner for his comments on this subject). For a study on kline monuments see Wrede (1981).
538 Or, perhaps, individuals’ aspiration to reach such status, as argued by Roller (2006) 33.
539 Apart from some scenes with a triclinium, which were also designed to show communal banquets. In such cases, however, the kline couches were arranged in a similar way as stibadia, so that everyone could share a meal. E.g. banquet on an ash chest from Aquileia (no. 5).
images with diners resting on *klinai* were intended to illustrate their ‘status and privilege, pleasure and luxury’\(^{541}\) and were ‘designed to stress the prestige of the dead’\(^{542}\). The scenes with *stibadia*, in contrast, represented the idea of communal celebration; whether it was, as stated by Dunbabin, ‘the ideal metaphor of happy existence’\(^{543}\) or something more realistic,\(^{544}\) the images of diners on *stibadia* were intended to accentuate the collective character of dining.

There are three main types of dining scene with diners resting on *kline* couches found in funerary contexts: relief representations found on ash chests, altars, *loculi* slabs or caskets of sarcophagi (sometimes also on the sarcophagi lids), the so-called *kline* monuments with sculpted in the round reclining figures on the sarcophagi lids, and the painted images with *klinai* occasionally found on the walls of Roman tombs. The following investigation aims to demonstrate the nature of *kline* scenes as representations focused on individuals (as opposed to *stibadia* scenes, which emphasized the collective character of the events). However, before discussing the three types in more detail it is worth focusing first on the scenes which depicted communal banquets held on *klinai*.

### 2.2. Collective dining scenes on *klinai* in funerary contexts

Apart from several convivial scenes painted on the walls of houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum, which depict banquets held on *klinai* arranged into a *triclinium*,\(^{545}\) there are also examples of similar representations in relief found on some commemorative or funerary monuments from the Italian peninsula. One such scene, is a fragment of a marble slab with the depiction of dining vestals commemorating a public event, which was discussed in Chapter 1.\(^{546}\)

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\(^{545}\) A detailed discussion about *stibadia* dining scenes in Chapter 3.
\(^{546}\) Chapter 1, section 1.1, fig. 8.
Two more examples are provided by early first-century AD marble funerary reliefs from Sentinum and Este. The meal scene depicted on the relief slab from Sentinum, now in the Museo Nazionale in Ancona (fig. 15), was probably part of a larger funerary monument.\textsuperscript{547} It represents twelve participants resting on three \textit{klinai} (clearly recognisable by ornamented legs) arranged in a \textit{triclinium} around a three-legged table laden with five drinking vessels. There were possibly two more banquet scenes depicted on other sides of the block. The context of the scene, however, has been lost, together with the inscription that presumably decorated the monument.\textsuperscript{548}

The dining scene on the funerary altar from Este (fig. 14) represents at least twelve participants reclining on a \textit{triclinium} situated underneath a \textit{parapetasma} (a curtain) stretched on a tree behind. There are two attendants depicted one on either side of the scene. The bottom part of the altar was cut off (and lost) sometimes during antiquity, while the top appears to have been reused. The inscription that most likely supplemented the altar’s decoration is now missing.\textsuperscript{549}

\textsuperscript{547} Dunbabin (2003) 75-77; Compostella (1992) 666-670; Ghedini (1990) 38, fig. 6; Jastrzębowska (1979) 60, no. 111; Bandinelli (1970) 66-68.

\textsuperscript{548} Ghedini (1990) 38; Compostella (1992) 673-675; Dunbabin (2003) 75-76.

Interestingly, the other sides of the altar from Este were decorated with representations of smith’s tools and tools related to wool working. These images may provide a clue to the understanding of the main decoration: the altar could have been dedicated to the memory of a man (probably a smith) by his wife, who also took part in a public meal offered by local officials (perhaps seviri Augustales) in order to honour her deceased husband. This view, however, is purely hypothetical, and, even though the representation of the banquet is most likely of a commemorative character, the emphasis of the decoration is on the ostentatious wealth displayed during the event. Perhaps it was an open demonstration of wealth amongst freedmen and low-class society members.

Another plausible interpretation is that the scene depicts a meal sponsored by the deceased, for a particular group of collegium members. This hypothesis, however, also lacks supportive evidence, which, in this case, would be an inscription. Therefore, the images may represent, as stated by Dunbabin, ‘a lasting record of the generosity of the donors to their fellow councillors or citizens’. Perhaps the monument was designed to commemorate more than one donor, for instance a family, as the additional images depict two set of tools: those used by a smith on one side of the altar, and those relating to the female activity of wool-working on the other side. This could indicate that the altar was in fact intended to honour a man and a woman, and the banquet scene could also relate to them both, depicting a family commemoration rather than a public feast. Again, this interpretation remains an assumption due to the lack of an inscription that could support such a view.

Nonetheless, the banqueting images on the monuments from Este and Sentinum may indeed represent public banquets organized by wealthy citizens, collegia or local officials for other community members. Sponsored public meals were practised all over the empire and are well documented through epigraphic

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550 Compostella (1992), fig. 7 and 8.
552 Compostella (1992) 669.
Evidence.\textsuperscript{556} It is essential at this point, however, to distinguish two types of sponsored communal banquets: those organized by wealthy citizens to demonstrate their generosity (and wealth) and meals sponsored by members of the *collegia* to honour the deceased on regular occasions during the year.\textsuperscript{557} Interestingly, epigraphic sources confirm that at least some of the events organized by *collegia* were intended not only for the members of particular associations, but were open to the public as well.\textsuperscript{558}

Therefore, the convivial images from Este and Sentinum may represent a variety of events: public meals sponsored by the deceased (or his/her relatives) in order to honour his/her memory, feasts funded by wealthy citizens as a demonstration of their virtues, or meals regularly held by the members of the *collegia* on different occasions. The scenes may also depict a completely different event, the context of which was lost together with the inscriptions; or, quite likely, each of the banquet representations might refer to a different occasion and should be considered individually instead of being put into stereotypical categories. The examples provided clearly demonstrate the issues that scholars have to face while seeking a proper interpretation of the subject. The only consensus that has been established regarding the reliefs from Este and Sentinum, is that they most likely represent real events that could have occurred at some time during the life, or just after the death, of a particular individual. It is also evident that they were commissioned in order to commemorate people who either sponsored or participated in the meals depicted, and who hoped to preserve the memory of the events through the reliefs. In this way, therefore, the early first-century scenes express the idea of


\textsuperscript{557} For instance, during the festivals of *parentalia* or *rosalia*, see the discussion in Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.1. Or during the special days of a particular *collegium* (e.g. *natalis collegii*) see Donahue (2005) 104-6 and Donahue (2004) 84-89.

\textsuperscript{558} E.g., the famous inscription of the College of Aesculapius and Hygia (CIL VI 10234) provides reference to at least seven public events organized by the college, see Donahue (2004) 86-8 and Donahue (2005) 105.
collective banquets, which were increasingly frequently represented as *stibadia* scenes from the late first century onwards.

In contrast to the communal convivial scenes with multiple *klinai*, a different message can be taken from the representations of single *kline* scenes. As I outlined above, the motif can be found on three separate types of funerary monuments: frescoes painted in tombs, altar and ash chests, and sarcophagi. The following sections will discuss each type separately in more detail.

### 2.3. *Kline* scenes on frescoes and mosaics

There are few remaining examples depicting individuals (or more rarely couples) on *kline* couches that are represented on funerary frescoes or mosaics.\(^{559}\) The small number of preserved representations of *kline* scenes, however, can be explained by the fragility of this type of art and the limited preservation of frescoes and mosaics from Roman tombs. The majority of scenes portray a single person – most likely the deceased – typically reclining on a high-backed couch.

![Reclining youth accompanied by a seated woman from Tomb 17 in the Porta Laurentina necropolis, now in the Museum of Ostia (inv. 10108)](image)

The individuals are often accompanied by other figures depicted near the *klinai*: either seated, which may suggest that these are the mourning family members (fig. 16), or standing, who would be interpreted as servants (fig. 17). Worth noticing is the depiction of the seated on a high-backed chair female

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\(^{559}\) Apart from the examples discussed below, there are also two representations of reclining individuals on Tombs 16 and 57 in the Isola Sacra necropolis, see Baldassare (1996) 172-80, Calza (1940) 296 (for Tomb 16) and Baldassare (1996) 172-80, Calza (1940) 296 (for Tomb 57).
figure (a mother or a wife of the reclining man), which is a motif that persisted for a long time, and will be discussed further in Chapter 5. \(^{560}\) Interestingly, once we accept that the reclining figures may represent the deceased, the figures who approach the banquet may also depict family members, bringing offerings to the deceased. This idea could be supported by the fact that the food carried by one of the figures on the fresco from tomb 57 in the Isola Sacra necropolis resembles the cakes depicted on other walls in the same tomb, which most likely represented the food offered to the deceased during the commemorative events.

The earliest known painted Roman \textit{kline} scene comes from tomb 17 in the Porta Laurentina necropolis in Ostia (fig. 16) and can be securely dated to the late-first century BC, \(^{561}\) while the last known mosaic representations from a funerary context were found in late-fourth-century AD provincial tombs. \(^{562}\)

A rare representation of a reclining couple was found in Tomb C on the Via Portuense (fig. 17) and is especially interesting as it demonstrates a kind of ‘transition’ between the scenes with \textit{klinai} and \textit{stibadia}. \(^{563}\) The couch on which the couple recline represents a \textit{kline}, however, its front is slightly arcuate and one of its sides is finished off with a soft, \textit{stibadium}-like cushion. Interestingly, the remaining decoration of the tomb presents people playing a ball game, and relaxing underneath flowery garlands, which has been interpreted as images reflecting the pleasures of Elysium. \(^{564}\)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{reclining_couple.png}
\caption{Reclining couple from Tomb C on the Via Portuense, now in the Museo Delle Terme in Rome}
\end{figure}

\(^{560}\) Chapter 5, section 5.4.2. \\
\(^{561}\) Blanc (1998) 105. \\
\(^{562}\) Late-fourth-century mosaics from funerary contexts see below, figs. 20 and 21. \\
\(^{563}\) Casagrande Kim (2012) 241-3, fig. 143, Felletti Maj (1953). \\
\(^{564}\) De Maria (1998). See also the discussion on Roman afterlife in Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.2.
The representation of the couple reclining resembles another banquet scene from a tomb near the columbarium of Statilii (fig. 18), and it is likely that this painting was also intended to represent diners resting on a kline couch (despite the fact that it was depicted as a stibadium-like stripy cushion, placed directly on the ground).\textsuperscript{565}

The image of the reclining couple was aligned with the image of a goddess (most likely Fortuna) and was intended to be viewed first, which makes this couple the most important amongst all the other couples that are shown.\textsuperscript{566} This could indicate that the diners (probably the owners of the tomb) may represent the deceased couple either as they used to recline on a daily basis, or as they do now in the afterlife. It is also possible that the diners were intended to be compared, or even assimilated with the represented mythical pairs. Thus, the meal scene should be interpreted as emphasizing the status of the deceased couple.

\textsuperscript{565} The painting was discovered in an early third-century AD tomb which is now completely destroyed (‘Sepulcrum picturis ornatum’) near the columbarium of Statilii, Via di Porta Maggiore in Rome, see Dunbabin (2003) 109, fig. 58, Ghedini (1990) 42, fig. 13, Nash (1962) 359-369, fig. 1152, Parker (1877) 36-41, photo 3312.

\textsuperscript{566} Most likely three mythological pairs: one male figure is (possibly) Apollo (or Orpheus) holding a lyre. Any further identification of the couples is impossible due to a poor quality of the only existing photograph, while the painting itself is destroyed.
There are only three known scenes of diners reclining on kline couches in the Roman catacombs: two are in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, and one in the Hypogeum of the Flavii in the catacomb of Domitilla. The painting in the Hypogeum of the Flavii is now almost entirely destroyed, and is known only from an early twentieth-century drawing reproduced in Wilpert’s work (fig. 19). It was a rather unusual depiction of the deceased but, as suggested by Dunbabin, must have referred to the ‘standard funerary motif of a reclining couple’.

Similarly, the late third-/early fourth-century AD floor mosaic representations of reclining diners from tombs in Thina (ancient Thanaea) in Tunisia provide names for the represented figures: C. Iulius Serenus, Numitoria Saturnina and Amianthus, which indicates that the figures represented are indeed the deceased. In addition, Iulius Serenus and Numitria Saturnina (fig. 19).
are depicted in an outdoor setting with winged cupids picking flowers, which, most likely, refer to the flowery meadow in Elysium.\footnote{572 See the discussion in Chapter 3, section 3.1.1.1.}

![Image of mosaics with winged cupids picking flowers]

Fig. 20. Mosaics with the representations of the reclining deceased from tombs in Honch Thina, now in the Sfax Museum in Tunisia

Therefore, in this particular case we can assume that the deceased are portrayed in the Netherworld. The depiction of the other banquet scene from Tunisia, however, is less specific and the lack of details makes it impossible to guess whether Amianthus is represented as reclining during his life or in the afterlife (fig. 20).

Finally, an unusual \textit{kline} scene was found in the late fourth-century AD Tomb of Mnemosyne in Antioch, which portrays two reclining women accompanied by four female servants (one reading from a scroll, one bringing wine to the banquet, and two standing and holding bags full of flowers) (fig. 21). The meal is depicted outdoors. Interestingly, the names for two figures could suggest they are intended as allegories: one reclining woman is \textit{Mnemosyne} (‘Memory’), while the servant with the amphora is called \textit{Aiochia} (probably misspelled \textit{Euochia} – ‘Merriment’).\footnote{573 Dunabin (2003) 185.} \footnote{574 \textit{Mnemosyne} may be understood as an allegory to the salvation of a soul, as ‘drinking from the water of \textit{Mnemosyne} is not only a remedy against eventual loss of memory on the initiate’s part, but}
figures, we could assume that the second reclining woman could be the deceased, who dines with the Titaness of Memory in the Netherworld. In fact, all the rites involved in the cult of the dead were intended to preserve the memory of the deceased, and in this way ensure the happy existence of the souls in the afterlife.\footnote{It also facilitates ahis achievement of the immortality proper to numina’, see Bernabé and Jiménez San Cristóbal (2008) 17-18.}

Fig. 21. Two reclining women on a mosaic from the Tomb of Mnemosyne, Antioch

The interpretation of the mosaic with Mnemosyne as referring to the Elysian fields could be supported by the presence of the two attendants who bring bags full of flowers, presumably picked in the meadow in Elysium. However, this is only one interpretation of the mosaic and the scene might have been intended to portray something completely different. Perhaps this particular mosaic was a part of a wider decoration and now, taken out of its wider context, cannot be easily explained. This proves that an understanding of any pictorial images taken out of their original context is purely hypothetical and based on personal perception.

\footnote{Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.}
2.4. Ash chests and grave altars with dining kline scenes

Convivial scenes with individuals reclining on kline couches (in the case of ash chests and funerary altars very rarely a reclining couple) also appeared on a number of ash chests and funerary altars. Out of those, by far the most common convivial design was of a reclining man accompanied by a woman sitting on a separate chair in front of the couch, or on the kline but near the feet of a reclining man (e.g. fig. 22).

There are also items decorated with single reclining men or women (e.g. fig. 23). However, the variety of designs also allows for some less common examples: for instance, a cinerary urn of M. Domitius Primigenius depicts a reclining woman accompanied by a boy standing on a little stool (fig. 24), while an uninscribed funerary altar in the Archaeological Museum in Rhodes presents a drunken banqueter (fig. 25).

The majority of scenes are depicted on a plain background, though some banquets seem to be arranged in architectural settings. For instance, some couches are represented in front of a brick wall, often decorated with garlands, which, perhaps, indicates that the scene was indeed to represent the deceased reclining in their house (or maybe even in their tomb?). It is likely that such scenes were intended to represent the aspirational status of the deceased. Some of the evidence suggests that the ash chests were commissioned mainly for freedmen and people of lower social status, that is people for whom reclining during mealtime was not a natural way of dining on daily basis and hence it was not what the deceased had done during their lifetimes.

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576 The only known example of a late second-century funerary altar of Q. Socconius Felix, see Dunbabin (2003) 116, fog. 64.
578 For the urn of L. Roscius Prepons (fig. 22) see Dunbabin (2003) 115, fig. 63; Sinn (1987), 201, no. 457, pl. 71a.
579 The cinerary urn of Lorania Cypare in Dunbabin (2003) 117, fig. 65; Sinn (1987) 202, no. 462, pl. 72c.
580 The cinerary urn of M. Domitius Primigenius in Davies (2007) 53, fig. 2.5; Dunbabin (2003) 118, fig. 66; Sinn (1987) 201, no. 458, pl. 71c, d. The uninscribed funerary altar in the Archaeological Museum of Rhodes in Dunbabin (2003) 139, fig. 83.
Fig. 22. Late first- or early second-century cinerary urn of L. Roscius Prepons from Puteoli, now in Naples, Museo Nazionale, inv. 4189

Fig. 23. Late first- or early second-century urn of Lorania Cypare, now in the Louvre Museum, inv. MA214

Fig. 24. Late first-century cinerary urn of M. Domitius Primigenius, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 27.122.2 ab.

Fig. 25. Late second-century uninscribed funerary altar from Rome, now in the Archaeological Museum in Rhodes, inv. 638

However, the majority of the epitaphs inscribed on the ash chests and grave altars with kline scenes do not indicate that the deceased was a freedman or freedwoman.583 Due to the substantial cost of ash chests and funerary altars, there is no reason to believe that the monuments were commissioned and purchased by freedmen and lower class citizens. In fact, the kline scenes with diners were a standard repertoire on gravestones of equites singulares Augusti,

583 Mowat (2017) Chapter 6, section 4. I am very grateful to Fiona Mowat for providing access to her catalogue of ash chests and grave altars and to her PhD thesis.
who were fully privileged Roman citizens (e.g. fig. 26).\textsuperscript{584} As argued by Busch, ‘the images being chosen emphasize the status of cavalrymen’, where ‘civilian and private aspects are stressed by the canonical use of banquet scenes’.\textsuperscript{585}

The gravestone of Titus Aurelius Tertius (fig. 26) was decorated not only with the \textit{kline} scene depicted above the inscription panel, but also with a representation of a boar hunt. This motif became common in the decoration of sarcophagi in the third and fourth centuries, and, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter 4, was also intended to emphasise the status of the tombs’ owners. Considering a rather dangerous life style of Roman \textit{equites singulares} it is possible that the dining scenes on \textit{kline} were intended to represent the piece and tranquillity often desired by soldiers. Perhaps then, we can view the scenes as not an aspiration to achieve particular social status, but a particular lifestyle.

However, not all of the images of diners resting on \textit{klinai} undisputedly represent the deceased.\textsuperscript{586} In the majority of cases the depictions of figures reclining seem to correlate with the epitaphs inscribed on the funerary monuments, for instance, the cinerary urn of Lorania Cyprare portrays a woman resting on \textit{kline} (fig. 23), or the gravestone of Titus Aurelius Tertius presents a portrait of the bearded man wearing a military cape on the very top, the same bearded man reclining below, and a bearded man hunting a boar on the bottom of the monument (fig. 26). In these cases, it is natural to assume that the decoration was intended to represent the deceased.\textsuperscript{587}

However, there are at least two examples of ash chests where the figures represented do not match the inscriptions (the urns of M. Servilius Hermeros) (fig. 27)\textsuperscript{588} and of M Domitius Primigenius (fig. 24) with the representations of women reclining. There is no obvious answer for such a mismatch, and the two cinerary urns may provide evidence for a secondary use of the monuments, or,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{584} The gravestone of Titus Aurelius Tertius in Speidel (1994) 128, no. 109. For more tombstones of \textit{equites singulares} see Speidel (1994). For the \textit{equites singulares} see Southern (2007) 118. See also Chapter 5, section 5.4.2.
\textsuperscript{585} Busch (2007) 335-6.
\textsuperscript{586} Davies (2007) 51-4.
\textsuperscript{587} Davies (2007) 44.
\textsuperscript{588} The ash chest of M. Servilius Hermeros in Davies (2007) 52, fig. 2.4; Roller (2005) 79.
\end{flushright}
perhaps, they are ‘just generic scenes which give generalised messages, not intended to be specific to the people commemorated’.\textsuperscript{589}

In addition, an interesting variation of funerary monuments portraying diners reclining provides an uninscribed altar from the Archaeological Museum in Rhodes (fig. 25).\textsuperscript{590} In this example the figure reclining was represented as a drunken man, probably at the end of a symposium. As this particular diner is accompanied by a figure of a bereaved woman, it is possible that the scene as representing the deceased who ‘drained the cup of life to the full’.\textsuperscript{591} Would this, then, allegorically portray the death of the deceased? Or, perhaps, it represents him in the afterlife in the state of everlasting drunkenness?

![Fig. 26. Gravestone of Titus Aurelius Tertius of the equites singulares, now in the Vatican Museum](image)

\textsuperscript{589} Davies (2007) 54.
\textsuperscript{590} Dunbabin (2003) 139, fig. 83.
\textsuperscript{591} Dunbabin (2003) 140.
This takes us to the main problem regarding the figures reclining depicted on the funerary monuments – were they designed to represent the deceased during his/her life on Earth or in the Netherworld? To investigate it further let us have a look at some other examples of convivial kline scenes.

2.5. The ambiguity of kline scenes with diners

As I outlined above, there are only two objects decorated with kline scenes which are accompanied by inscription referring to the decoration. One of them belongs to a group of they so-called kline monuments.\textsuperscript{592} Such a design was also common in (and probably originated from) the Etruscan funerary decoration.\textsuperscript{593} The popularity of kline monuments in Rome started around the

\textsuperscript{592} The main publications about the kline monuments to date are: Wrede (1977) and Wrede (1981).

\textsuperscript{593} Beginning with a late sixth-century BC painted terracotta sarcophagus with a reclining couple from Cerveteri, now in Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia in Rome, see Gardner (1991) 192, fig. 6.7.
mid-first century AD and lasted until the late third century. In this section I shall discuss only examples portraying diners reclining.\textsuperscript{594}

Probably the most famous example of a \textit{kline} monument was discovered in the early seventeenth century underneath the Basilica of St. Peter in the Vatican and can be dated to around 160 AD (fig. 28).\textsuperscript{595} The monument belonged to a certain Flavius Agricola from Tibur (modern Tivoli), who is presented as an older man reclining during a drinking \textit{convivium}: holding a cup, partly covered with a mantle but with bare torso. Just next to his feet is a circular recess for a funerary urn. While the image itself was acceptable for the seventeen-century standards, the inscription below the statue shocked the contemporary discoverers and was immediately destroyed.\textsuperscript{596}

Moreover, under the order of Pope Urban VIII, whoever would dare to recall it was to be excommunicated. Bearing that in mind, revealing the text is, nevertheless, worth risking as it explains the commissioner's intention:

Tibur is my native place; I am called Flavius Agricola. I am reclining here, as you see me, just as I did during those years that fate gave me amongst the living, I looked after my spirit and never lacked the wine. Primitiva, my most charming wife, who was also a Flavian, a chaste worshipper of Isis, attentive to my needs, and of graceful appearance, passed away before me. We spent thirty blissful years together, as a comfort she left me her son, Aurelius Primitivus, to tend out house/tomb with dutiful affection; and so, herself released from care, she has kept a welcome for me for ever. Friends who read this, I advise you. Mix the wine, drink heavily, bound your brows with flowers, and do not refuse sexual pleasure with pretty girls. For after death, earth and fire consume all the rest.\textsuperscript{597}

\textsuperscript{594} As I outlined above, the \textit{kline} scenes also represent figures during activities not related to dining: e.g. asleep or holding scrolls, see Wrede (1977) and Wrede (1981).


\textsuperscript{596} Fortunately, it was recorded before its destruction: Pucci (1968-9) 173-177.

\textsuperscript{597} CIL VI 17985a: Tibur mihi patria, Agricola sum vocitatus, / Flavius, idem ego sum discumbens, ut me videtis. / sic et aput superos annis, quibus fata dedere/ animulam colui nec defuit umqua Lyaeus. / praecessitque prior Primitiva gratissima coniunx, / Flavia et ipsa, cultrix deae Phariaeas casta / sedulaque et forma decore repleta, / cum qua ter denos dulcissimos egerim annos. / solaciumque sui generis Aurelium Primitivum / tradidit, qui pietae sua coleret fastiga nostra / hospitiumque mihi secura servovit in aevum. / amici qui legitis, moneo, miscete Lyaeum / et potate procul redimiti
There are three main aspects that make this inscription especially interesting for this study. First, the character in which it refers to both the commissioner and the represented figure is unique as only one other (known) inscription provides such a clear connection.\textsuperscript{598} There are many examples of funerary monuments depicting reclining figures with written dedications below (or above), not many, however, state ‘it is me who is reclining here’. The inscriptions usually provide the name of the deceased and, occasionally, his/her profession, which allowed scholars to read it as a ‘subtitle’ to the image provided.\textsuperscript{599} It is tempting to follow such interpretations, however, as I demonstrated above, there are also examples of funerary monuments, on which the pictorial representation does not collate with the epitaph inscribed.\textsuperscript{600} That has puzzled the researchers and different interpretation has been suggested,\textsuperscript{601} but no satisfying answer has been provided to date.\textsuperscript{602}


\textsuperscript{598} For the monument of C. Rubrius Urbanus see below fig. 31.

\textsuperscript{599} For example, Dyson [(2010) 387] states: ‘[inscription] CIL VI 4222, where a man [the reclining figure on top of the monument] identifies himself as a \textit{aeditus temple divi Augusti et divae Augustae quod est in Palatium}. Dyson assumes that the statue represents C. Iulius Bathyllus, the freedman of Augustus, to whom the inscription refers.

\textsuperscript{600} E.g. the ash chest of M. Servilius Hermosos portrays a woman, while the inscription referring to a man.

\textsuperscript{601} For example: an idea that a figure may represent the commissioner, who is not the deceased (e.g. a son ordered an altar for his mother) in Dunbabin (2003) 116-120; the \textit{kline} scene represents the status of the deceased: in Roller (2005) 59-65. Davies (2007), on the other hand, emphasises the
The second interesting aspect of Agricola’s inscription is that it provides a connection between the pleasures of life and the oblivion after death. Agricola wanted to be depicted as he often appeared during his life: reclining at a convivial party and with a cup in his hand. The inscription ensured that he never lacked wine, which seemed to emphasise his successful life. But at the end we are warned: remember to seize the day, as there is nothing else after death. Several inscriptions from Roman tombs refer to earthly enjoyments and repeat the formula that praises bathing, wine and sexual pleasures (*balnea vina Venus*).603

The *carpe diem* message on the funerary inscriptions predated Roman culture as many similar dedications could be found on Greek monuments dated as early as the fourth century BC.604 During the Roman period, however, the *carpe diem* motto reached its apex and beautiful representations survived not only on some funerary monuments, but also on the frescoes depicting the frivolous banquets from Pompeii and Herculaneum. Similar ideas can be detected in the representation of a reclining skeleton on a mosaic found in a tomb on Via Appia (fig. 29), which was combined with a Greek inscription invoking the motto of Delphic Oracle ‘*Know Yourself*’ (*ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ*).605
Small figures of reclining skeletons (*larvae conviviales*) were placed at dining tables in order to remind guests of their mortality and invite them to enjoy life. Perhaps, it was this particular idea of the brevity of life, which influenced the parents of Antonia Panace to commission a unique funerary altar for their nine-year-old daughter decorated with a figure of a reclining skeleton (fig. 30). Perhaps, Antonia’s parents’ intention was to demonstrate the pleasures which their little daughter had no opportunity to experience. It is, however, difficult to imagine that Antonia’s parents would have decided to represent their lost daughter as a reclining skeleton.

The final interesting aspect of Agricola’s inscription is that, despite its evident reference to the stoic eschatological ideology of the total oblivion after death, the epitaph appears to be rather ambivalent as it also mentions Agricola’s deceased wife Primitiva who ‘has kept a welcome for him for ever’. This particular passage is often omitted from scholars’ discussions as it may provide a contradiction to the general stoic message carried by Agricola’s

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607 Dunbabin (2003) 135, fig. 79.
609 Harrill (2010) 123.
Perhaps Agricola did not intend to deny that there is a kind of afterlife which, however, does not compare with the bodily pleasures of this world. It is especially possible because a similar idea of a temporary afterlife which eventually ‘will blaze up in a common conflagration’ can be deduced from Seneca’s consolatory letter to Martia. Seneca who himself was a stoic, comforts Martia that her departed son has ‘joined the souls of the blessed’ and has been welcomed by the Scipios and the Catos and Martias father. It is, however, a temporary state, and after all ‘the souls of the blessed [...] and we too, amid the falling universe, shall be added as tiny fractions to this mighty destruction’. Therefore, Agricola’s inscription is not as obscure as has previously been seen, and all its elements fit into the stoic eschatological view.

The inscription on the monument of Flavius Agricola informs the viewer that the reclining figure is the deceased represented during his life, and during activities that he enjoyed most. We have no way of knowing how Agricola imagined the temporary stoic afterlife, but his advice to his friends is clear: drink and be merry while you still can. Therefore, it is rather unlikely that he hoped for cheerful state of everlasting drunkenness, and is unlikely that the reclining figure could represent him in the temporary stoic afterlife.

Interestingly, if we compare Agricola’s monument with other funerary decorations depicting reclining figures it is possible to assume that at least some of them may represent the deceased still enjoying their earthly lives. The ambiguity of the kline banquet scenes, however, emerges when looking at the single other example of a kline scene combined with an inscription that describes the image. The monument of C. Rubrius Urbanus represents Rubrius.

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611 Davies (2007) 48. Agricola’s wife was a follower of the cult of Isis and she must have believed in the afterlife. Perhaps the passage refers to Primitiva’s belief, though, as argued by Davies, Agricola probably did not share that idea.
612 Seneca, Ad Marciam 26.6: omni flagrante materia uno igni quicquid nunc ex disposto lucet ardebit [tr. Basore (1932) 95-7].
613 Seneca, Ad Marciam 25.1: deinde ad excelsa sublatus inter felices currit animas [tr. Basore (1932) 89-91].
614 Seneca, Ad Marciam 26.7: Nos quoque felices animae et aeterna sortitae, cum deo uisum erit iterum ista moli, labentibus cunctis et ipsae parua ruinae ingentis accessio in antiqua elementa vertemur [tr. Basore (1932) 97].
reclining accompanied by his deceased son Cn. Domitius Urbicus Rubrianus seated on a small stool in front of Rubrius’s couch (fig. 31). The inscription states:

He who, while life was given to him, lived meanly, scrimping for his heir, resentful even of himself, ordered that he should be sculpted here by a skilful hand, merrily reclining after his own death, so that at least in death he could lie quietly and enjoy that peace. His son sits on his right, who followed soldiering and died before the sad funeral of his father. Yet what good is a cheerful image do the dead? This is the way they ought rather to have lived

Caius Rubrius Urbanus made this for himself and Antonia Domestica his wife and for Cnaeus Domitius Urbicus Rubrianus his son and for his freedmen and freedwomen and their descendants and for M. Antonius Daphnus.616

Here the dedication clearly refers to the decoration and the reclining figure is the deceased commissioner, while the seated figure is his son. In the case of this particular monument, however, the inscription informs us that Rubrius did not have much opportunity to dine with his son, who died as a soldier sometime before his father. What is interesting is that the relief indeed presents the son as a deceased soldier still wearing a military cape and a sword, but also holding a wanderer’s cane, which perhaps reflects the idea of the journey of the souls of the deceased through the Netherworld.617 Therefore, the image might also represent the peaceful moments that Rubrius hopes to enjoy in the afterlife when he is reunited with his son. Yet, the last sentence confirms the carpe diem message represented here through the convivial image of the father dining with his son: this is how they ought to have lived.


617 E.g. Lucian, On funerals,9: ‘But those of the middle way in life, and they are many, wander about in the meadow without their bodies’ [tr. Harmon (1953) 117].
The difference between the two funerary monuments lays also in the type of events represented. While Agricola ordered that he should be portrayed reclining as he himself often had done during his life, the representation of a cup in his hand and the inscription stating that he had never lacked wine indicate that he is most likely portrayed during a *symposium*.

![Fig. 31. Funerary altar of C. Rubrius Urbanus, now in the Palazzo Barberini in Rome](image)

On the contrary, the funerary altar of Rubrius Urbanus focuses on the broken bond between the father and his son and the inscription states that this is how they should have spent time: together, during a private family celebration.

In fact, looking at the *kline* scenes there are not many examples that portray the reclining figures in a specific context, whether a *symposium*, a family meal or a lavish banquet.\(^{618}\) There are more elaborate representations of diners displayed on Roman sarcophagi, which could indicate that they represent reclining individual during larger events. An example of this kind of casket is the

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\(^{618}\) One more example of a representation of a reclining participant of a drinking symposium must be the uninscribed funerary altar from Rome, now in the Archaeological Museum in Rhodes, see above fig. 25.
late third-century sarcophagus of P. Caecilius Villianus from the Museo Gregoriano Profano in the Vatican (fig. 32).\textsuperscript{619}

![Sarcophagus of P. Caecilius Villianus, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 9538/9539](image)

Fig. 32. Sarcophagus of P. Caecilius Villianus, Museo Gregoriano Profano, inv. 9538/9539

Here, the decoration presents a reclining man, though the dress of the reclining figure and its breast visible through the fabric indicate that the casket was originally intended for a woman and the head of the diner was re-carved to match the inscription. The epitaph provides the name of the deceased: P. Caecilius Villianus, who was a soldier and lived for sixty-nine years. The diner rests on a \textit{kline} and a small table laden with a plate containing a fish is placed in front of him. He is accompanied by a musician seated on a separate chair and at least eight attendants who bring food and drinks for the diner. Additionally, three flying cupids hold a garland above the couch and two smaller figures (children?) play with a bird in front of the \textit{kline}. Despite the plentiful food and number of servants that would indicate the lavish character of the represented meal, the decoration most likely does not represent any particular event and

\textsuperscript{619} Amedick (1991) 167-8, no. 286, fig. 15.2-4; Andraea (1980) 73, no. 232, pl. 41,2.3; Himmelmann (1973) 19 and 47, no. 3, pl. 26-29. Similar dining scenes with plentiful food and several attendants can be found on both sarcophagi [e.g. an early third-century casket from the British Museum, inv. GR 1805.7-3.132 depicting a couple reclining, see Amedick (1991) 131, no. 62, or a mid-third-century fragment of a sarcophagus from the Palazzo Giustiniani in Rome with a couple reclining, see Amedick (1991) 155-6, no. 208], and on sarcophagi lids [e.g. an early fourth-century fragment from the Museo Nazionale Romano with a couple reclining, see Amedick (1991) 150, no. 174].
was intended to emphasise the wealth and status of the portrayed deceased. This interpretation can be supported by the fact that the back of the sarcophagus was decorated with scenes of a lion hunt carved in a shallow relief, which was a common design of the third- and fourth-century caskets, and which, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter 4, was intended to demonstrate the rank of the tombs’ owners.620

Therefore, although some kline scenes appear to be more elaborate than others, they most often present the diners on couches, with small tables laden with food represented in front of them, often accompanied by one or two attendants. These representations are so general to allow us to guess what type of events they may depict. Therefore, it seems more reasonable to view them not in the light of particular types of meals, but as representations of the deceased. Whether these were the true likenesses of the people buried in and/or commemorated through particular ash chests, altars, gravestones, caskets or tombs,621 or were an allegorical depictions of the deceased, they most likely portrayed the idea of dining in a particular way (i.e. reclining) which was associated with the lifestyle of the privileged.

The examples above demonstrate our inability to provide a clear and single interpretation of the dining kline scenes depicted on Roman funerary monuments. The inscriptions that often supplemented images carried various messages, which depended on the commissioners’ personal requirements and beliefs. As for the images themselves, most of them are likely to represent the deceased, perhaps even enjoying the pleasures of Elysium, as shown by the dining scene from Tomb C on the Via Portuense (no. 17); however, in the majority of cases it is impossible to determine whether the representation was designed to refer to this or the other world. Perhaps some of the images were even designed to be ambiguous.622 Therefore, it may be worth considering each

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620 For the scenes with lion or boar hunts represented on Roman sarcophagi see Chapter 4, section 4.1.2.1.
621 This was suggested by Wrede (1981) 123-31 in regard to certain examples of kline monuments representing couple reclining.
image individually instead of seeking a single explanation for the motifs.\textsuperscript{623} In fact the evidence suggests that there are no two identical ash chests known, which emphasises the individuality of the Roman commissioners’ requirements.\textsuperscript{624}

In any case, it is evident that the main intention of the inscribed monuments of Flavius Agricola and Rubrius Urbanus was to preserve the name and the memory of the deceased. It has always been the main reason for the construction of any funerary monument, including cenotaphs and memorials. \textit{Kline} scenes are, therefore, an ideal medium to achieve such a goal: not only do they provide a representation of the deceased, but they also emphasise the status of the person depicted. As I shall demonstrate further, the idea of self-representation and emphasis on the rank of the deceased depicted is also noticeable in the late antique examples of Christian \textit{kline} scenes.

### 2.6. \textit{Kline} dining scenes on late antique Christian sarcophagi

There are only a few known representations of \textit{kline} banquet scenes found on funerary monuments that can be undoubtedly assigned to Christian owners.\textsuperscript{625} This, however, is due to the fact that, first, the convivial images decorated the lids of the sarcophagi, which were usually broken into pieces or misplaced by the grave robbers and tombs’ ‘explorers’, and, second, they were rarely accompanied by specifically Christian scenes.\textsuperscript{626} As the majority of marble coffins are preserved only as fragments it is often impossible to match a lid with a particular casket. This section will examine the few known examples of Christian monuments decorated with \textit{kline} dining scenes, and compare them with non-Christian reliefs. The aim of this section is to demonstrate that the

\textsuperscript{623} Douglas [(1972) 62], and recently supported by Denis Smith [(2003) 7], who summarised: ‘rather than proposing theories that explain all of human history, one should concentrate on intensive descriptions of individual examples, with an emphasis on the individuality. Only then might one tentatively propose explanations to explain the phenomena’.

\textsuperscript{624} Davies (2007) 40.

\textsuperscript{625} This investigation will not include monuments with \textit{kline} scenes, which have previously been associated with Christian owners purely by their provenance in the Roman catacombs. As I discussed in the Introduction, section 0.4.2., catacomb provenance is not a definite factor for an object or a tomb to be understood as Christian.

\textsuperscript{626} The biblical scenes only accompanied convivial images with \textit{stibadia}, these are discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.2, and Chapter 4, section 4.2.
Christian representations of reclining diners were also designed to emphasise the status of the depicted figures.

2.6.1. The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus

The two most striking examples of kline scenes representing diners are the previously discussed kline monument of Flavius Agricola (fig. 28) and the mid-fourth-century sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (fig. 33), which were both found underneath the Basilica of St. Peter. At first glance it seems impossible to find any further analogy between the two: from the former only the upper part depicting the deceased reclining during a symposium survived, while the casket containing a ‘profane’ inscription was destroyed after its discovery. By contrast, the casket of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus was preserved almost in its entirety probably due to the presence of purely Christian iconography. The identification of two fragments of its lid decorated with a traditional dining kline scene, which had been lost after the excavation of the monument in the late sixteenth century, has been possible only thanks to a recent discovery. In addition, the monument of Flavius Agricola depicts only the deceased, while the kline scene on the lid of Bassus’s sarcophagus represents him in the company of (most likely) members of his familia: his wife, slaves and musicians (the feet of multiple figures are still visible in the fragments).

However, despite the differences, the representations of reclining Flavius Agricola and Junius Bassus were, in fact, both intended to focus on the deceased. Roller argues that even though convivial reclining was a privilege of the higher-classes, some members of the sub-élite (especially less wealthy Romans and rich freedmen) favoured the representations of banquets held on klinai, which

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627 The kline monument of Flavius Agricola was found in the Mausoleum R located on the ancient Via Cornelia, now known as the Vatican Necropolis; see Toynbee, Ward Perkins (1956) 30-2 and 58, Wrede (1981) 102. The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus must have been originally placed underneath the first Constantinian Basilica in a tomb built on top of the ancient necropolis during the construction of the church, see Elsner (2006) 86.

628 The inscription was intentionally destroyed. The body of the sarcophagus is either lost (in a way that cannot be paired with its lid) or has not survived either.

were intended to elevate the status of the deceased.\footnote{Roller (2006) 42-5.} This, however, seem not to be the case when considering the monuments of both Flavius Agricola and Junius Bassus.

![Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus](image)

Agricola, according to the epitaph, lived a happy life full of pleasures, which would be the richer-class prerogative. Despite the fact that the inscription did not mention his office, the quality of the monument itself allows us to presume that Agricola had enough resources to pay for his monument, his \textit{nomina} also makes it unlikely that he was a freedman. In this case we can assume that Flavius Agricola did not belong to the lower strata of Roman society. Quite the opposite, bearing in mind the cost of the monument and its full-sculpture elaborate design we should rather see him as a middle-class citizen.\footnote{Mayer (2012) 121-3.}
It has been suggested that Roman elite members paid special attention to constructing their social identity through the representations of negotia (i.e. ‘advocacy for clients, office holding, etc.’) and dining is what they did on a daily basis hence no need to express that through art.632 However, this seem to be an invalid point when considering certain examples from funerary art. The monument of Flavius Agricola was placed inside his family tomb (Mausoleum R underneath the Basilica of St. Peter) and was not intended to be viewed in public (contrary to its present location on display in a museum). Therefore, there was no need for Agricola to construct his social identity through his funerary monument as it was intended to be viewed only by close members of his familia.633 Secondly, the lost inscription clearly states that this is precisely how Flavius wanted to be remembered: reclining during symposium and enjoying himself in life. There is no aspect of aspiration and, perhaps it is exactly how Agricola’s descendents wanted to remember their relative or patron. Therefore, Roller’s argument proves once again that the funerary monuments should not be viewed in a standardised way.

It is likely that some freedmen wished to be represented in a particular way to emphasise their status as an aspiration to the life of the elite (perhaps understood as a better way of living). However, it is also possible that certain middle-class citizens also wanted to be remembered in a way they had often been seen.634 Therefore, the kline scenes could be understood as a medium to accentuate the represented reclining figure regardless of the status, office, class or wealth of the deceased.

One of the two epitaphs on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, on the other hand, identifies the deceased as praefectus urbi, a high-ranking senator, for whom reclining during lavish banquets would be a regular occurrence.635 This example also contradicts Roller’s argument, as Junius Bassus, despite holding a super-prestigious office, had nothing against representing himself as

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634 Mayer (2012) 123.
635 Iun(ius) Bassus v(ir) c(larissimus) qvi vixit XLII men ii in ipsa praefectura urbi necfitus iit ad deum VII kal(endas) sept(embris) Eusebio et Ypatio co(n)s(ulibus) in Malbon (1991) 3.
Interestingly, beside the representation of the reclining figure on the right of the inscription panel, the left side of the lid was decorated with a scene of Junius Bassus addressing his clients (only the lower part of the relief survived representing feet of at least four standing figures). It is, therefore, evident that the decoration on the lid was intended to represent the deeds and status of the owner of the sarcophagus. If that was not enough, the second epitaph inscribed in between of these scenes provided a clear statement about the importance of Junius Bassus, and how much he was going to be missed in Rome:

[...]

He fostered rivers of plenty, moderating the people to the benefit of the native land and the senate house, He died, to the perpetual tears of the city. Nor was it permitted to the servants of the lord to carry the coffin But that was the burden of the striving people. All crowd wept - mothers and boys and old men, And then the pious order [of senators] deposed their togas and wept. Then the monuments seemed to weep, And then the houses themselves along the way (seemed) to give forth sighs. Yield, lofty honors of the living, yield; Because it is a higher eminence that death bestows upon him.

The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus is a rare example of a Christian monument, of which both the casket and (parts of) the lid survived. It is, however, evident that when it was discovered in the late sixteenth century the founders decided to keep the coffin richly ornamented with Christian scenes, while the lid decorated with neutral iconography, which included the reclining deceased, was probably recognised as ‘pagan’, broken into pieces and

eventually used as building material in the basilica. As the majority of Christian sarcophagi were catalogued without their matching lids it is likely that there could have been more objects decorated in a similar way to the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus, with Christian design on the casket and neutral iconography on the lid.

Therefore, despite the differences between the monument of Flavius Agricola and the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus it is evident that both commissioners had a similar idea in mind. Both examples were clearly intended to emphasise the deceased represented on the monuments. In addition, the cost of the material and the quality of the design surely point at the wealth of the owners of both sarcophagi, which combined with the motif of reclining diners emphasises the status of the deceased.

2.6.2. A fragment of a sarcophagus’ lid from Palazzo Doria Pamphilj

A unique example of a *kline* scene comes from a late fourth-century lid of a sarcophagus from Palazzo Doria Pamphilj, which depicts the adoration of the Magi where Mary is reclining on a richly draped couch with baby Jesus at her side (fig. 34).\(^{639}\) The typical late third- and fourth-century representations of the adoration of the Magi depicted Mary sitting on a high-backed chair, usually woven or draped,\(^{640}\) in a similar manner to the figures of female musicians or mourning mothers.\(^{641}\) The relief from Palazzo Doria Pamphilji, on the contrary, represents Mary receiving gifts in, what appear to be, less formal scene. What is more, the *kline* scene with Mary was not intended to represent her as dining.

\(^{639}\) Deichmann (1967) 396, no. 949.
\(^{640}\) E.g. a fragment of an early fourth-century lid of a sarcophagus (or front of a child’s sarcophagus) from the catacomb of Santa Agnese, now in the Museo Pio Christiano, in Deichmann (1967) 15, no. 16; or a lid of a sarcophagus with the inscription *CRI/SP/NA* from the Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican, in Deichmann (1967) 89, no. 135.
\(^{641}\) E.g. a figure of seated female musician on a woven chair near a representation of the reclining deceased: a sarcophagus from the British Museum dated to c. 220AD, Inv. GR 1805.7-3.132, found in the seventeenth century near the church of San Cesareo in Rome, see: Amedick (1991) 131, no. 62 or a late third-century fragment of a lid of a sarcophagus from the catacomb of Pretestato in Rome with a banqueting couple in Amedick (1991) 144, no. 138. An example of a figure of a mourning mother seated on a chair near a deathbed: a second-century sarcophagus from British Museum, inv. GR 1805.7-3.144 in Amedick (1991) 131, no. 60.
therefore the reclinig position must be understood as the emphasis of her status.

The depiction of Mary reclining with Jesus at her side, even though it is one-of-a-kind amongst surviving Christian funerary representations was most likely based on a more common design.\textsuperscript{642} A similar depiction of a woman reclining with a child beside her comes from a mid-fourth century sarcophagus discovered in 1988 during the archaeological excavations underneath Saint-Just de Valcabrère basilica in the Comminges region in France (fig. 35).\textsuperscript{643} The woman wears a long dress and a hat covered with a long veil. The partly preserved relief does not allow the identification of the female figure as Mary, as the two men standing on the right of the \textit{kline} and holding plates with food (fruit?) most likely represent servants rather than the Magi.\textsuperscript{644} The representation of the reclining woman is not a typical \textit{kline} scene either as it does not include a small table, which would normally be situated in front of the couch and laden with food. In addition, the remaining decoration of the fragment is also ambiguous and probably not Christian.\textsuperscript{645} Regardless of the

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig34}
\caption{A later fourth-century fragment of a sarcophagus from Palazzo Doria Pamphilj in Rome}
\end{figure}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{642} However, I have not come across an earlier example representing a woman reclining with a child beside her.
\item\textsuperscript{644} Guyon interprets the scene as representing a funerary banquet, see: Guyon, Schenk (1991) 65.
\item\textsuperscript{645} The two figures depicted on the right of the \textit{kline} are puzzling: one is an elderly, bearded man dressed in a long toga and holding an open scroll in his left hand, the other is a naked figure of a young woman standing as an orant with a lion on her left side (the other side is missing). She was recognised by Guyon as Thecla (who was miraculously protected by a lioness from being eaten in the arena), which was enough to interpret the monument as Christian. This representation would refer to the apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla hence the bearded man could be St. Paul [Guyon, Schenk
\end{itemize}
religious interpretation of the monument’s iconography, it is noticeable that its main emphasis is on the importance of the reclining woman and her child represented in the middle of the decoration, who most likely were the deceased buried in the sarcophagus.

As mentioned before, kline scenes appear frequently on pre-Christian sarcophagi but they are relatively uncommon in Christian relief. The sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and the fragment from Palazzo Doria Pamphilji are rare examples of known Christian monuments of which lids are decorated with dining kline scenes. Only one more fourth-century sarcophagus with the strigil design and sculpted full-size figure of the reclining young man on the lid has also been recognised as Christian due to the inscription DEP PHOYBIANUS V IDUS NOBEMBRES. However, it is likely that the variations of the word depositus appeared more widely in the funerary epigraphy and their classification as ‘typically Christian’ is linked to the religious affiliation of the early twentieth-century researchers rather than to the third- and fourth-

Fig. 35. Fragment of a sarcophagus from an ancient necropolis underneath the Basilica Saint-Just de Valcabrère, now in the Musée Archéologique Départemental, Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges
century citizens of the Roman Empire. Nevertheless, whether Pholybianus was a Christian or not, the decoration of his sarcophagus is neutral and the representation of the reclining deceased was also intended to emphasise his status rather than any particular event. Moreover, Pholybianus is depicted reclining and holding a scroll in his hand, and not dining, the representation of which portrays the deceased during the activities of paideia. Nonetheless, if we assume that the inscription on Pholybianus’s sarcophagus is indeed of a Christian character, the reclining scene on the lid would be the third and last known kline representation on a Christian funerary monument.

2.7. Summary

The discussion above was intended to demonstrate the popularity of kline scenes in Roman funerary art. From the examples presented it is evident that this particular motif was designed to emphasize the status of the represented reclining figures, whether they were the deceased or, later on, Mary and Jesus. However, apart from this it is still impossible to determine a single interpretation of the dining kline scenes, as the evidence rather points to their ambiguity. For this reason, it is possible to assume that they were not intended to carry a single meaning and were used according to the diverse beliefs and wishes of individual clients.

647 The word depositus (or depositio) that appear frequently on the third- and fourth-century funerary inscriptions was classified in the early twentieth century as an indicator that the owner of a monument was Christian [e.g. Marucchi (1912) 56-7; Kaufmann (1917) 53; Knott (1956) 74]. However, Kraemer’s research on Jewish epigraphy proved that this formula was also used on some Jewish funerary inscriptions: e.g. an inscription accompanied by a menorah from the Jewish cemetery in Naples, CIL 5580: hic requiescit in pace / Barbarus filius Cumanii / de Benafri qui vixit an/ n(o)s p(lus) m(inus) XVIII depoti/ t us Idus Iulias Ind VI [in Hebrew: ‘peace to his resting place’] [Kraemer (1991) 159]. In a similar way, formulas such as dis manibus can be found not only in pagan inscriptions, or formulas in pace or benemerenti are also not typically Christian. The header D M was frequently used by the early Christians; e.g. early fourth-century funeral stele of Licinia Amias from Museo Nazionale Delle Terme in Rome: D M / IXΘYC ΖωΝΤωΝ / LICINIAE AMIATI BE / NEMERENTI VIXIT. The formula in pace (en eirene) was common amongst the Jewish inscription, see: Park (2000) 104-12. The phrase benemerenti appears universally on the Latin funeral inscriptions e.g. CIL VI 34978: D M / M COCCI / O ALCIMO AUG / LIBCOCEIA LO / LIA FECIT PAT / RONO SUO BE / NE MERENTI in Moore (1909), 5; or an inscription on the ash altar of Q. Flavius Crito from Lateran Collection in the Vatican Museum: DIS MANIBUS/ Q FLAVIO CRITONI CONIUGI BENE/ MERENTI ET Q FLAVIO PROCULO/ MILIT I COH XII URB/ BASSI FILIO PIENITISSIMO/ IUNIA PROCULA FECIT in Davies (1978) 21, no. 56.

648 For other representation of figures reclining see Wrede (1977) and Wrede (1981).
It is also evident that the dining *kline* scenes were used to demonstrate a self-identity of the deceased. According to the two known examples of depictions of diners reclining which are combined with the inscribed epitaphs that refer to the commissioners’ intentions, the scenes were intended to represent the deceased in very specific ways. In the monument of Flavius Agricola, the deceased ordered that he should be represented in a way he used to spend his days, so that whoever looks at the monument recognises him immediately. Rubrius Urbanus, on the other hand, wanted to be represented as dining with his son, because he had not had much chance to do that in his life. In all other cases, where images are not supported by such a specific message, our interpretation still remains pure speculation.

Interestingly, looking at the few surviving Christian examples of *kline* scenes, it is noticeable that this kind of representation was used to demonstrate the importance and status of the figures depicted. Junius Bassus was a high-ranking senator and was portrayed as such in his funerary monument, addressing his clients and reclining, both of which were the upper-class prerogatives. Mary and Jesus were also portrayed as reclining in order to elevate their importance.

It is also evident that the main focus of the representation was on the individual person (or a couple) and not on the convivial event. As I have shown, it is impossible to determine the type of the meal: whether it was a private or a public event, or whether the meal was a part of an earthly event or a celebration in the afterlife. The emphasis is clearly placed on the figure and the fact that the person is depicted as reclining. Therefore, it is likely that the *kline* scenes were designed to preserve the memory of the deceased through emphasising their status.

In addition, some of the dining *kline* scenes presented appear to demonstrate a transition between depictions portraying the deceased and images of collective meals, which emphasise communal events. In the early scenes of collective meals held on *klinai* depicted on funerary monuments the diners are presented in a more schematic and less individualised way, which indicates that the importance of the scene lies not in the portrayed people but in
the event itself. It is likely that the early representations depicted diners on
*klinai*, because the *stibadia* sitting arrangements were not yet so widely used, or
the designs were not yet developed. Therefore, the scenes with *kline* couches
arranged into a *triclinium* around a table should rather be understood in a
similar way as the *stibadia* scenes, which will be discussed in the next two
chapters.
Chapter 3: Meal scenes on Roman funerary monuments: stibadia scenes

The second type of convivial images which frequently decorated Roman tombs represents communal scenes with participants resting on half-moon stibadia. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, this type of dining scene most likely originated from meals held in an outdoor setting, and it was intended to emphasise the collective aspect of the events rather than the participants themselves. The aim of this chapter is, firstly, to present the available material found in funerary contexts. Similarly to the case of poor preservation of painted examples of the kline scenes, frescoes and mosaics depicting stibadia are relatively more rare than the relief examples. However, in contrast to the discussion of kline scenes, I shall aim to present all known images of stibadia found in the funerary context. Secondly, I shall investigate whether it is at all possible to link any of the convivial images with a particular religion. In order to reach a conclusion, I will examine the overall decorative schemes of particular tombs, as, I will argue, they provide clues for a proper understanding of the subject. The dining scenes will therefore be discussed in groups according to their interpretation, and will then be considered in the wider context of the tradition of Roman funerary decoration and rites. As I intend to demonstrate, the stibadia scenes, despite the similarities in their representations, varied significantly in their characters and functions and cannot be interpreted, in toto, as conveying a single meaning.

The main discussion here will be divided into three separate sections according to the overall interpretation of the scenes, rather than their chronological order. I shall begin with an investigation of pagan images, and this section will include a discussion on images that most likely portray the Elysian picnics (section 3.1.1.), which clearly demonstrate certain beliefs in the afterlife. This section will also incorporate a discussion of scenes which were intended to demonstrate the social status and wealth of the tombs’ owners (3.1.2.), and thus their function differs significantly from the other pagan convivial scenes. Following that, I shall then discuss scenes which reflect commemorative dining (refrigeria), organized by families and collegia (3.1.3.), which not only expresses
a common belief in the afterlife, but was also intended to ensure the immortality of the soul of the deceased.

In the second part of the chapter, I shall investigate the convivial scenes found in the Christian parts of the Roman catacombs (excluding images found in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, which will be discussed in Chapter 5), and will attempt to place the decoration within the wider Greco-Roman context of funerary rites. As I shall demonstrate, the majority of Christian dining images do not differ in their composition, meaning and function from the pagan *collegia* and families’ convivial representations. In only three cases do Christian dining scenes portray specific biblical stories, though they also fit into the overall theme of Christian funerary decoration which reflects salvation as achieved through faith in God.

Finally, I shall examine a representation of an Elysian picnic found in the Hypogeum of Vibia on the Via Appia Antica and compare it to the second dining scene (with Vincentius and Seven Pious Priests) painted on a wall in the same *arcosolium*. As I shall argue, the two scenes represent different types of dining; Vibia is portrayed in Elysium, while Vincentius dines with his companions during a *refrigerium* organized to honour his prematurely deceased wife. However, both scenes reflect a belief in the happy afterlife, and fit perfectly into the pagan funerary context.

The main focus of this chapter will be to investigate the function that these dining scenes were intended to perform. The scholarship to date has concentrated solely on the interpretation of the scenes, however the images were most likely chosen to reflect a specific meaning and perform a particular function. In other words, they must have been chosen for a reason, and this chapter will investigate whether they played a single aesthetic role, or if their function was more complex.

This chapter will be based on the catalogue, and the numbers of particular entries will be provided in brackets. The main focus will be on the

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649 All of the discussed artefacts with banquet scenes can be found in Appendix 1.
dining scenes depicted as frescoes or mosaics on mortuary monuments such as tombs and catacombs. The relief *stibadia* scenes will be discussed in Chapter 4.

### 3.1. Pagan painted collective dining scenes from Roman tombs

Convivial images with diners resting on *stibadia* couches are easily recognisable. They usually depict more than two participants leaning over a stripy, rounded cushion arranged in a semi-circular shape. The food is usually presented either on small three-legged tables, or placed directly on the ground in front of the couches. In many cases the diners are served by attendants, who bring the convivial paraphernalia to them. The meals are usually represented in an outdoor setting, which is emphasized by *parapetasmata* (curtains), trees or flowers depicted in the vicinity of the diners.

As I shall demonstrate below, it is impossible to determine the association of meal scenes with any particular religion simply by looking at them. This way of viewing images taken out of the wider context has been the most common oversight in the previous scholarship. For instance, Jastrzębowska, who has presented one of the most comprehensive academic discussions of collective dining scenes to date, rejected any possibility of connection between the images depicted in individual tombs. Her method led to some very general statements and misinterpretation of many convivial scenes. Therefore, it is essential to examine the dining scenes in the context of the overall decorative scheme, which, I will demonstrate, clearly show correlations between the images. Only in such a way is it possible to positively establish interpretations of the scenes, and provide a potential explanation for their functions.

This section will be divided into four parts, which will investigate the available examples according to their interpretations. Firstly, I shall look at the images representing the pagan afterlife and the Elysian picnics. I shall continue

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650 There is only one known example of a scene representing one diner resting on a *stibadium* (no. 33). An example of a *stibadium* scene with only two participants is in cubiculum 14 in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino (no. 19).

651 Jastrzębowska (1979) 88-90.

652 Several mistakes in Jastrzebowska’s article were pointed out by, e.g., Engemann (1982).
by discussing two dining scenes that represent the social status of the deceased. Finally, I shall present the family and collegia collective meals from Roman tombs. The main emphasis will be on presenting the meal scenes as integral parts of the tombs' decoration, which sheds light on the potential functions of the funerary decoration.

3.1.1. The Elysian picnic scenes

3.1.1.1. Picnic scene from the Large Columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj

Probably the earliest depiction of a meal with participants resting on a stibadium found in a funerary context decorates a wall of the Large Columbarium in the Villa Doria Pamphilj in Rome (now in the Museo Nazionale Romano, no. 1).653 It can be securely dated to the late first century AD.654 The dining scene, which portrays six diners wearing varied colour tunics and circlets of flowers on their heads, is depicted in a separate register, with an additional, yet separate rural scene painted above, and dancing figures entertained by a musician playing a double flute pictured below the convivial scene (fig. 36).

![Fig. 36. The panel with the dancers below the picnic scene from the columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj](image)

Mainly due to the lack of any specific religious symbolism this dining scene has been interpreted as representing a private outdoor picnic, though it is evident that such an explanation clearly considered the scene as separate from

the rest of the decoration. Considering the other images represented in the columbarium, and especially their random subjects and location, it is, of course, possible that the picnic scene was intended to stand on its own. However, it is also likely that the image was somehow connected with the scenes represented close to it: bucolic scenery above and/or a dynamic dancing scene below. In such a case the picnic scene could indeed represent a private al fresco celebratory event, though the dancing scene may also suggest a reference to certain beliefs in the afterlife, especially if we consider its potential connection with the scenes of judgement of the souls represented on the adjacent wall (fig. 37).

Fig. 37. The judgement of the souls and the Three Fates in the columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj

There are several Roman tombs decorated with images depicting the journey of the deceased to the Underworld, the judgement of the soul, and the realm of Pluto, which suggests that the idea was not only known but also often visualised in funerary art. Additionally, a depiction of the Elysian Fields decorated the early third-century Hypogeum of the Octavii on the Via Triumphalis outside Rome (fig. 38). This unique painting portrays the deceased Octavia Paulina, aged six, a daughter of M. Octavius Felix, the owner of the tomb, captured by a winged cupid and taken to Elysium in a manner resembling the famous depictions of the rape of Proserpine; here, however the chariot is pulled by two doves. Mercury leads them to the flowery meadow

656 Including scenes of judgement, nilotic scenes, images of coutryside, mythological scenes, birds, animals and flowers. A detailed description of the images in Bendinelli (1940).
657 See the discussion on Roman ideas of the afterlife in Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.2.
658 See the discussion and examples in Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.2.
where the deceased are occupied with picking tall roses. The fresco is not the only known example of the depiction of Elysium, and I shall refer to it again later in section 3.3.

Fig. 38. Elysian Fields from the Hypogeous of the Octavii on the Via Triumphantis near Rome. Now in the Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 104480, first quarter of the third century AD

Returning to the picnic scene from the columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj, it is unfortunate that the images are located rather randomly around the walls, and there is no real order to their appearance, though the decoration overall represents the mythological Underworld, bucolic landscapes and playful pygmies. This decoration resembles the pictorial representations found in the late first- or early second-century AD Hypogeous in Caivano near Naples (no. 3.), in particular because of the rural scenes it displays. The iconography of this hypogeous also includes a picnic scene, whose composition and style is almost identical to the image from the columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj. However, in the case of the Hypogeous in Caivano, the decoration presents only ‘unrealistic’ bucolic scenery (i.e. not reflecting any actual countryside), and the picnic scene was most likely intended to emphasise the rural aspect of the landscapes. What is more, the diners are represented without circlets of flowers on their heads which differentiates it from the Elysian picnic scene from the columbarium od Villa Doria Pamphilj. Therefore the function of the dining

662 Libertini (2005); Ghedini (1990) 48; Jastrzębowska (1979) 44, no. XXXI.
image from Caivano should be understood as purely aesthetic, and can be compared with the common decoration of Roman houses representing idyllic landscapes.663 This could suggest that the hypogeum in Caivano was designed as a house for the dead, which was a common idea in the Roman world.664

There is no doubt that the decoration of the columbarium of Villa Doria Pamphilj should also be understood in such a way, as both mythological and Nilotic scenes were also common in domestic contexts. However, it is the combination of picnic and dancing scenes reflecting festive celebrations, which, perhaps, was intended to symbolically represent the afterlife.

3.1.1.2. Hypogeum of Crispia Salvia in Sicily

A combination of dining and dancing scenes was also chosen for the decoration of the second-century AD hypogeum of Crispia Salvia in the Lilybaeum necropolis in Sicily, which is additionally decorated with multiple red roses, garlands, peacocks and cupids (no. 4).665 What is more, the dining and dancing scenes, which decorate one of the niches, are clearly linked into a narrative that can be ‘read’ from left to right: first the festive drinking (there is no food represented at the table), and then the dancing. 666

Dunbabin interpreted the decoration as recalling the previously discussed epitaph of Flavius Agricola: ‘mix up the wine and drink far away, binding your brows with flowers’, which would refer to festive celebrations held during the earthly life.667 However, the joyful character of this picnic, the diners wearing circlets of flowers on their heads, and especially the dancing which clearly takes place in a flowery meadow, resembles the decorations of the Hypogeum of Octavii and the Columbarium of Villa Doria Panphilj, all of which reflect the popular idea of a happy afterlife. The picnic scene and the dancers

666 The dancers wear the same colourful tunics as the diners, which indicates that these are the same men depicted in two scenes.
667 Dunbabin (2003) 130. See the discussion about Flavius Agricola and his monument in Chapter 2, section 2.5.
conform to the Platonic description, and echo the verses in the poem of Tibullus or, even nearer in time, the popular beliefs mocked by Lucian. For that reason, it is possible to assume that the Hypogeum of Crispia Salvia was designed to represent the Underworld. Perhaps as the family members walked down the stairs to visit the tomb in order to perform all necessary sacrifices, they could ‘see’ their deceased relatives in the flowery meadow of the Netherworld.

However, it is impossible to determine, whether the figures depicted are the deceased, buried in this Hypogeum, or were intended to symbolically represent the festivity in Elysium. The diners and dancers are all male, while the inscription found in the tomb is dedicated to a woman by her devoted husband. The only woman depicted in the decoration is a seated musician playing a double flute, but it is unlikely that she was intended to represent Crispia Salvia. The hypogeum was constructed with three niches and two arcosolia that allow space for six separate cubicula intended for inhumations, and it is likely that more than one individual was buried in each casket. The inscription dedicated to Crispia Salvia is placed in one of the niches, while the convivial scenes decorate a different niche. Perhaps the decoration could have been designed to portray the other deceased buried in the hypogeum, as enjoying the afterlife? Or, perhaps, the diners and dancers portray the idea of a happy afterlife rather than people buried in this particular hypogeum? Neither of these ideas, however can be confirmed due to the lack of any additional inscriptions providing names of the deceased.

3.1.1.3. The picnic scene from a tomb near the columbarium of Vigna Codini in Rome

A similar jolly atmosphere can be found in an early third-century convivial scene from a tomb near columbarium 1 in Vigna Codini on the Via

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668 Newby (2016) 232-40. The three round holes cut in the floor next to the cubicula confirm that libations were offered for the dead.
669 Crispia Salvia must have been a member of the Sicilian aristocracy and it is hard to imagine that she would have been depicted as a servant musician, see Giglio (1996).
670 An excellent 3D view of the Hypogeum can be found on the Marsala City Council’s website: http://www2.comune.marsala.tp.it/marsala_tour/flash/ipogeo.html (accessed on the 21/09/2016).
Appia in Rome, now in the Louvre Museum (no. 5).\footnote{Dunbabin (2003) 130; Ghedini (1990) 41, fig. 11; Jastrzębowska (1979) 36, no. XXII; Tran Tam Tinh (1974) 71-2, no. 50.} What makes this scene different from previous representations is that the fresco depicts both male and female diners.\footnote{According to Campana’s reproduction of the painting [(1840) 322].} However, similarly to the representations of Elysian picnics, all diners wear circlets of flowers on their heads. Moreover, as the picnic takes place underneath a vine pergola, the picnic scene has been associated with the cult of Dionysus.\footnote{Ghedini (1990) 41. Though Dunbabin [(2003) 130] suggests that the vine should rather be understood as a general indication of the conviviality of the represented scene.} Unfortunately, the tomb was destroyed after excavation, and the leading ‘archaeologist’ – Giampietro Campana - provided only brief information that the sepulchre had been richly decorated with both frescoes and marble reliefs.\footnote{Campana (1840) 51.}

What is interesting, however, is that Campana’s reproduction of the convivial scene is combined with the depiction of two tall cypress trees to the right of the diners.\footnote{This is also confirmed by Tran Tam Tinh (1974) 71.} Such trees were, of course, typical features of the Roman landscape,\footnote{Carroll (2015) 534.} but they were also considered as sacred trees of Pluto, the god of the underworld.\footnote{Lindsay (2000) 155.} Therefore, it would be very tempting to interpret the scene as portraying the deceased enjoying themselves in the afterlife.

Looking at the three examples presented above it is evident that the festive character of the events depicted played an important role for the tombs’ commissioners. The diners are represented as relaxed, their poses are cheerful, they seem to be engaged in conversations, and the represented events bring to mind informal gatherings. All participants wear circlets of flowers on their heads, and are often entertained by musicians. The last picnic scene from this series, the one from the tomb near columbarium 1 in Vigna Codini, even though it survived without any adjacent images of dancers or musicians, is still very characteristic and clearly points to the jovial character of the gathering that most likely took part in the afterlife.
As for the function of such decorations, they not only portrayed certain beliefs in the afterlife, but were also intended to link the tomb with the Netherworld.\textsuperscript{679} This is especially evident from the example of the Hypogeum of Crispia Salvia, where the decoration portrays a jovial celebration taking place in the afterlife. Perhaps the images were intended to reassure the living relatives that the souls of their deceased were happy and well nourished in the other world. Therefore, this kind of decoration was most likely designed to be viewed by living users of the tombs. However, such understanding of the images is only possible if one considers that the pictures form part of a larger decorative scheme. Otherwise, looking at the scenes as each is standing on its own would make such an interpretation impossible.

The following section will demonstrate that viewing images as part of wider decoration is essential as the two examples of picnic scenes, which will be presented, are stylistically similar to the scenes discussed above. One presents a festive picnic, and the other places the diner within the setting of a flowery meadow. However, as I shall demonstrate, the function of the following convivial scenes is very different.

3.1.2. Dining scenes that represent the social status of the deceased

Roman funerary iconography contains a rich repertoire of images and scenes that were designed to demonstrate, or elevate, the social status of the deceased. One example of this type of representation – the kline scene – has been discussed in the previous chapter, and more motifs will be presented in Chapter 4 in regard to the \textit{vita humana} sarcophagi. The following section will examine two painted representations of convivial scenes, which, forming part of wider decorative scheme, were designed to perform a similar function.

3.1.2.1. A lavish banquet scene from the tomb of Vestorius Priscus in Pompeii

\textsuperscript{679} As opposed to the examples where the decoration was most likely designed to resemble the images found in Roman houses, see e.g. a hypogeum in Caivano near Naples (no. 3).
Very similar in style to the examples presented above is an opulent banquet scene from the late first-century AD tomb of Vestorius Priscus in Pompeii (no. 2) (fig. 39).

![Picnic scene combined with the depiction of a table laden with silver dishes, and a Nilotic scene with pygmies on the Tomb of Vestorius Priscus, Pompeii](image)

Additional representations of two large sculptures of peacocks placed on top of cubic pedestals and the inclusion of a curtain above the diners may suggest that the image was intended to present an event held either in a private garden or, perhaps, at a cemetery. The latter possibility could indicate that the convivial image represent a funerary meal. The presence of peacocks and the festive character of the event, which is accentuated by a musician depicted on the right below the diners, and by the number of drinking vessels scattered around the table, may also at first glance resemble the Elysian picnic from the Hypogeum of Crispia Salvia.

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681 For the relevance of peacocks in Roman funerary art see Balch (2008) 32.
However, there are other elements included in the decoration that point to a major difference in the function of the dining scene from Vestorius’s tomb. Here the picnic scene is accompanied by images representing wealth and prestige: a depiction of a young seated aedile (most likely Vestorius) surrounded by several men, a gladiatorial combat (probably one of the events sponsored by Vestorius) and a table laden with numerous costly silver dishes, accentuating the prosperity of the deceased. 684 Moreover, lest those representations should not be enough to emphasize the status and wealth of young Vestorius, the first scene visible after entering the tomb depicts Vestorius himself as paterfamilias standing in a doorway of a room furnished with, amongst other things, a table laden with money, which leaves us in no doubt about the intentions of the commissioner of this décor (in this case Vestorius’s mother). 685

Such references to the social and economic prestige of the deceased suggest a different interpretation of the convivial scene: it might have depicted one of the opulent banquets in which Vestorius took part during his life. 686 Perhaps Vestorius even sponsored such banquets himself, which would emphasize his wealth and generosity in an even greater way. 687 In such a case all the images included in the decoration should be viewed as commemorating Vestorius’s deeds and prosperity.

However, the images on the tomb of Vestorius Priscus were not visible to passers-by, but only to Vestorius’s family members. 688 Surely, Vestorius’s relatives must have known about his prosperity; so what was the purpose of such an ostentatious display of his wealth? The epitaph itself which is inscribed on the marble altar placed on top of the funerary monument, and which is visible from outside the tomb, would have been enough to communicate the elite status of the deceased. Perhaps the decoration was a simple reminder of

688 The tomb is surrounded by a tall wall which hides the inner decoration.
Vestorius to all who visited the tomb, both literate and illiterate members of his *familia*.

In addition, the scene of the lavish picnic in Vestorius’s tomb is accompanied by a painting situated below the convivial image of playful pygmies navigating boats on the river Nile (fig. 39). Images of pygmies frequently decorated not only tombs, but also public areas and private rooms, usually used for dining, in the houses of the Roman elite. The images of pygmies played an important apotropaic function and were designed to protect the occupants of the houses or users of the tombs from the ‘Evil Eye’. The representations of pygmies on the tomb of Vestorius Priscus would therefore play a double role: not only to protect the visitors of the tomb, but also refer to Vestorius’s elite life-style. Therefore, the perfect iconographic unity of the decoration of Vestorius’s tomb demonstrates that it must have been carefully planned. The scenes complement one another and portray Vestorius as a wealthy member of the municipal elite.

### 3.1.2.2. The Hypogeum of Arangio from the Villa Landolina Necropolis in Syracuse

This picnic scene, completely different in style, though similar in meaning, was found in the mid-fourth-century Hypogeum of Arangio in Syracuse (no. 33). The scene represents a post-hunt picnic, with a single diner resting on a *stibadium* and being served by an attendant, while the second servant is butchering a black animal (a boar?) to the right of the composition. This representation clearly resembles convivial scenes from sarcophagi decorated with either mythological or *vita humana* hunting events. The hunt scenes which can be found in several Roman tombs, reflect the elite villa life

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692 They will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4, section 4.1.2.
style, and in such a way portray the status of the figures represented.\textsuperscript{693} However, there is no possibility of determining whether the owner of the tomb, who was most likely represented as the hunter dining, was a member of the Sicilian elite, or whether he commissioned the design to elevate himself to the higher ranks.\textsuperscript{694}

The picnic scene from Syracuse is also unusual as it depicts only one diner resting on a \textit{stibadium}. It is, therefore, evident that the decoration’s commissioner intended to represent the hunter, rather than a collective meal. The fact that the diner rests on a \textit{stibadium} reflects an outdoor setting for the picnic, where a \textit{kline} couch would not be a natural choice. In the case of the Hypogeum of Arangio, the picnic takes place in a flowery meadow which most likely refers to an outdoor setting for the event, though might have also portrayed the deceased hunting in the afterlife.\textsuperscript{695}

These two examples of convivial images again demonstrate the necessity of viewing the scenes as part of a more complex decorative repertoire. It is only thanks to the adjacent images that we can see that these examples, so different in style, representing different events, and produced three centuries apart from each other, were designed to perform a similar function. It is also noticeable that, similarly to the scenes depicting the joyful celebrations in the afterlife, the decoration representing the status and prosperity of the deceased was most likely intended to be viewed by the living, in order to reassure them about the happy existence of their departed in the other world.

\textsuperscript{693} Several hunt scenes were discovered in the tombs in the Isola Sacra necropolis, e.g. a painting of a lion hunt in tomb 24 or a depiction of a deer hunt in tomb 26 (personal observation). A hunt scene also decorated the famous third-century Tomb of the Nasonii, see Borg (2013) 245.

\textsuperscript{694} The modesty of the tomb and its decoration should not be an indicator of Arangio’s poverty or lower social status. It appears that in Syracuse the members of the local elite were also buried in similarly designed simple hypogea. For instance, Crispia Salvia belonged to the local aristocracy, while her husband Iulius Demetrius, was most likely a wealthy wine merchant. Their funerary monument, however, is excavated and decorated rather crudely.

\textsuperscript{695} Depictions of red roses are found ubiquitously in Syracusan tombs as a background to all kinds of representations, e.g. around Jonah, Daniel and Good Shepherd in \textit{loculus} 1 in the south gallery in the cemetery of S. Lucia see Ahlqvist (1995) 330-3, fig. 80b; or around a seated man in \textit{loculus} 3 in Hypogeum X in the cemetery of S. Maria di Gesù, see Ahlqvist (1995) 313-17, fig. 78. However, a neighbouring representation of a poppy pericarp in the Hypogeum of Arangio, which was a Roman symbol of everlasting sleep, may suggest that the decoration reflects the afterlife. For previous interpretations of the scene see Ahlqvist (1995) 211.
The majority of the dining scenes discussed so far come from a span of time of approximately one hundred and fifty years, between the end of the first and the early third century AD. These scenes, despite being designed to perform different functions, all appear to be linked by common messages of convivial festivity, and the preservation of the memory of the deceased either by representing them in the afterlife or by portraying their status. However, these joyful and festive meal scenes disappear from funerary decoration in the early third century, and are replaced by more ‘formal’ representations of meals, where the figures of the diners are represented almost as if they were sitting still behind semi-circular tables; the figures are less animated and do not wear circlets of flowers on their heads. As I shall demonstrate in the following section, the new design of the meal scenes reflects convivial events organized by living members of Roman families and collegia. The change in style also indicates a shift in the character of the events represented: from depictions of the dead to the representations of the living who commemorate the dead in order to ensure the peaceful and happy existence of their souls after death. As I have shown in Chapter 1, the commemorative rituals of refrigeria can be attested as a Roman mortuary practice from around the beginning of the third century, which might have been linked with the change in funerary iconography. The next section will discuss certain third-century examples that focus on the living, who are depicted performing necessary rites in order to ensure the happy and peaceful immortality of the souls of their deceased.

3.1.3. The dining scenes depicting family commemoration of the dead and collegia events

There are several examples of third-century convivial images that represent commemorative events organized for the dead by their families or by professional associations. Meal scenes of this type are characterised by a slightly more ‘formal’ design. This section will present examples which most likely portray the living rather than the deceased, though, as I shall argue, they were

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696 Chapter 1, section 1.3.1.2.
intended for the departed. I shall begin with a fresco, which combines not only a representation of a ‘farewell’ event held by a family in honour of the deceased boy, but also of his journey to the Netherworld.

3.1.3.1. Tomb of Atimetus in the piazzola on the Via Appia Antica in Rome

This fresco is located in the piazzola and decorates a late-second century AD plaster loculus closure situated in a small sepulchre in the southwestern part of the courtyard. The picnic scene, recognisable by the shape of a stibadium, is crudely sketched in the left section of the composition (no. 9). The tomb, according to the inscription, was dedicated by Earinus and Potens to their eight-year-old son Atimetus, who was an imperial slave. The additional symbols of an anchor and a fish should not necessarily be considered as evidence for a Christian interpretation of the images.

The images most likely depict the journey of Atimetus to the afterlife (on the left of the inscription) and entering the underworld through two golden arches (on the right). The nakedness of the figures in the right section of the sealant usually represents the heroic nature of men or gods. In addition, a second figure, now almost completely vanished, was represented next to the youth depicted standing on the right of the inscription panel: it most likely depicted Mercury Psychopompos (‘Guide of Souls’) leading the deceased to the Underworld. Thus, the picnic scene can be understood as a final ‘farewell’ to the departed, and most likely symbolically portrays Atimetus’s relatives during an honorific meal.

What is unique in this decoration is that the arch on the far right is surmounted with an object that looks like a set of scales. Bearing in mind the

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697 Tortorella (2011) 1359-73; Finney (1994) 232-3, fig. 6.65; Ghedini (1990) 46, fig. 23; Stryger (1935) pl. 32.
698 ICUR V 12892: *Atimetus Aug(usti) vern(a) / vixit annis VIII / mensibus III / Earinus et Potens / filio.*
699 See the discussion in Finney (1994) 237. Tortorella [(2011) 1362-73] argued that the decoration on the loculus represents Jesus entering Jerusalem, a motif which, as noticed by Tortorella himself, does not appear in Christian art until the fourth century AD [Dinkler (1970) and Goffredo (2000)].
funerary context of the representation it is likely that this reflects the ancient idea of the weighing of souls, especially popular in Egyptian funerary culture.\textsuperscript{702}

Looking at these images it is evident that they were designed to depict some meaningful scenes linked with the transition between life and death and the ascension of the deceased to the afterlife. Therefore, this early third-century decoration provides a link between the previous depictions of the afterlife and the later representations of the commemoration of the dead. This combination of images of the deceased in the afterlife and a commemorative meal held in their honour is not unique and appears again in the mid-fourth century decoration of the arcosolium of Vibia, which will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. However, the most common representations of dining in funerary contexts present the commemorative meals organized by families and collegia. These scenes, as I shall argue, not only portrayed the refrigeria, but also performed an additional role, which was to support, or even to be a substitute for the actual rites.

3.1.3.2. Columbarium 31 in the Via Laurentina Necropolis in Ostia

The first example of this kind originally decorated the early third-century columbarium 31 in the Via Laurentina necropolis in Ostia (no. 6), but can now be found in the Biblioteca Apostolica in the Vatican.\textsuperscript{703} The uniqueness of the scene is instantly noticeable as the inscriptions above the five male diners provide their names (\textit{N[?]mus, Felix, Foebus, Restutus and Fortunatus}).\textsuperscript{704}

The dining scene is accompanied by a representation on the adjacent wall of four men dressed in short tunics, loading a cargo on a ship (called Isis Giminiana) in the presence of three other men (Abascantus, who was probably a

\textsuperscript{702} Brandon (1967) 76-97 and Brandon (1969). It is very unlikely that these particular images could have reflected the Christian idea of the judgment, as, firstly, there is no mention of the weighing of souls in the scriptures, secondly, the are no references to weighing the souls in the works of the Church Fathers, and, thirdly, the earliest known visual Christian representation that has been interpreted as a potential reference to the judgment of souls can be found in the sixth century mosaic in the church of Saint Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, see Resnik and Curtis (2011) 24 with references.

\textsuperscript{703} Dunbabin (2003) 128, fig. 7; Ghedini (1990) fig. 12; Jastrzębowska (1979) 36, no. XXIII; Meiggs (1973) 294-5. For the Via Laurentina necropolis see Borg (2013) 28-9.

\textsuperscript{704} Jastrzębowska [(1979) 68] argues that these are the names of the participants of a real commemorative event that happened after the death of the deceased.
grain merchant and the ship owner, a second man dressed in a short, black tunic holding a branch of a tree in his left hand – probably a port official, and Farnaces Magister - the captain.\textsuperscript{705} It is very likely that the images were linked together, which, in turn, may indicate that the columbarium belonged to a guild of workmen of Portus depicted here both during their daily routine, and during certain collegium activities.\textsuperscript{706} Moreover, the floor in the columbarium was arranged into a triclinium, which was probably regularly used over the years by the members of the collegium for funerals and commemorative celebrations.\textsuperscript{707}

The composition of the images suggests that it is Abascantus who was the most prominent figure represented in the decoration. In fact, he was probably the founder of the columbarium. Bearing in mind that there was a large number of burials in columbarium 31, it is likely that the named diners were intended as representations of the whole collegium. In such a case, the depicted convivial scene could have been meant to represent many real refrigera that happened in this columbarium, or, perhaps, not real events at all, but an idea of commemoration instead.

What is most important is the combination of the two images of the workmen during their daily activities and the dining scene. It is evident that the decoration's emphasis was on the profession of the guild and the commemorative services provided by its members for their deceased colleagues.\textsuperscript{708} Such a combination of images appeared also in two cubicula in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.\textsuperscript{709}

3.1.3.3. Hypogaeum of the Aurelii on Viale Manzoni in Rome

A direct reference to a refrigerium held in honour of a collegium member was found in the Hypogaeum of the Aurelii on Viale Mazoni in Rome.\textsuperscript{710} Here, however, membership in the collegium depended not on any particular

\textsuperscript{705} CIL XIV 2028; Rohde (2012) 239; Meiggs (1973) 294.
\textsuperscript{706} Ghedini (1990) 42. On the presence of collegia in Ostia see Rhode (2012) 79-274.
\textsuperscript{707} Rohde (2012) 95-117; Egelhaaf-Gaiser (2000), 295; Floriani Squarciapino (1958), fig. 61. See my discussion of collegia commemorative activities in Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.
\textsuperscript{708} For a discussion on certain collegia occupying columbaria see: Borg (2013) 30-1.
\textsuperscript{709} Chapter 5, section 5.2.
profession, but on belonging to the *familia* of Aurelii. The decoration of the hypogeum, which developed between 220 and 230 AD, has been vigorously debated since the discovery of the tomb in 1919, and several different religious identities, including Christian, Gnostic, ‘Heretic’, pagan and ‘syncretistic’, have been proposed. What is interesting is that the very complex decoration of chamber A also contains a convivial scene (no. 7), which has been interpreted according to the potential religious affiliation of the tomb’s owners. Regardless of the interpretation, however, it is quite evident that the meal scene is an integral part of the overall decoration and must be considered in a wider context.

A very fresh and interesting approach to the iconography of the Hypogeum of the Aurelii was proposed recently by Jastrzębowska, who suggested that the narrative scenes represented in chamber A depict a *manumissione vindicta* – a ceremony of freeing a slave. Therefore, the meal scene, instead of carrying any biblical, Gnostic or celestial messages, can be recognised as an image referring to events organized by a *collegium* of the members (freedmen and slaves) of the Aurelii family.

Such an interpretation can be supported by the presence of the painted inscription, now almost completely faded, that refers to the rite of *refrigerium*.

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711 Based on two inscriptions found in the tomb: ICUR VI 15932: Aureliae Myrsin[ae filiae] | dulcissimae quae vixit ann(is) | V mensibus VI diebus XI | Aurelii Martinus et Iunia Ly[de paren] | tes fecerunt in Giovagnoli (2011) 230, pl. 15; and ICUR VI 15931: Aurelio Onesimo | Aurelio Papirio | Aureliae Prim(a)e virg(ini) | Aurelius Felicissimus | fratris et colliberti(bus) b(ene) m(erentibus) f(ecit) in Jastrzębowska (2012) 54.


713 The dining scene has been previously seen as a funerary feast, a meal with Job, a Christian banquet, a Eucharistic rite, a messianic banquet with Jesus, the feeding of the crowds, a celestial banquet of the blessed, a celestial meal of the deceased Aurelii, Jesus appearing to the eleven disciples after his resurrection, the Last Supper, a funerary meal of the Aurelii or one of the real banquets of Aurelia Prima, see Pergola (2011) 121-3.

714 In the majority of cases the dining scene has been considered on its own and it is surprising that the correlation between all images in chamber A has been noticed only recently: Jastrzębowska (2012) 55; Braconi (2011) 135–164; Grassigoli (2002) 414.


observed at the end of June by a certain Remmeus Celerinus to honour the
deceased Aurelius Epafroditian.\textsuperscript{717} The inscription is located on the same wall as
the dining scene, rather not right beside it (fig. 40).

Fig. 40. An inscription from the Hypogeum of the Aurelii in Rome: Re(m)neus Celerinus /
k(alends) Iunis refriq(r)ium (fecit) / moum hono(rem) A(urelii) Epafro(diti)

This would imply that, even though both the lettering and the meal
scene allude to the collegium’s convivial activities, it is unlikely that they refer to
the same event. The composition of the decoration leaves no doubt that the
convivial scene is a part of the narrative representation of the manumissione
vindicta, i.e. a celebratory meal that would probably follow an official ceremony.
This interpretation, however, does not exclude the possibility that the convivial
event might have included a commemorative rite, perhaps to honour the
deceased members of the collegium, during a celebratory meal.

The decoration in the Hypogeum of the Aurelii therefore provides
another example of the integrity of the decorative scheme found in the majority
of Roman funerary monuments. In the case of the tomb of the Aurelii, its
commissioner ordered a specific and unique set of images that clearly reflected
the character of the collegium, which was associated with freedmen and
freedwomen of the Aurelii family.\textsuperscript{718} Therefore, scenes depicting the
manumissione vindicta are not surprising as they allude to an important events

\textsuperscript{717} ICUR VIII 20798: in Carcopino (1956) 97; Jastrzębowska (2012) 60.
\textsuperscript{718} Borg (2012) 112-15.
in the lives of the deceased. Similarly, members from the *collegium* of port workers in Ostia decorated their columbarium in the Via Laurentina necropolis with images indicating their occupation and group activities. It is, therefore, evident that the decoration focused on representing the members’ affiliation to a *collegium* regardless of their religions and beliefs.

3.1.3.4. The façade of the Tomb of M. Clodius Hermes

Another example of the convivial activities of *collegia* can be found in the *piazzola* situated under the basilica of San Sebastiano on the Via Appia Antica in Rome.719 The image containing four *stibadia* meal scenes (no. 8) is located on the upper part of the façade of Mausoleum X, which was built mid-second century AD by M. Clodius Hermes for his family, his freedmen and their offspring.720 Later on, probably some time in the first half of the third century AD, it was re-used and re-decorated by a *collegium* of workmen of the imperial court.721

Even though the five *stibadia* are located to the right of the attic’s façade, they are in fact placed in the very centre of the decoration’s composition with bucolic scenes (shepherds and a swineherd) and groups of men flanking the convivial images on both sides. It is likely that the two groups of standing men might have represented more participants joining the diners, or, perhaps, judging by the size of the figures, which would indicate their importance, they might portray the sponsors of the picnic (whoever they might be). The scenes with the shepherds and the swineherd were, most likely, designed to demonstrate the rural and peaceful setting for the picnics, rather than reflecting a biblical story.722

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What we know about the *piazzola* is that in the early third century it was used by at least two separate *collegia* who gathered there regularly in order to dine and commemorate their deceased members. As the images are located on the façade of Mausoleum X, and must have been visible to all users of the courtyard, it is very likely that they do not reflect private family gatherings, but events organized for a larger number of participants. The lack of any specific details makes is possible that the images were not intended to represent any particular event, but rather the idea of commemorative rites. For these reasons, it is rather likely that the decoration of the façade was designed to represent multiple *refrigeria* organized by a *collegium*(a?) active in this region in the early third century AD.

### 3.1.3.5. Tomb of the Banquet from Constanta

The final example of a pagan commemorative dining scene decorates a fourth-century AD tomb (known as the Tomb of the Banquet) in ancient Tomis, modern Constanta in Romania (no. 34). The distinctive clothes of the diners (*tunicae manicatae* – long sleeve tunics, and *bracae* - trousers) may suggest that the tomb belonged to a family of a military officer. However, it is impossible to state whether the picnic scene was intended to represent any particular type of event as the adjacent decoration does not provide any clues. The fact that the convivial scene represents only male participants, which does not correlate to the actual people buried in the tomb (the remains found in the tomb are of four men, a woman and an infant) suggests that it was probably not intended to represent the deceased dining in the afterlife.

It is more likely that the scene represented a commemorative event, which could be indicated by the presence of six moon-shaped cakes on the table.

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723 *Collegium Innocentiorum* in Jastrzebowska (1981) 53 and Jastrząbrowska (2010) 183-4. Borg (2012) 153) noticed that the iconographical and inscriptive evidence from the *piazzola* and Mausoleum X would suggest the presence of more than one *collegium* in this specific area.


726 The banquet from Constanta has been interpreted by Barbet as representing a Christian funerary meal. However, there is nothing in the decoration which might corroborate such understanding.

in front of the five diners: the sixth cake could have been symbolically intended for the deceased. Similar-style decoration was found in the neighbouring Tomb of the Orants including two picnic scenes placed on the two long walls of the chamber. Here the picnic scenes are accompanied by praying figures which were common in both a pagan and Christian contexts and reflect the commemorative character of the meal scenes. The orants most likely were intended to strengthen the funerary prayers (depicted in Christian funerary contexts as biblical stories), while refrigeria scenes portrayed the commemorative rites. Therefore, as the dining scenes in the Tomb of Orants represented refrigeria, it is likely that the meal scene in the Tomb of the Banquet might have depicted a similar event. Moreover, the size of the tomb and the number of burials point to the family ownership of the sepulchre, therefore the dining scene most likely reflected a private family commemoration.

3.1.3.6. The function of the family and collegia dining scenes

The examples discussed in this section presented the depictions of convivial events that were organized by Roman families and collegia. As the images are located in tombs belonging to certain individuals, families and associations, it is likely that they refer to the commemorative meals (refrigeria) held in order to honour the deceased. As for the example from the Hypogeum of the Aurelii, it most likely represents a different kind of meal organized by the collegium (probably a celebration connected with the manumissione vindicta), but it is also possible that during regular gatherings of the collegia their members also commemorated the departed.

From the discussion presented above it is evident that, although there has been considerable discussion of the meanings of particular convivial scenes in Roman tombs, the functions of the funerary decoration as a whole has been overlooked by scholars. Surely, there must have been a reason why anyone would want to represent collegia meetings on their tombs. One reason, of course, would be to demonstrate the guilds’ activities, as in the case of the decoration

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from columbarium 31 in the Via Laurentina necropolis, or some important events, as in case of the scenes from the hypogeum of the Aurelii, which represent the *manumissione vindicta*. Or, perhaps, to portray the generosity of a *collegium* through the representation of communal picnics sponsored by the guild. However, it is essential to stress here that in almost all of the cases the decoration was placed inside the tombs and was visible only to small and closed groups of people, therefore the question of the ‘demonstration’ of activities or generosity remains. Who was supposed to view these images?

Perhaps, it is worth considering once again the decorations’ funerary context. As I outlined above, along with the development of this particular type of convivial representations came a specific rite of commemoration of the dead: the *refrigeria*, which were intended to provide nourishment for the deceased in order that their souls could exist peacefully in the afterlife. It is, therefore, likely that at least some of the representations of convivial events found in the Roman tombs performed a similar function: they were intended to reassure the deceased that such rites are being offered to them.

Alternatively, some dining scenes could have been designed to substitute for the rite itself. If the figures of pygmies were indeed understood in the Roman world as possessing some apotropaic qualities, which clearly points to the ‘power’ of the images, maybe some scenes of diners honouring the dead were intended to perform the duties of the relatives in periods of time when an actual commemoration could not take place? In Antiquity images could be comprehended as carrying some special properties: this is a well-documented phenomenon, as can be seen, for instance, from the magical and apotropaic medallions and amulets worn by the living, and eventually placed in graves in order to protect the dead, or the late antique Christian destruction of the ‘wicked’ images of ancient gods that were believed to have been possessed by demons.730

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For example, a symbolic reading of certain religious images can be observed in Mithraic representations of tauroctony (e.g. no. 161).\textsuperscript{731} Archaeological evidence neither confirms nor denies that a sacrifice of a bull was indeed performed by the followers of Mithras during their meetings,\textsuperscript{732} therefore the portrayal of slaying a bull should be understood as a symbolic reference to the world of gods rather than as a realistic event. Perhaps we can even read the image as a substitute for an actual ceremony as the representation of a divine sacrifice had even more power than an offering that would have been performed by people. Archaeological evidence suggests that the images of tauroctony were worshipped, which clearly indicates their powerful characteristics.\textsuperscript{733}

It is, therefore, possible that the convivial images from the Roman tombs were indeed perceived as carrying some special power, especially if we consider their connection with the world of the \textit{manes}. As argued by Jensen, ‘[images] do not mean only one thing; they encompass the depth and richness of meaning attached to any idea or symbol’.\textsuperscript{734} In this case, the idea of the afterlife was visible not only in the images representing the Elysian fields, but also in the convivial scenes of the diners as symbolic or actual representation of those who met on several occasions to commemorate their deceased and offer libations, because that was their duty and the only way to ensure that the departed rest in peace. But the commemoration was not guaranteed forever – when the relatives die and their relatives die, who was responsible for observing the rites? Perhaps this was the main function of at least some of the convivial scenes: to last and ensure an everlasting salvation of the departed souls. To follow this thought, the decoration was intended for the dead, to reassure them that the rites are being performed.

This was not a uniquely pagan idea and references to commemorative dining can also be found in Christian imagery in the funerary context, as will be

\textsuperscript{731} Elsner (1995) 210-21.
\textsuperscript{732} However, as Elsner admits, bringing a bull and sacrificing him in a small underground space, which are the characteristic features of the ancient Mithraea, would be almost impossible: Elsner (1995) 212.
\textsuperscript{734} Jensen (2004) 47.
discussed in the following section. However, as I shall argue, the early Christians understood and used the images of *refrigeria* in the same way as their pagan neighbours, which demonstrates the continuation of the traditional funerary rites until at least the late fourth century AD.

### 3.2. Painted meal scenes from Christian *cubicula*

The dining scenes from Christian graves and sarcophagi do not differ from the contemporary convivial images found on the non-Christian funerary monuments. Therefore, their identification as ‘Christian’ scenes is based on the adjacent decoration or, more rarely, on an inscription supplementing a monument. This section will present all known third-century convivial images that can be classified as Christian and, wherever possible, will place them in the context of the entire decorative scheme of the monuments. This section will focus on dining scenes found in Roman catacombs, but will exclude the images from the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

#### 3.2.1. General overview of the scenes

The earliest examples of dining images in Christian art come some Christian *cubicula* in the Roman catacombs. There are four dining scenes (two mid-third century, and two dated to the second half of the third century) in the catacomb of San Callisto on the Via Appia (*cubicula* A2, A3, A5 and A6), and one convivial image securely dated to the late third century in the *Capella Greca* in the catacomb of Priscilla on the Via Salaria (nos. 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 respectively). There are also three scenes in the *Coemeterium Maius* on the Via Nomentana: one in the mid-third-century *cubiculum* 3, and two in the late third-/ early fourth-century *cubicula* 16 and 19 (nos. 15, 16 and 17 respectively).\(^{735}\)

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\(^{735}\) Additionally, Jastrzębowska [(1979) 19, no. VIII] provides a reference to a destroyed convivial scene which used to decorate the ‘*cubiculum* of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace’ in the catacomb of Giordani, which is of uncertain date, however, most likely also from the second half of the third century. There is no information about this scene in Nestori (1975). Jastrzębowska provides a reference to the image to Josi (1931) 276, however, there is no information about any dining scene in this particular source.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cubiculum</th>
<th>Location in the cubiculum</th>
<th>Additional scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A2 Cal</td>
<td>Middle of the right wall</td>
<td>Jonah, a Good Shepherd, Lazarus, Moses, an angler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 Cal</td>
<td>Middle of the rear wall opposite the entrance</td>
<td>three scenes with Christ, Jonah, an angler, the healing of the paralytic and Abraham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5 Cal</td>
<td>Middle of the left wall</td>
<td>Jonah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6 Cal</td>
<td>Middle of the rear wall opposite the entrance</td>
<td>Moses, Lazarus and Jonah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capella Greca</td>
<td>arch of the second vault, opposite the entrance</td>
<td>On the vault with the dining scene: Noah, Daniel and Abraham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 CM</td>
<td>Back wall of the arcosolium on the left from the entrance</td>
<td>Christ, the resurrection of Lazarus, the miracle in Cana, Moses striking the rock, and several orants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 CM</td>
<td>Back wall of the arcosolium opposite the entrance</td>
<td>Christ as Judge, the healing of the paralytic, Lazarus, Moses, Jonah, Noah, Daniel, a Good Shepherd, three youths in the fiery furnace, and several orants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 CM</td>
<td>Back wall of the arcosolium on the left from the entrance</td>
<td>Jonah, three youths in the fiery furnace, Adam and Eve, a Good Shepherd, Daniel between the lions and a figure of an orant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

It is very likely that there used to be many more such representations, which have been lost over the centuries. All of these meal scenes are accompanied by images which can undoubtedly be associated with the Christian religion (see Table 1).

Looking at the decoration of the third- and early fourth-century tombs, which contain meal scenes, it is noticeable that the majority of the convivial images were positioned in the most visible and/or central parts of the walls (see Table 1). The walls opposite the doorways were usually decorated with images carrying the most important message.736 Placing the dining scenes in the

centre of the side walls, which were the second most honorary places in the chambers’ decoration also emphasized their importance. It is, therefore, evident, that at least some of the convivial scenes must have carried crucial messages for the *cubicula* owners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Interpretation of Christian dining scenes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bosio (1632)</td>
<td>Miracle in Cana/ Multiplication of bread and fishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garucci (1872-81)</td>
<td>Miracle in Cana/ Multiplication of bread and fishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rochette (1837)</td>
<td>Continuation of the traditional cult of the dead that originated in the Etruscan times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Rossi (1864-1859)</td>
<td>Symbolic Eucharist that encompassed the stories of Jesus dining with the disciples at Lake Tiberias and the feeding of the crowd after the miracle of the multiplication of bread and fishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilpert (1903)</td>
<td>A3 Cal and <em>Capella Greca</em>: Eucharist; the rest portray biblical stories and miracles of Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dölger (1922-45)</td>
<td>Multiplication of bread and fishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kollwitz (1953)</td>
<td>Collective dining during mourning period, though with strong soteriological meaning that refer to the power of God and miracles of Jesus (i.e. multiplication of the bread and fishes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuiber (1957)</td>
<td><em>Refrigeria</em>, but in the sense of earthly funerary meals and not the celestial dining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauser (1966)</td>
<td>Funerary Eucharist, which was performed in order to ensure celestial happiness of the deceased Christians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nestori (1979)</td>
<td><em>Agapae</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jastrzębowska (1979)</td>
<td>Traditional cult of the dead and the development of Christian charitable meals called <em>agapae</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engemann (1982),</td>
<td>Celestial meals and the depictions of the deceased dining in the afterlife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisconti (2000)</td>
<td>Dining scenes oscillate between realistic funerary meals and eschatological vision of the celestial dining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunbabin (2003)</td>
<td>Convivial scenes are intentionally ambivalent and designed to interact with the viewer – interpretation was dependant on the individual perspective of the tombs’ visitors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

The meaning of the convivial scenes found in Christian tombs has been vigorously debated over the past centuries of research (see Table 2). However, it is evident that in the majority of cases the convivial scenes have been interpreted outside the context of the decoration as a whole. Therefore, it is clear the search for a proper understanding of the function of the dining scenes requires further examination of the adjacent decoration and its correlation with the dining scenes. The next section will consider the Christian convivial scenes as part of the decorative scheme, which will not only enable their proper identification, but also demonstrate the functions they were designed to perform.

3.2.2. Christian convivial scenes in context

3.2.2.1. Biblical picnic scenes in cubiculum A2 in the catacomb of San Callisto, and cubicula 3 and 19 in the Coemeterium Maius

A study of the pictorial imagery of four cubicula containing dining scenes in the catacomb of San Callisto provides very interesting results. These cubicula are situated side by side and were developed in a relatively short span of time.\footnote{Cubicula A2 and A3 developed in c. 230-240 AD, while A5 and A6 date to c. 240-260 AD.} Even a quick glance at the images makes it clear that the convivial scene in cubiculum A2 is different from the representations found in the other three tombs (no. 10). The panel containing the dining scene in cubiculum A2 is also decorated with a figure of Moses striking the rock on the left side and an angler sitting on a boulder and fishing in the stream that poured down after Moses’ miracle (fig. 41).\footnote{Bisconti (2009) 17, fig. 5; Nestori (1975) 102, no. 21.} The second panel, situated on the right of the convivial scene was painted with an image of a flying bird and an ornamental motif.\footnote{Nestori (1975) 102, no. 21.} The sections are separated by a reddish line, which emphasises that
Moses, the angler and the picnic scene belong to one story, and should be read as a narrative from left to right. Thus, the figure of the angler should not be taken as a clue to the profession of any of the diners, and anyone viewing the decoration should include the figure of Moses in the overall interpretation.

Fig. 41. Moses, an angler and a picnic scene from cubiculum A2 in the catacomb of San Callisto

The story of Moses striking the rock is repeated in the bible several times and must have been well known in the mid-third century.\textsuperscript{740} It was also one of the most common decorative motifs that appeared in early Christian funerary decoration.\textsuperscript{741} The representation from cubiculum A2 is one of the earliest known depictions of this narrative from the Roman catacombs, and for that reason it is possible that the painter could have ‘experimented’ with the design and included the scene with the angler and the picnic to emphasise the biblical story, which was not only intended to demonstrate the miracle of making water flow from the rock performed by Moses, but also commemorated the salvation of the Israelites from death by thirst or hunger in the desert. The story of Moses would have been known to the commissioner/painter of cubiculum A2 from sermons and preaching (texts of which have not survived to date) that also might have included certain allegorical use of fishing and dining imagery.\textsuperscript{742} The overall story depicted in the scenes fits perfectly into the theme of salvation that dominates early Christian funerary decoration. What is also

\textsuperscript{740} It appears not only in the Old Testament in Exodus 17:6 ("Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel) and Numbers 20:11 ('Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank'), but also in Deuteronomy 8:15, and in Psalms 74, 78, 105, 114.

\textsuperscript{741} It was represented in at least seventy-five cubicula, see Nestori (1975) 213.

\textsuperscript{742} Francis (2009) 299-302.
evident is that the images complement one another to make the soteriological theme even stronger: Moses alone represents the power of God, while the dining scene without being clearly linked to Moses would not have been interpreted as representing Moses’ companions. The angler also links the story into one narrative.

The combination of the images of the angler fishing in the vicinity of the picnic scene closely resembles the decoration of cubiculum 3 in the Coemeterium Maius, where the stibadium with seven participants is set above a river with seven fishes (no. 15). Additionally, seven baskets stand to the left of the picnic. It is the representation of flowing water below the picnic scene that makes it different to other convivial images found in Christian cubicula. It is, therefore, likely that the decoration was designed to refer to one of the miracles performed by Jesus.\(^\text{743}\) It is especially likely because the majority of images depicted in this cubiculum also portray Jesus (Table 2). In such a case they could fit into the the eschatological theme of early Christian funerary decoration.

A final depiction of a particular biblical story with a convivial scene decorates cubiculum 19 in the Coemeterium Maius (no. 17): this portrays a banquet of five ‘Wise Virgins’,\(^\text{744}\) who are also represented as holding torches on the right side of the arcosolium.\(^\text{745}\) Additional scenes of Daniel among the lions, and Adam and Eve, accompanied by the figures of an orant and a Good Shepherd emphasise the overall Christian message that runs through this composition. The parable of the ‘Wise virgins’ also confirms the eschatological theme, and that those who have been prepared can join Jesus in the Kingdom of Heaven.

\(^{743}\) E.g. the multiplication of bread and fishes in Matthew 14:13-21, or the first miracle performed by Jesus when he met Simon Peter and ordered him to fish again after an unsuccessful night in John 21.3-7.

\(^{744}\) The parable of the ‘Wise Virgins’ in Mathew, 25. 1-10: ‘Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise answered, saying, ‘No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut.’

\(^{745}\) Nestori (1975) 35, no. 19.
Therefore, in the case of the *arcosolium* decoration, the identification of the convivial scene as a meal in the Kingdom of Heaven is only possible when viewing the scene in the context of the neighbouring images. Without the representation of the five virgins holding torches depicted on the right, the dining scene could easily be mistaken as a standard portrayal of a funerary meal.

3.2.2.2. *Cubiculum A3 in the catacomb of San Callisto*

In contrast to the narrative scenes from *cubiculum A2* in the catacomb of San Callisto and chambers 3 and 19 in the *Coemeterium Maius*, a separate panel with a convivial scene framed with a continuous red line in *cubiculum A3* is located in the middle of a larger section containing scenes with two orants standing on either side of a three legged table to the left of the meal, and the figures of Abraham and Isaac depicted as orants surrounded by a small flock of sheep to the right (no. 11). Additional figures of *fossores* holding their tools flank the composition at both ends, but are separated from the other images by the red lines. In this case, the meal scene should be considered as a separate image, which is accentuated by the presence of a framing line around the scene. The additional representations of orants and biblical figures may have some connections with the middle section containing the meal scene, but should probably be considered as individual images that support the reading of the main (in this case, the meal) scene.

Due to the presence of the images of *fossores* it can be deduced that the *cubiculum* belonged to a group of grave-diggers (a family? *A collegium*?). As for the dining scene, it is depicted without any indication of its location, which suggests that the setting did not matter. As to the multiple baskets represented at both ends of the *stibadium*, they should be understood as an allegorical

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746 Bisconti (2009) 21, fig. 11; Nestori (1975) 102, no. 22.
747 Unfortunately, due to centuries of plundering of the catacombs, it is now impossible to determine the original location of the epigraphic material found in Area 1. By the time De Rossi documented his excavations in this region the inscriptions were broken, and random pieces of the same epitaphs were often found scattered around in different places. Therefore, the inscriptions that De Rossi found in certain cubicula might not necessarily have come from those tombs.
reference to the collective (communal) character of the depicted event, rather than to any particular biblical story.748

Fig. 42. Two scenes of sacrifices from cubiculum A3 in the catacomb of San Callisto

Worth noting is the position of the convivial image between two scenes referring to sacrifices: on the left a man places fish and bread on a tall three-legged table in the presence of a female orant, while on the right Abraham and Isaac pray after the moment in which Abraham tried to sacrifice Isaac but was stopped by God (fig. 42). The latter representation is unusual and must have been specifically commissioned to match the sacrifice scene on the left.749 The scene with Abraham and Isaac should be understood in a metaphorical sense as it clearly refers to the early Christian eschatological theme, and, possibly, reflects an early Christian funerary prayer discussed in Chapter 1.750

The scene on the left, on the contrary, presents a moment of actual sacrifice, though, as the image combines fish and bread, it is unlikely that it was intended to represent the rite of Eucharist.751 Therefore, bearing in mind the sepulchral setting for the images, the offering possibly reflects a funerary

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748 Jastrzębowska (1979) 68.
749 The usual representation (and one of the most popular scenes in early Christian art) of Abraham sacrificing Isaac is of the exact moment of God’s intervention, see, e.g. in cubicula 12, 21, 24, 28, 49 or 52 in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, the Capella Greca in the catacomb of Priscilla, or cubicula 3 and 7 in the catacomb of Giordani.
750 Chapter 1, section 1.3.3.
751 According to the early Church Fathers the Eucharist consisted of bread and wine, see, e.g. Justin Martyr, First Apology 65: ‘There is then brought to the president of the brethren bread and a cup of wine mixed with water’ [ed. Roberts (2007) 185]; Irenaeus, Adversus haereses 5.2.3: ‘the bread and wine are wisely put to man’s use, and when they receive the word of God they become the Eucharist, that is, the body and blood of Christ’ [in Hamman (2001) 92].
sacrifice. The fact that the scene of the sacrifice on the left and the dining scene portray the same kind of food (fish and bread) strengthens a potential link between the two images: the food offered during a funerary rite is then consumed during a collective meal. Perhaps we can read the images from left to right as they go: ‘we sacrifice this food to God, we dine to commemorate the dead (offer refrigeria), please God: save their souls as you saved Isaac’. Therefore, this visual representation supports the argument that the Christians continued traditional mortuary rites, while the specifically Christian accent would be achieved by a Christian prayer, depicted here through the images of Abraham and Isaac as orants praying to God.

Moreover, the images in cubiculum A3 could also be understood in a similar way to the dining scenes representing the picnics of collegia, i.e. that their function was not only to represent, but also substitute for funerary and/or commemorative rites. This is especially likely as the dining scene is not very detailed and represents only men without any individual features, while the female orant who prayed over the sacrifice on the left is nowhere to be found, therefore the images appear to be standardised rather than represent any actual events. Thus, it is possible to consider the images as taken from a pattern book and combined in a particular design in order to carry a specific message.

I would therefore propose that we see the dining scene as a symbolic representation of funerary and commemorative rites (refrigeria) that was designed to stand for the commemoration of the dead when the rituals were not actually observed, as it was in the case of the pagan depictions of refrigeria that were discussed above. However, I do not deny that the actual commemoration did take place, quite the opposite: the images suggest that the owners of the tombs must have observed regular rites in order to ensure a happy afterlife for their deceased as long as the tomb was in use. Perhaps we should view the convivial scenes as being intended to last beyond the actual practices, as a substitute for commemoration when the living were not able to observe the rites for the dead. They could, thus, guarantee everlasting happiness in the

752 Chapter 1, section 1.3.1.
753 See the discussion on early Christian funerary prayer in Chapter 1, section 1.3.3.
afterlife: as long as the images exist the commemoration will take place and the souls of the dead will be refreshed in the Netherworld.

3.2.2.3. Cubicula A5 and A6 in the catacomb of San Callisto

Similar standardised convivial scenes can be found in two more cubicula in the catacomb of San Callisto. In chamber A5, a separate panel depicting a dining scene and framed with red lines is located between two sections decorated with representations of flying birds (no. 12). The lack of any other supporting images suggests that the dining scene should be considered as an individual representation, which on its own carries a specific message that was clearly understood by, at least, the owners of this particular cubiculum. Similarly, the last known meal scene from the catacomb of San Callisto, located in cubiculum A6 is represented on its own in the middle of the left wall of the chamber (no. 13).

The fact that both images stand on their own, that the images are standardised and do not portray the participants in any individual or animated way may suggest that they were not designed to depict any actual event. Additionally, each convivial scene from cubicula A3, A5 and A6 depicts a different number of baskets of bread which makes it rather unlikely that they could refer to any particular biblical story, and they probably should be viewed as symbolic representations of plentiful food, as in the depiction from the façade of the tomb of M. Clodius Hermes. For this reason I would propose viewing the scenes from chambers A5 and A6 in the same way as the convivial image from cubiculum A3: they most likely represent refrigeria meals (in an allegorical rather than realistic way) held in honour of the dead, but their additional function was, perhaps, to stand for the actual commemoration of the deceased when the observance of the rites was not taking place.

754 Bisconti (2009) 33, fig. 22; Nestori (1975) 103, no. 24.
755 Bisconti (2009) 38, fig. 28; Nestori (1975) 103, no. 25.
756 Jastrzębowska (1979) 68.
3.2.2.4. **Cubiculum 16 in the Coemeterium Maius and the Capella Greca in the catacomb of Priscilla**

Two more analogous convivial scenes can be found in cubiculum 16 in the Coemeterium Maius (no. 16) and the Capella Greca (no. 14). However, in contrast to the dining scenes from the catacomb of San Callisto, the two convivial images provide less standardised representations of the scenes. The dining image in chamber 16 is combined with an additional panel representing seven baskets and two amphorae depicted below the stibadium. According to the early seventeenth-century drawing of the painting, three out of seven participants are women, though the current state of the fresco does not allow us to confirm such identification. The image most likely represents a refrigerium, either one that actually took place or, perhaps, an allegorical event, and because it is surrounded by several biblical scenes referring the eschatological theme (see Table 1), I propose to view it in the same way as the convivial scene in cubiculum A3 in the catacomb of San Callisto. Here, the scene of the refrigerium, which as a traditional funerary rite was intended to ensure the happy existence of the souls in the afterlife, conforms to the eschatological reading of the biblical scenes that reflected a Christian mortuary prayer which was discussed in Chapter 1.

This idea is even more evident in the decoration of the Capella Greca. The composition of the scenes clearly suggests that the convivial image carried a similar message to the scenes reflecting the prayer for the salvation of the souls. The fact that the participants are represented in a more individual way makes it possible to interpret the image as being intended to represent actual people who were somehow connected with the tomb (the owners or the deceased). Therefore, it is possible to view the dining scene as representing a refrigerium, which not only depicted the commemorative rite, but could also have been intended to stand for everlasting commemoration, which would

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757 Nestori (1975) 35, no. 16.
758 Bosio (1632) 185.
759 Nestori (1975) 27, no. 39.
760 See the discussion in Chapter 1, section 1.3.3.
ensure the salvation of the deceased souls according to the traditional Greco-Roman idea.

3.2.3. Christian dining scenes – a summary

It is, therefore, evident that despite the general similarities between the convivial images their interpretation may vary, and this can only be detected by considering the scenes in the context of the decoration as a whole. As the example of the dining scene with the 'Wise Virgins' from cubiculum 19 in the Coemeterium Maius demonstrates the presence of some additional images may provide a clue for a proper reading of the decoration. Similarly, the scene of a meal combined with the representation of an angler and Moses striking the rock in cubiculum A2 needs to be differentiated from other convivial images found in the same region of the catacomb of San Callisto. In this case, the composition of the scenes clearly reflects a particular story, (perhaps taken from a homily?) and it is possible to link it with the overall eschatological theme of early Christian funerary decoration.

In contrast, the other third-century Christian convivial scenes that were discussed in this chapter most likely represent *refrigeria*. They are often combined with biblical images illustrating the salvation of biblical characters, and reflect the early Christian funerary prayer for the salvation of the souls of the deceased. The dining scenes could also have performed an additional function of strengthening or even substituting for honorary rites when the actual commemoration was not able to take place.

As a result of considering the Christian dining scenes as part of wider decorative schemes, it is possible to compare the non-narrative scenes with the non-Christian examples from the same time. The convivial scenes from *cubicula* A3, A5 and A6 in the catacomb of San Callisto, the *Capella Greca* and cubiculum 16 from the Coemeterium Maius resemble the picnic scenes from the façade of M. Clodius Hermes (in the number of baskets depicted) or columbarium 31 from the Via Laurentina necropolis (in the more ‘formal’ character of the event). The representation of multiple baskets of bread was, most likely, intended to depict
the plentiful food that was a characteristic feature of the *collegia* meetings.\textsuperscript{761} It is therefore likely that the Christian convivial scenes were intended to represent the *refrigeria* in the same way as the non-Christian examples. They should, then, be understood as a visual representation of a transition between the traditional Greco-Roman and Christian funerary practices.

As demonstrated previously, the early Christians were members of the wider Greco-Roman community and the pictorial, epigraphic and archaeological evidence suggests that they did not invent their tombs’ decoration, funerary rites and prayers.\textsuperscript{762} Quite the opposite; they gradually transformed existing practices and images to fit the new Christian ideology, although, as the example of the convivial images demonstrates, such adaptation and transformation must have taken some time. The Christians continued traditional commemoration of the dead until, at least, the early fifth century, and so in the third century, when the dining scenes were painted on the tombs, the link must have been even stronger. The evidence for this is also demonstrated by the fact that the collective convivial images gradually disappeared from funerary decoration in the course of the fourth century, which is exactly the time when the Church became involved in the commemorative rites, and eventually, in the fifth century, established the funerary Eucharist.\textsuperscript{763}

For that reason, it is possible that the early Christians chose to decorate their tombs with convivial images because such scenes not only portrayed traditional commemoration of the dead (*refrigerium*), which was supposed to ensure a peaceful existence of souls in the afterlife, but also maintained the idea that the images could substitute for the rites in order to strengthen or extend their outcome. This commemorative meaning and function of convivial scenes is

\textsuperscript{761} This is known from several inscriptions that state the status of a *collegium*: e.g. the *collegium* of Diana and Antinous in Lanuvium, CIL XIV 2112: [...] *magistri cenarum ex ordine albi facti qu[---]Jo ordine homines quaterni poneredebe b[unt] vini boni amphoras singulas et panes a(ssium) Il qui numeros collegi fuerit etsardas o[u]-mero quattuor strationem caldam cum ministerio [...]; or the *collegium* of Aesculapius and Hygiea on Via Appia, CIL VI 10234: [...] XI K(alendas) Apr(iles) die violari eodem loco praesentibus dividerentur sportulae vinu et pane Sscut diebus s(upper) s(cryptis) [...].

\textsuperscript{762} See the discussion in the Introduction, section 0.3.2. and Chapter 1, section 1.3.

\textsuperscript{763} See Chapter 1, section 1.3.2.
especially evident in the last known representation of a refrigerium which comes from a pagan tomb, and which will be discussed in the following section.

3.3. The arcosolium of Vibia and Vincentius

The final funerary monument that will be discussed in this chapter comes from a small mid-fourth-century hypogeum on the Via Appia Antica in Rome, located opposite the catacomb of San Callisto.\textsuperscript{764} The tomb in question, situated in one of the arcosolia in the hypogeum, belonged to a certain Vibia and her husband Vincentius, a priest of the eastern god Sabazius, about whom we are informed by the inscription painted above the niche.\textsuperscript{765} The decoration of the arcosolium is especially interesting as it depicts, amongst other images, two separate dining scenes (nos. 35 and 36).

The first image located on the back wall of the niche portrays Vibia as, first, entering Elysium together with the Angelus Bonus on the left and, eventually, resting on a stibadium couch amongst the Bonorum Iudicio Iudicati (‘those judged by the judgement of the righteous’).\textsuperscript{766} The scene of the Elysian picnic is combined with images depicting the the judgment of the dead with Dis Pater and Aera Curia, who were the Gallic chthonic gods equivalent to Pluto and Proserpine (fig. 43).\textsuperscript{767} Vibia stands together with Alcestis, the deceased wife of the mythological king Admetus. The women have been brought to the judgement by Mercurius Nuntius (Mercury the Messenger) while Three Fates (Fata Divina) stand on the other side of the composition.

The left wall of the niche contains a scene of the kidnap of Vibia (Abreptio Vibies): Dis Pater and Vibia are depicted in the style of a well known funerary representation of the abduction of Proserpine, but, this time, an inscription clearly states that the victim is Vibia herself (fig. 43). Mercury,

\textsuperscript{764} The Hypogeum of Vibia and the catacomb of San Callisto must have been connected by a corridor, which allowed the first explorer of the Hypogeum to claim its Christian ownership, see Ferrua (1971) 7.


\textsuperscript{766} Dunbabin (2003) 190.

\textsuperscript{767} Jufer and Luginbühl (2001) 40-45.
depicted on the right, holds the horses’ harness and leads the chariot to the underworld (DISCENSIO).

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 43** The judgement of Vibia, and the kidnap of Vibia

The scenes of the abduction and the judgement, combined with the depiction of Vibia being led to the Netherworld and eventually dining with those who have been judged, clearly narrate the story of Vibia’s premature death and her family’s belief in Vibia’s happy existence in the afterlife.\footnote{Casagrande-Kim (2012) 165-8.} The scene of the abduction and the company of Alcestis (a devoted wife) during the judgement suggest that the decoration of the tomb was commissioned by Vibia’s husband, Vincentius.

Vincentius is also portrayed as one of the diners resting on a stibadium in the second convivial image painted in this arcosolium (he is probably the bearded man in the middle).\footnote{Engemann (1982) 243-4.} It depicts seven men \textit{(SEPTEM PII SACERDOTIS)}; three of them wear Phrygian hats, which accentuate their eastern provenance. In contrast to the convivial scene with Vibia, the seven priests are not served by any attendants; however, the food depicted in front of them is significantly more plentiful and varied.

Although the picnic scene with Vibia undoubtedly depicts an Elysian feast, there is no consensus as to the interpretation of the convivial scene with Vincentius. On the one hand it has been suggested that because the main
inscription refers to Vincentius as the deceased, the meal should also be understood as alluding to an event held in the afterlife. On the other hand, the iconographical differences between the two convivial images may indicate that the dining scene with Vincentius is a depiction of a funerary meal organized by Vincentius to honour his prematurely deceased wife.

As discussed earlier, the decoration was commissioned by Vincentius, and the unity of the composition and style demonstrates that the meal scene with seven priests was also included in the original plan. Therefore, it is more likely that Vincentius intended to depict himself as commemorating his wife in the company of his colleagues, rather than as the deceased. If, however, the decoration was commissioned after Vincentius's death, his family would more likely have asked for him to be portrayed as dining in paradise together with his dear wife Vibia.

The two convivial scenes from the *arcosolium* of Vibia are especially important as they contain inscriptions explaining the decoration of the tomb. Only thanks to them is it possible to observe the syncretism of the eastern cult of Sabazius and the Gallic (northern) gods. The inscriptions also provide the names of the deceased and leave no doubt of what was the commissioner’s intention. Looking at the decoration itself, however, it is rather surprising to find such detailed subtitles for each painting. Certain inscriptions, such as those describing Vibia in the abduction scene, providing names of foreign gods, must have been used so that the figures were not mistaken for other, more popular, gods and heroes. The inscriptions on the picnic with Vibia, on the other hand, could be viewed as unnecessary. However, for some reason, the client (i.e. Vincentius) decided to subtitle the painting: the person leading Vibia to the Underworld is *angelus bonus*, the diners are *iudicati*. It is, therefore, evident that such detailed description was commissioned in order to avoid any doubts regarding the *convivium* represented.

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772 Despite many efforts to attribute the *arcosolium* of Vibia to a Christian owner [e.g. Ferrua (1971)] there is no doubt that the commissioner of the decoration was not a Christian.
The dining scene with Vincentius, on the contrary, does not contain any similar inscriptions, which would suggest that the understanding of this convivial scene was more obvious to the viewer and, excepting the presentation of the diners as seven pious priests, the subtitles were not essential. For that reason, it is possible that the Elysian meal of Vibia and those that have been judged was not based on a well-known theme in funerary decoration in Vincentius's area and time. By contrast, the meal with Vincentius most likely belonged to a more common (and more easily recognisable) repertoire. For that reason, it is possible to assume that the two dining scenes in the *arcosolium* of Vibia were intended to represent two different types of *convivia* – one Elysian, and the other held on Earth.

The dining scene with Vincentius was most likely designed to represent a *refrigerium* - a commemorative rite that was intended to ensure the happiness of the deceased in the afterlife. The composition of the representation confirms such an interpretation as it emphasizes plentiful food and drink, which was also used in the depictions of dining scenes in the neighbouring catacomb of San Callisto, and the catacomb of Priscilla. The convivial scene with Vincentius was, therefore, possibly designed to demonstrate Vincentius' devotion to his wife and his belief that Vibia is worthy to be in Elysium and to dine there. But her everlasting happiness in the Netherworld could only be ensured through the preservation of Vibia’s memory, the libation rites which were intended to nourish her soul, and the annual commemoration of her name and deeds. There is no way of guessing how long Vincentius lived and for how many years he remembered his prematurely deceased wife in the annual offerings for the *manes*. However, it is likely that the image of Vincentius dining was intended to help him with this duty as it shows the priest, in the company of his fellow priests, while he was commemorating his wife. As long as the image existed Vibia would be remembered and her soul would be happy in the afterlife.

3.4. **Conclusions**

The aim of this chapter was to discuss not only the meanings but also functions of collective convivial images that appear in Roman funerary art
between the first and the fourth century AD. Looking at the iconography of representations of meals held on *stibadia* it is noticeable that there are no major compositional differences between the non-Christian and Christian convivial scenes. The Christian convivial images are recognisable only thanks to the adjacent scenes decorating individual tombs.

Consideration of the neighbouring decoration also enables a proper identification of the scenes, which either portray Elysian events (e.g. the Hypogeum of Crispa Salvia), represent the status and prosperity of the deceased (e.g. the Tomb of Vestorius Priscus), or depict commemorative meals held by some Roman *collegia* (e.g. columbarium 31 in the Via Laurentina necropolis). There are also examples of Christian representations which most likely reflect certain biblical stories (e.g. the dining scene with Moses and an angler from *cubiculum* A2 in the catacomb of San Callisto). Even though it is impossible to determine whether they were based on particular narratives, or were allegorical references taken from now lost sermons and homilies, their identification is supported by the presence of neighbouring images.

The majority of the third-century AD dining scenes, both pagan and Christian, most likely depict *refrigeria* - commemorative meals connected with the cult of the dead. Therefore, the meal scenes found in a Christian funerary context that do not portray any biblical stories should be understood as visual evidence for the continuation of traditional mortuary and commemorative rites.

Dining images also point to the different functions of funerary decoration. As some tombs were designed to resemble houses, and performed the role of 'houses for the dead' (e.g. the hypogeum in Caivano near Naples), other sepulchres were intended to represent the Underworld. It is also noticeable that in the cases of decorations representing the afterlife, the intention was that it would be viewed by the living users of the tombs. In contrast, the shift in the decoration's style and composition occurred along with the development of *refrigeria* and the change in the function of the decoration. From the third century AD the dining images represented the living relatives commemorating their dead and were most likely intended to be viewed by the departed.
The majority of dining scenes were designed not only to portray *refrigeria*, but, most likely, were also intended to perform an additional function, which was to be a substitute for the commemorative rites when needed. This is only evident from investigating the scenes in the wider context of the adjacent decoration. The Christian dining scenes are often combined with biblical scenes evoking an eschatological theme, or with orants, which also illustrate the act of prayer. As the actual *refrigeria* were intended to ensure the happy existence of the deceased souls in the afterlife, it is possible that the images of commemoration were designed to help or strengthen the rites.
Chapter 4. Collective meal scenes on sarcophagi

Having presented the discussion of painted and mosaic representations of collective meals from Roman tombs, I shall now focus on convivial images with *stibadium*-type couches that appeared on sarcophagi. The dining scenes represented in funerary reliefs differ significantly from painted depictions, not in their form, but in overall meaning and function. As I shall argue, in the case of Roman sarcophagi the majority of convivial scenes with *stibadia* reflect the status of the deceased, in a similar way to the representations of figures reclining on *kline* couches. However, as I shall also demonstrate, the main difference between the representations of diners resting on *klinai* and on *stibadia* is that the latter do not symbolically portray the deceased themselves, but reflect the elite villa lifestyle, and in this way accentuate the status of the deceased buried in caskets.

The following chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first part will investigate pagan and ‘religiously neutral’ representations of collective meal scenes with *stibadium*-type couches. This section will include the earliest representations of collective meal scenes found on Roman sarcophagi which appeared around the mid-second century AD and portray gods and heroes dining – a motif popular on carved monuments until the end of the third century, yet absent from the painted representations found in Roman tombs. In the first part I shall also discuss hunting and travelling scenes accompanied by picnic scenes which were designed to depict the elite villa lifestyle. I shall argue that the mythological dining scenes and images of meals reflecting the elite villa lifestyle did not carry any commemorative function, and were most likely designed to support the main theme represented on the sarcophagi caskets. The dining scenes on sarcophagi were part of a larger repertoire of motifs, within which scenes with hunters or travellers were interchangeable with one another. Moreover, in the case of the mythological dining scenes, despite being connected to well known stories, the descriptions of the meals themselves have not been included in the narratives, therefore it is likely that the motif was intended to perform a decorative, rather than a funerary function.
In the second part of the chapter I shall focus on Christian dining scenes represented on sarcophagi. I shall also re-evaluate the objects which have been previously classified as ‘Christian’, and will disqualify some of them from that list. As we shall see, there are few existing fragments which can be associated with Christian owners with a relative degree of certainty, and an even smaller number of examples that are comparable with painted images found in the Roman tombs. The aim of this discussion is to demonstrate that dining scenes accompanied by biblical images also performed an additional commemorative function, and in many instances the early Christians did not refrain from using caskets decorated with religiously neutral designs.

4.1. Pagan and ‘religiously neutral’ collective dining scenes

In contrast to the painted images of meals held on stibadia in Roman funerary art, which represented the deceased in the afterlife or the commemoration of the dead performed by the descendants’ relatives, the majority of dining scenes depicted on sarcophagi portrayed either mythological events, or scenes reflecting the elite villa lifestyle.

This section will be based on the catalogue and will examine each category of representation in typological rather than chronological order. The aim of the discussion is to demonstrate the transition from the mythological depictions of banquets of the gods and picnics with heroes to images portraying the daily life of the Roman elite. In all types of stibadia meal scenes carved on sarcophagi the images represent convivial dining, but, as this section will demonstrate, the focus of the decoration was placed on events which were designed to emphasise the status of the monuments’ owners.

4.1.1. Mythological meal and picnic scenes

4.1.1.1. Picnic scenes with Dionysus

The first mythological motif that included dining scenes portrayed the life of Dionysus. There are (at least) twenty-nine existing monuments, or fragments of caskets, decorated with such a design (selected examples: nos. 37-
The earliest sarcophagi depicting Dionysus appear in the mid-second century AD and the motif continued in popularity until at least the first half of the fourth century.\textsuperscript{774}

While the main decoration on the sarcophagi caskets varies, and represents different events from the life of Dionysus (e.g. his birth, journey to India, finding Ariadne, their wedding, or the triumph of Dionysus),\textsuperscript{775} the convivial images on the lids appear to be less diversified (e.g. fig. 44). The picnic scenes always fill the entire length of the lid; the diners are satyrs and the god's companions, while Dionysus and Ariadne are usually depicted in the middle of the composition, holding cups and reclining directly on the ground or on animal skins.\textsuperscript{776}

![Fig. 44. Dionysiac sarcophagus decorated with a ceremonial procession (on the casket) and a symposium scene (on the lid) from Museo Nazionale delle Terme in Rome, inv. 128577, 160-180 AD, discovered in 1956 in a tomb on the Via Aurelia Antica](image)

Occasionally, as on the example from The Boston Museum of Fine Arts (no. 39), the couple are accompanied by flying cupids, which were most likely intended to emphasise the erotic character of the scene. Additional figures of satyrs reclining and god's companions are depicted symmetrically on each side.

\textsuperscript{773} Appendix 1 includes only selected examples of the Dionysiac sarcophagi as the design of the picnic scenes on these monuments is relatively uniform. The catalogue of the majority of known Dionysiac sarcophagi in Matz (1975), see also Lehmann, Olsen (1942).

\textsuperscript{774} E.g. the mid-second-century AD sarcophagus from the Walters Museum of Art in Baltimore (no. 38), see Matz (1975) 199, and a fourth-century sarcophagus from the Museo Nazionale delle Terme in Rome, see Matz (1975) 448, no. 256.

\textsuperscript{775} Zanker, Ewald (2012) 318-34.

\textsuperscript{776} Occasionally, the representation differs in the way the figures of Dionysus and Ariadne are orientated towards or away from one another.
Small servants preparing hot water for the wine are often placed on the far left of the compositions. The events are always represented outdoors with curtains hanging behind the participants, and, occasionally, there are drinking vessels scattered around the guests, as there are, for instance, on the sarcophagus from Baltimore (no. 37). The absence of food in the Dionysiac picnic scenes suggests that the images were intended to portray symposia - events so typical for this god. The convivial scenes on the sarcophagi picturing Dionysus were not intended to depict any particular storyline from Dionysus’s life and should be viewed rather as a design suitable for the decoration of elongated panels of sarcophagus lids. Therefore, they should be identified as an additional narrative that supports the main themes represented on the front elevation of the casket. However, while they do not play any functional role in the overall storyline, they do represent eternal conviviality and sexual pleasures, which were the most crucial aspects of the Dionysiac cult.

It has been suggested that the Dionysiac dining scenes might have reflected funerary family meals. This view, however, is mistaken for several reasons. Firstly, the convivial images on the Dionysiac sarcophagi always portray Dionysiac companions or Dionysus himself and clearly reflect the typical symposia. Secondly, the funerary family dining scenes had not yet been developed in the mid-second century AD when the Dionysiac sarcophagi were most popular. Finally, the mythological dining scenes are found only on these sarcophagi, where convivia are clearly part of the main mythological theme, Dionysus was the god of wine, hence images of symposia would be perfectly suitable to represent his story. If the Dionysiac picnic scenes had been intended to recall symbolically family funerary gatherings, they would have appeared more commonly on the sarcophagus decoration, and would surely not have represented drinking parties with a strong erotic connotation. Therefore, as much as the Dionysiac picnic scenes demonstrate convivial culture, there is no

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778 Cabrera (2013).
reason to assume that they were designed as a ‘bridge’ between the family funerary dining and mythological representations of Dionysiac picnics.\footnote{Cf. Zanker, Ewald (2012) 155.}

\subsection*{4.1.1.2. Dining Trojans}

The second type of sarcophagus decorated with mythological \textit{convivia} represents the Iliupersis, with scenes of dining Trojans represented on their lids (e.g. no. 40).\footnote{Jastrzębowska (1979) 56, no. 79. Jastrzębowska also mentioned a sarcophagus from the catacomb of San Sebastiano in Rome (no. 80 in her catalogue), which was decorated with a similar design.} The fragments are clearly recognisable as they represent the exact moment when the Greek soldiers, wearing short tunics, helmets and elaborately draped capes, enter Troy and surprise the citizens (depicted dining, and wearing Phrygian hats) in their homes. These scenes therefore differ from the examples discussed above as they reflect a particular mythological story. However, the literary description of the attack on Troy does not mention citizens dining.\footnote{The sack of Troy was only mentioned in The \textit{Odyssey} 4.271 and 8.495. The literary account of this legendary event is known from later source by Quintus Smyrnaeus, \textit{Posthomerica} 13. 100–104 [tr. Way (1913)].} However, this probably is how the attack was imagined by the subsequent readers of the story: the Trojans were surprised and murdered in their homes during the evening, which was a natural time for family dining. For that reason, the meal scenes depicting Trojans were most likely intended to symbolise the tranquillity of domestic life in order to juxtapose it with horror when peace is suddenly shattered by war.\footnote{Zanker and Ewald (2012) 74-6.}

\subsection*{4.1.1.3. Post-hunt picnic scenes with Meleager and Atlanta}

The final group of monuments decorated with mythological meals relate to the story of the Calydonian Boar hunt. There are three surviving, fully-preserved sarcophagi of this kind, with depictions, on their lids, of Meleager, Atlanta, the Argonauts and their companions who are shown dining (nos. 41, 42 and 43).\footnote{Koch (1975) nos. 7, 73 and 81.} The figures of the hunters are easily distinguishable: Argonauts wear Phrygian hats, whereas Atlanta is the huntress dressed in a short tunic, and with
her hair arranged into a chignon. They are represented as resting on animal skins or *stibadia*. As the scenes are so easily recognised by the characteristic details of the Calydonian boar hunters it is possible to identify another eleven relief fragments containing convivial images that belonged to the ‘Meleager’ sarcophagi (nos. 44-54). The imagery is quite standard. It is evident that the picnics represent the moment of relaxation after the killing of the boar, yet before the gory events that followed the hunt. However, there is no literary account of the post-Calydonian boar hunt picnic in any of the known narratives of this myth, though illustrations of the post-hunt picnics were popular in antiquity, and it is likely that they were the origin for the motif appearing on the sarcophagi.

Mythological meal scenes were always represented on the lids of sarcophagi, and, for that reason, it is safe to assume that they were not intended to perform a prominent function in the overall decoration. It is most likely that they were designed as images that support the iconography depicted on the caskets, and to fill the available space with relevant images. In addition, despite the fact that the stories of the meals were not necessarily included in the mythological narratives, it is evident that they all represent the pleasures and tranquillity of convivial dining, most often set outdoors.

A similar unity of decoration can be observed in some of the sarcophagi representing scenes taken from the *vita humana*, where the imagery depicted on the lid supplements the scenes represented on the caskets. They will be discussed in the following section.

### 4.1.2. Sarcophagi with scenes related to the lifestyle of the Roman elite

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785 The number of participants varies between three and six, and there is usually a hog’s head (or other cut of meat) laid out in front of the cushion and often with loaves of bread or rolls. The diners are often accompanied by servants preparing a meal or butchering the carcass of the animal.


788 Apart from the scenes of the Iliupersis.
Sometime in the 220s or 230s a new type of pictorial representation appeared in sarcophagus decoration containing images related to the *vita humana*. Depictions of mythological figures with the portrait features of the deceased became less popular because they compared the deceased with heroes who, despite being highly virtuous, also had many weaknesses. As such ambiguity could have been easily misinterpreted new, less equivocal representations of hunters, generals and senators replaced the mythological figures. This section will investigate sarcophagi belonging to the *vita humana* group which were also decorated with picnic scenes.

I refer to this category of monuments as ‘religiously neutral’ as the decoration of neither of the sarcophagi discussed in this section indicates the religious affiliation of their owners. In the case of these particular caskets religion(s) evidently did not play any role in the choice of their decoration. What actually mattered was the demonstration of the status of the sarcophagus owners which was achieved through the representations of the elite lifestyle. However, this section will also include sarcophagi and fragments which are decorated with religiously neutral designs, but are additionally accompanied by Christian inscriptions.

### 4.1.2.1. Post-hunt picnics

The first design from this group represents hunting scenes which developed directly from mythological iconography (nos. 55-76). Bernard Andreae, who catalogued caskets with hunting imagery, noticed that the decoration most likely originated from scenes representing the mythological Hippolytus (fig. 45). The hero was usually depicted as hunting on horseback and accompanied by *Virtus* (represented as a female figure dressed in a short tunic and a helmet). The figure of *Virtus* depicted behind the centrally placed hunters (which were intended to represent the deceased) is also partly visible

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792 For a catalogue of hunt sarcophagi see: Andreae (1980).
on two out of three fully preserved sarcophagi with hunting scenes, lids of which were also decorated with picnic scenes (nos. 59 and 60).  

Fig. 45. Phaedra and Hippolytus sarcophagus from the Camposanto Monumentale in Pisa, inv. C9 est., c. 180 AD

One of the examples of such a monument is the sarcophagus of Bera, found in Mausoleum 478 situated underneath the basilica of San Sebastiano on the Via Appia (no. 59), which is combined with a potentially Christian inscription. It was discovered alongside five more sarcophagi decorated with neutral and mythological scenes. A second casket with a very similar design (no. 60), was found alongside the sarcophagus of Bera. It is also decorated with hunting scenes, yet of higher quality and more elaborate design. As on Bera’s sarcophagus, a picnic scene with hunters is represented on the lid of that casket.

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795 The sarcophagus of Bera contains an inscription DEP BERAЕ / V KAL MART which was interpreted as ‘Christian’ [e.g. Jastrzębowska (1979) 34, no. 12; Himmelmann (1973) 62, no. 32; Deichmann (1967) 155, no. 298]. As I argued before, this should not be taken as an indisputable indication of Christian ownership of an object, see Chapter 2, section 2.6.2. I shall discuss this sarcophagus in more detail further in the text. Sarcophagus of Bera in Birk (2013) 110-11 and 137, no. 511; Amedick (1991) 148, no. 167.
798 Another, almost entirely preserved sarcophagus with hunting scenes and a stibadium picnic scene depicted on the lid is now located in the Crypt in the church of Saint-Étienne in Déols, France (no. 58), see Amedick (1991) 127, no. 42; Andreea (1980) 147, no. 27; Jastrzębowska (1979) 53, no. 62; Himmelmann (1973) 63, no. 39.
Hunting was an entertainment for the elite, and the scenes of chase should be viewed as a reference to the status and luxury of the privileged.\textsuperscript{799} Hunting images on sarcophagi most likely played a similar role to the reclining figures represented on other types of funerary monuments (ash chests, \textit{kline} monuments, altars and gravestones), i.e. they referred to a particular lifestyle which was associated with wealth and higher social status. It is also likely that the decoration of some of the sarcophagi with hunting scenes could be viewed as ‘aspirational’, as has been argued in the case of the \textit{kline} representations.\textsuperscript{800} However, here too any interpretation of the people who bought sarcophagi should be considered on an individual basis. For instance, the two caskets mentioned earlier (no. 59 and 60) were found in an elaborate mausoleum underneath the basilica of San Sebastiano, which clearly points to the wealth and higher social status of their owners.\textsuperscript{801}

![Fig. 46. Sarcophagus of Lot, from a round Mausoleum underneath the basilica of San Sebastiano, Via Appia Antica, Rome](image)

Another example is provided by the late fourth-century AD sarcophagus of Lot, of which the casket is decorated with elaborate Christian scenes, while

\textsuperscript{799} Borg (2012) 182. 
\textsuperscript{800} Borg (2013) 182. For the discussion on \textit{kline} scenes see Chapter 2. 
\textsuperscript{801} Borg (2013) 56.
the lid contains a post-hunting scene with the hunters returning from the chase, and a travel scene (fig. 46). This composition, where Christian images are depicted on the casket and the lid is decorated with images reflecting the status of the tomb’s owner, resembles the decoration of the previously discussed sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. The difference between these monuments is that the Sarcophagus of Lot alluded to the luxurious villa lifestyle while the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus represented the deceased as a highly ranked city official.

From a detailed analysis of the hunting sarcophagi it is evident that several examples (including the two sarcophagi from the catacomb of San Sebastiano) were designed to represent members of the military elite, accompanied by figures dressed in armour or helmets. This particular design most likely derived from the earlier imperial iconography of emperors represented as hunters or commanders on public monuments. In the third century AD these motifs were adopted by military commanders to demonstrate their virtues, or even to compare them to the paradigm of the emperors. However, the hunting sarcophagi were not intended to depict real-life events but were designed to demonstrate or increase the status of the deceased through representing him (or sometimes her) in the privileged sphere of the military elite. Over time hunting sarcophagi also became common amongst the non-military elite and depicted more ordinary events that would have occurred on the villa estates (deer or hare chases rather than lion hunts).

The three sarcophagi with hunting scenes combined with representations of post-hunt picnics are the only caskets which were preserved together with their lids. There are also two examples of sarcophagus lids that

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802 Deichmann (1967) 116-19, no. 188; Weber (1978) 23, no 12, Amedick (1991) 148, no. 169 The sarcophagus of Lot is especially interesting as it was found in 1950 in one of the mausolea underneath the basilica of San Sebastiano and no alterations had been made to its original design, in contrast to the majority of the existing sarcophagi, which have been heavily ‘restored’ or re-carved, e.g. the ‘Via Salaria’ sarcophagus, see Carder (1979) 518, or the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus with the ‘readjusted’ figure of Daniel, see Malbon (1990) 59-67.
803 For the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus see Chapter 2, section 2.6.1. Another example of such a design is the sarcophagus of Sabinus from the Vatican Museum, see Deichmann (1967) 6-7, no. 6.
806 Borg (2013) 181-2 with examples.
are decorated with images of hunts on one side, and meal scenes on the other (nos. 62 and 63). One of them is the lid from the catacomb of Pretestato (no. 63), which is decorated with a meal which actually is not a post-hunt picnic, but an outdoor meal with a man and his wife reclining on a *kline*. They are accompanied by a seated female musician and four attendants. As the *kline* seating arrangements did not belong to the standard repertoire of post-hunt picnic scenes, it is possible that this particular representation (alongside the hunting scene represented on the other side of the inscription panel) was intended to emphasize or even increase the status of the portrayed couple by referring to the bucolic lifestyle of the countryside estates.

The other well preserved lid of a sarcophagus from the Abbey of San Pietro in Valle in Ferentillo (no. 62) is decorated on the right hand side with a scene representing three riders chasing a deer, a central panel containing a portrait of the deceased, and a picnic scene with a *stibadium* on the left. As the convivial image also represents three male participants, it would be tempting to assume that they are hunters represented on the other end of the lid. However, the number of hunters does not always correlate with the number of diners represented on post-hunt picnics. Also, as clearly shown on the anonymous casket from Mausoleum 47δ in the catacomb of San Sebastiano (no. 60), the diners, represented as youths wearing short tunics, are not the hunters from the main decoration of the casket, who have beards and wear military clothes.

There are also two known examples of post-hunt picnics represented on sarcophagus caskets (no. 55 and 56). In these examples the emphasis of the decoration is not on the hunts themselves and the glorification of the hunters, but on the relaxing events that happened just after the chase. In both cases the hunters are accompanied not only by servants preparing a meal for the picnics

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807 One servant is preparing hot water in a large amphora on the far left of the scene; two attendants are approaching the diners with plates laden with food (probably poultry) and one servant is standing on the right of the couch holding a jug.
808 The scene depicts a lion hunt, and the figures of the helpers dressed in military tunics and helmets may suggest that the deceased was a military officer. Andreae (1980) 160, no. 88.
809 E.g. the banquet scene on the second sarcophagus from cubiculum 47δ in the catacomb of San Sebastiano represents six men, while there are only three hunters depicted in the deer chase scene on the right of the blank inscription panel, while on the monument from Déols there are four diners and eight hunters returning home after the event.
but also by female musicians who provide the entertainment for the diners. The number of attendants emphasizes the wealth of the hunters, and the overall decoration is clearly intended to demonstrate the privileges of the elite villa life.

Since the post-hunt picnic scenes are rather standardized it is possible to recognize the motif even from small fragments (nos. 64-76 and 101). The post-hunt picnics are characterised by the depictions of boar heads or cuts of meat situated in front of the *stibadia*, but occasionally the main food represented on the table is fish, while the servants carry cooked meat (e.g. roast hares).810 The diners are always male which distinguishes these images from the picnic scenes depicting Meleager and Atlanta.811 Typically, one of the servants prepares cuts of meat for the meal. Often dogs are seated near the hunters. The atmosphere of the convivial images depicted is always relaxed; and the scenes are sometimes accompanied by representations of hunters going back home after a successful chase.812

As different scenes reflecting hunting activities appear on the sarcophagus lids (e.g. the sarcophagus of Lot, which was discussed earlier, contains a scene of hunters returning home after a chase), it is evident that the designs were interchangeable. For this reason, the post-hunt picnic scenes should be viewed as part of the hunting iconography and should not be discussed individually. As this section demonstrates the hunting theme reflected the elite villa lifestyle, which was clearly intended to show the status of the owner of the tomb.

4.1.2.2. Travel scenes

The second motif that was occasionally accompanied by meal scenes is travel. I shall begin this section by referring to the lid of the sarcophagus of Lot (fig. 46), the decoration of which does not contain any convivial images, but

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810 Examples with a boar’s head: nos. 62-68 (no. 67 represents a unique specimen between a fish and a boar’s head on the table); cuts of meat: nos. 69-73, 75 and 76. A fragment with fish as a main meal depicted on the table and servants bringing hares to the table is now in Loggia Scoperta in the Vatican Museum (no. 74).

811 Interestingly, the ‘Christian’ dining scenes on sarcophagi also represent only male participants, see section 4.2. below.

812 E.g. the sarcophagus from Déols (no. 71).
which is the only known case of a casket that was preserved together with its lid decorated with a travel scene. As I discussed above, the presence of the hunting images indicates that the decoration of the lid was purposely designed to demonstrate the wealth and status of the monument’s owner. Hence, it is very likely that the travel scenes, one of which is depicted on the left side of the lid of Sarcophagus of Lot, could also have carried a similar meaning.

The travel scenes usually represent a man and a woman (sometimes also with a child) travelling in a wagon pulled by two horses (e.g. no. 110) or goats (e.g. no. 111). The travellers are escorted by two or three servants, of whom one often leads the way with a rod. The scenes occasionally include certain landscape details (e.g. an aqueduct on fragment no. 112), which allows the interpretation that, at least some of the travellers are villa owners travelling to (or from) their estates.

The meal scenes that accompany the travel scenes vary and there seems to be no particular preference for the type of representation associated with the travel scenes. This is especially evident from looking at the two known fully preserved sarcophagus lids with these designs, one of which depicts figures resting on a kline (no. 111) and one on a stibadium (no. 110). The difference, however, may lie in the character of the events represented, as the kline scene portrays two diners who are most likely the same travellers depicted on the other side of the lid. The stibadium picnic, on the other hand, portrays four male participants served by three female attendants wearing long tunics, while the neighbouring travel scene represents a man and a woman sitting in a wagon pulled by two horses and accompanied by three male slaves wearing short tunics. It is evident, therefore, that on the fragment with the stibadium the scenes are not connected directly, and the banqueting image probably portrays a post-hunt picnic which alludes to the luxurious elite life on the villa estates.

Interpretation of the travel scenes appears not to be as straightforward as in the case of the hunting scenes. Based on the fact that the travel scenes

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813 All other examples of travel scenes decorating the covers survive only fragmentary, which does not allow them to be matched with any particular monument. For the catalogue of travel scenes see: Weber (1978).
often accompany hunting scenes, it is likely that the travel scenes should be recognised as alluding to the luxurious life of the privileged.\textsuperscript{815} However, an interpretation of the travel scenes as referring to the \textit{cursus vitae} cannot be totally excluded.\textsuperscript{816} In fact, the decoration of an early second-century AD sarcophagus of a child, from the Museo Nazionale Romano, which contains two representations of the same couple travelling on a wagon, where one scene is enriched with a figure of a cupid flying above the horses undeniably represents the course of life (fig. 47).\textsuperscript{817} It is very likely that the sarcophagus was indeed intentionally designed to depict symbolically the short life of a child, who is represented first as an infant in the travel scene on the left, then as a toddler playing, and, eventually, as a young boy on his parents’ laps departing to the afterlife in the travel scene on the right.\textsuperscript{818}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{sarcophagus.png}
\caption{Sarcophagus from Museo Nazionale Romano, inv. 65199 (c. 100AD)}
\end{figure}

However, in the case of the dining images accompanied by travel scenes, it is more likely that they do reflect some aspects of a luxurious villa lifestyle. This is evident from a small fragment of a sarcophagus lid from the Museo Pio Cristiano in the Vatican (no. 113), which is decorated not only with both travel and dining scenes, but also with a small scene depicted underneath an

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{815} Amedick (1991) 52-4.
\textsuperscript{816} Weber (1978) 124-33.
\textsuperscript{818} Whitehead (1984) 170-1.
\end{footnotesize}
inscription panel which represents a figure of a servant releasing a hunting dog to chase a deer.\textsuperscript{819}

The combination of the three scenes indicates that the representations were intended to reflect the elite villa life and in such a way demonstrate the status and wealth of the sarcophagus’s owner. For that reason, the travel scenes should not be considered as a unified motif with a single meaning, but as a design used according to the commissioner’s intentions and should be discussed only in relation to the neighbouring scenes.

4.1.2.3. Picnic scenes that are not related to hunting or travelling

In addition to the post-hunt picnic scenes there are also three known sarcophagus caskets and several fragments decorated with imagery depicting picnic scenes which refer to the bucolic villa lifestyle, but are not necessarily connected with hunting or travel. This type of decoration most likely derived from the Dionysiac convivial scenes and originated earlier than the post-hunt imagery.\textsuperscript{820}

One of the examples is an early third-century AD fragment of a sarcophagus from the National Museum in Warsaw which depicts a diner reclining on a \textit{stibadium}, a seated female musician playing on flute, and a servant preparing the meal to the left of the couch (no. 58).\textsuperscript{821} What differentiates this representation from the post-hunt picnic scenes is the figure of the attendant, who, first of all, wears only a narrow band around his hips, and, secondly, is represented in an unusual pose (bent over and, perhaps, reaching towards a basket), unseen in any other picnic scenes. The connection between the style of decoration of the Warsaw sarcophagus and Dionysiac imagery is also supported by the depiction of a crater standing next to a rock on which the \textit{stibadium} was placed. In addition, the food represented in front of the diner is poultry, which also does not belong to post-hunt imagery. As the majority of the

\textsuperscript{819} Amedick (1991) 168, no. 290; Himmelmann (1973) 54, no. 34; Deichmann (1967) 83, no. 119. As this fragment also contains a Christian inscription, I shall discuss it in section 4.1.3.

\textsuperscript{820} Amedick (1991) 28.

\textsuperscript{821} Amedick (1991) 172, no. 313. The head of the diner is missing; however, the clothes suggest that the figure was most likely male. The composition suggests that originally there were two diners depicted at the meal.
casket is missing and the preserved relief is only fragmentary it is impossible to determine the rest of the decoration, but it is unlikely that it represented a post-hunt picnic scene. More likely it portrayed an event that reflected the pleasures of elite villa lifestyles and as an indication of the tranquillity of the countryside.

A reference to a rural picnic setting can also be found on a late third-century fragment of a sarcophagus which is now on display in the Bardo Museum in Tunis (no. 59).\textsuperscript{822} It depicts a ram-bearer and a small female servant standing next to a \textit{stibadium} with (probably) two figures reclining. Because of the figure of the shepherd, which was believed to depict the Good Shepherd, the fragment was classified as 'Christian'.\textsuperscript{823} However, the figure should rather be viewed as indication the rural setting for the picnic, and a symbol of tranquillity of the villa lifestyle.\textsuperscript{824} Of course, the sarcophagus could have been used by a Christian owner, but it might just as well have been commissioned/purchased by a pagan client. Due to its fragmentary preservation and the lack of any details about its provenance this question may never be solved.

The same 'Christian' interpretation was given to another fragment of a late third-century AD sarcophagus decorated with two dining scenes which is now in the Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome (no. 107).\textsuperscript{825} The casket is mostly destroyed but the lower part of the decoration is still visible. Similarly to the fragment from Tunis, a figure of a ram-bearer is represented on the left side of the composition, next to a \textit{stibadium} meal. At the opposite end the figure of a servant holding a little basket stands on the edge of a river (a fisherman?). Between the servant and the couch stands a female attendant who is holding a plate of poultry. This particular figure was identified by Wilpert as a neophyte.\textsuperscript{826} However, it is more likely that the figure is in fact a servant, similar to the representations of attendants from the luxurious \textit{kline} scenes, as in the case of the sarcophagus of P. Caecilius Villianus discussed above.\textsuperscript{827}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{822} Amedick (1991) 162, no. 253.
\textsuperscript{823} Himmelmann (1973) 27, 52, no. 26.
\textsuperscript{824} See the discussion on the representations of a ram-bearer in the Introduction, section 0.3.2.1.3.
\textsuperscript{825} Amedick (1991) 154, no. 197; Himmelmann (1973) 52, no. 27; Deichmann (1967, 337, no. 806
\textsuperscript{826} Wilpert (1932) 17 and 92. According to Wilpert, the plate contains fish not poultry.
\textsuperscript{827} See Chapter 2, section 2.5.
\end{flushright}
Wilpert’s reconstruction of the central part of the composition suggests that it could have been decorated with a figure of a veiled woman holding a scroll. However, it is equally likely that the middle section contained a scene of *dextrarum iunctio*, similar to the representation from the so-called Annona Sarcophagus from Rome (fig. 48). As for the two dining scenes, it is unquestionable that the shepherd and the trees represented in the background emphasize their outdoor, and rural setting. Perhaps the diners portray a married couple on two separate occasions, which would seem to be appropriate imagery flanking a central scene of marriage. Again, regardless of the actual decoration, it is equally possible that the casket was commissioned/purchased by a Christian or a pagan client. The figure of a ram-bearer should not be taken as an undoubted indication of an object’s Christian affiliation.

### 4.1.2.4. Other representations of picnics held on *stibadia*

The final group in this section contains caskets decorated with dining scenes which have often been interpreted as representing some specific type of

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828 The three figures represented in the centre of the composition of the sarcophagus from the Museo del Palazzo dei Conservatori (no. 107) are distinguishable by their footwear: to the left is a man wearing *calcei*, in the middle is a woman wearing a long dress and soft leather shoes covering her toes, and the man to the right, his feet covered in similar footwear to the ram bearer on the far left, is probably a servant. It is possible that the man with *calcei* represents a military officer, who could also be the figure (a man wearing a long tunic and a cape) still visible reclining on the *stibadium* to the right.

829 The Annona Sarcophagus in Meinecke (2012) 98, fig. 10.
dining, as for instance, portraying the deceased in the afterlife or picnics of cupids.

The first interpretation was given to the child’s sarcophagus of Curtia Catiana from the catacomb of Pretestato (no. 109) which contains a clipeus with a portrait of a young boy, but the (potentially) Christian inscription refers to a girl.\(^{830}\) The clipeus is held by two Tritons, while the rest of the casket is decorated with more Nereids and Tritons represented on either side of the bust. A small boat carrying two boys is depicted below the portrait. The same boys are represented twice on the lid: in palestra scenes, wrestling and boxing, and in a picnic scene reclining on a stibadium. As the marine scenes with Nereids and Tritons have been commonly interpreted as referring to the afterlife and the Islands of the Blessed,\(^{831}\) it has been suggested that the bust represents a portrait of the deceased boy for whom the sarcophagus was originally intended.\(^{832}\) Moreover, according to Wilpert, one of the diners is identical to the boy represented in the clipeus, which would suggest that both the picnic and the palestra activities take place in the afterlife.\(^{833}\)

Whether the scenes with marine creatures did indeed refer to the afterlife or were simply decorative and did not carry any symbolic meaning is an unsolvable question. What is more, it is likely that the ‘either/or’ interpretation of the scenes is a modern question and was not considered by a contemporary Roman client.\(^{834}\)

A similar approach can be taken to the sarcophagi with Nilotic representations that also contain dining scenes. One such example was found in a tomb on Via Ostiense and is now in the Museo Nazionale Romano (no. 110).\(^{835}\) The decoration on the casket of the sarcophagus is divided into four registers:

\(^{830}\) ICUR V 14155: CURTIAE / CATIANAE / C(larissimae) P(uellae) IN PACE. The discussions about the sarcophagus in Huskinson (1996) 37, no. 4.9; Amedick (1991) 145, no. 145; Jastrzębowska (1979) 33, no. 10; Himmelmann (1973) 62, no. 30; Deichmann (1967) 230, no. 557.

\(^{831}\) Zanker and Ewald (2012) 112-29.

\(^{832}\) Grabar ([1967] 239, fig. 265) claims that the bust portrays the deceased Curtia Catiana. However, for some unknown reason the decoration does not match the inscription. For a discussion on the problem of relevance between the decoration and epitaphs on Roman funerary monuments see Chapter 2, sections 2.4. and 2.5.

\(^{833}\) Wilpert (1936) 341.

\(^{834}\) Zanker and Ewald (2012) 127.

\(^{835}\) Amedick (1991) 152, no. 185; Himmelmann (1973) 52, no. 25.
three of them portray boats with putti, Cupids and Psyches playing, while the
fourth depicts a convivial scene with three diners resting on a stibadium and
served by winged cherubs.836 The upper part of the reclining figures has been
destroyed which makes any further identification impossible.837 The picnic
takes place on the bank of the River Nile.838 Similar Nilotic scenes, representing
Psyche and Cupid reclining on rafts are known from several other sarcophagi.839
The cheerful Nilotic iconography has been linked to the idea of bucolic and
happy life, therefore the convivial scenes on the river shore would refer to
pleasures of the elite villa lifestyle.840 However, whether the figures of the
diners were intended to portray the deceased in this world or in the afterlife
may be yet another question ‘created’ by modern viewers, and not necessarily a
concern of an ancient client.841

Finally, there are several fragments of sarcophagus reliefs with convivial
scenes representing outdoor picnics or preparation of the meals, though it is
impossible to determine whether the scenes were related to travel, hunt or any
other particular imagery (nos. 78-101, 103-106, 115-117 and 129).842 For
instance, some of them do not contain any details that would suggest an outdoor
setting for the picnics (nos. 78-80, 82, 83, 87-91, 93, 96, 97, 99, 106 and 115).
Amongst these scenes there are some that have been previously recognised as
‘Christian’ due to their compositional and stylistic similarities with the convivial
scenes found in Roman catacombs or of catacomb provenance (nos. 79, 80, 87,
91, 97 and 98).843

837 The figure on the right is a woman dressed in a tunic with long sleeves (not Psyche, as she is
depicted in a sleeveless tunic in the other three registers), the middle figure appears to be naked.
The third figure (to the left of the naked diner) is mostly destroyed, but was represented clothed.
838 Though the landscape appears to be rather unrealistic, see Versylus (2002) 454.
839 E.g. a second-century AD child sarcophagus in Badisches Landesmuseum in Karlsruhe (inv. 29147)
see Amedick (1991) pl. 5.3, Huskinson (1996) fig. 7.1; or a sarcophagus from Antiquarium Forense in
Rome, see Amedick (1991) pl. 5.2. These and more in Jucker (1988).
842 No. 106 is actually a cover of a loculus, though it is stylized as the front of a sarcophagus.
843 No. 79 was identified as ‘Christian’ because of its inscription ΕΠΙΚΘ / ΑΝΝΙ / ΕΝΚΩΧ. Garrucci [(1879) 401, 15], followed by Matthaei [(1899) 17] read the inscription as:
ΕΠΙΚΘ...ΑΝΝΙ...(Ζητις) ΕΥ ΚΥΡΙΟ ΧΡΙΣΤΟ, however, such interpretation is rather doubtful. As explained by Gary Vos (personal communication), the first word ΕΠΙΚΘ(ΜΑ) means ‘property’, the
There are some that definitely represent outdoor events, though these are preserved only in fragments and it is impossible to determine their original context (nos. 81, 84-86, 92, 94, 95, 98, 100, 101, 103-105 and 116). Of these, two appear to be rather unusual: one represents a picnic taking place near a brick building, while the figures who would normally be interpreted as servants are represented in an identical way to the diners, suggesting that they may also be meal participants arriving late for the event (no. 92). The other, unusual, scene presents a naked diner who could be a cupid resting on a stibadium (no. 94). Unfortunately, it is impossible to guess what type of convivial events these scenes might have depicted as there are no analogous representations known to date. Also, any attempt at explaining these fragments without knowing their original contexts seem idle.³⁴⁴

4.1.3. Sarcophagi with non-Christian imagery used by Christians

As I outlined above, some of the sarcophagi with the ‘religiously neutral’ imagery discussed so far have been identified as ‘Christian’ because of the inscriptions included in their decoration.³⁴⁵ However, in most cases Christian affiliation of these inscriptions is debatable,³⁴⁶ and, in fact, only one of them is definitely Christian. It has an epitaph in Greek with a chi-ro symbol, and is part of a fragment decorated with a travel scene, a picnic scene, and a hare hunt scene (no. 113). This fragment, alongside the Lot sarcophagus, the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus and many more, proves that at least some Christians did not

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³⁴⁴ Dunbabin [(2003) 131-2] provides an overview of the scholarship, concluding that the scenes are ‘linked together by a common idea of the banquet as the ideal metaphor for happy existence’.
³⁴⁵ The sarcophagus of Bera (no. 60), of Curtia Catiana (109), the fragment from Manziana (no. 79), a fragment from Avignon (no. 89), the fragment from the Galleria Lapidaria in the Vatican (no. 114), and a fragment from the catacomb of San Callisto (no. 115).
³⁴⁶ See the discussions on ‘Christian’ formulae on funerary inscriptions in Chapter 2, section 2.6.2.
refrain from choosing commonly accepted designs representing an elite lifestyle, and clearly used them in order to demonstrate their social status.\footnote{Birk (2013) 112-13.}

It is, therefore, safe to assume that when it comes to the picnic scenes found on ‘religiously neutral’ sarcophagi, even if some of them were commissioned/ purchased/ used or re-used by early Christians, the convivial scenes should be viewed as referring to the bucolic elite villa lifestyle, rather than as religious gatherings of any sort.\footnote{E.g. Wilpert (1932) vol. 2, 341 suggested that the picnic scene on the sarcophagus of Bera represents an agape meal.} Moreover, even if we assume that the sarcophagi of Bera and of Curtia Catiana did indeed belong to a Christian client, it is evident that their religion did not play a prominent role in their choice of casket decoration. The deceased’s faith would only be expressed by a formula included in the epitaphs (in pace), but this can also refer to the universally accepted idea of a peaceful afterlife.\footnote{Borg (2016).} Therefore, the choice of the decoration on sarcophagi once again demonstrates that for at least some Christians it was their social rather than religious identity that mattered in a funerary context.

The are, however, examples of fragments decorated with dining scenes which are accompanied by certain biblical motifs that do suggest Christian ownership of the caskets. The next section will investigate whether these convivial images were intended to represent a particular religious event, or performed a similar function as the picnic scenes on the vita humana sarcophagi (or neither? Or both?).

### 4.2. Christian stibadia meal scenes

The earliest known sarcophagi decorated with Christian images emerge in the last quarter of the third century AD. Convivial scenes, however, remained a rather uncommon motif in the Christian repertoire and only nine fragments decorated with the combination of biblical and dining scenes are known to date.\footnote{Koch ([1993] 1) calculates that there are around 12.000-15.000 presently known sarcophagi, therefore nine fragments are a tiny fraction of the total number. Even if we assume that all uncertain
118-123), two are decorated with Noah in the ark (nos. 125 and 126) and one contains a baptismal scene (no. 124). As discussed before, the presence of biblical images allows the positive identification of a monument/object as Christian.\textsuperscript{851}

The composition of the images depicted on the nine fragments with biblical scenes calls to mind the painted decoration found in the Roman catacombs, where the separate scenes are represented one after another in order to recall a funerary prayer. This is especially visible from the examples that represent the story of Jonah: in the majority of these cases the image fills a single register, and is separated from the dining scene by an inscription panel. One such example is the sarcophagus dedicated to Baebia Hermofile, the beloved wife of Valerius Valentinianus (no. 117). This sarcophagus is the only fully preserved casket the lid of which is decorated with both a dining scene and a biblical image.

If the sarcophagus of Baebia Hermofile had not been preserved in such excellent condition, and only a fragment with the meal scene and the inscription had survived, it would have been automatically classified as ‘not-Christian’.\textsuperscript{852} A very similar example of a fragment depicting a dining scene accompanied by a partly preserved religiously neutral inscription comes from the Museo Nazionale in Ostia (no. 96). Here too, the food depicted in front of the \textit{stibadium} consists of large round loaves of bread. Due to the lack of any specific images, symbols or formulas the fragment from Ostia has been classified as non-Christian.\textsuperscript{853} It is, therefore, evident that Christian identification of the sarcophagus of Baebia Hermofile is down to the presence of the depiction of Jonah’s story.\textsuperscript{854}

\textsuperscript{851} The statement is based on an assumption that the Roman Jews did not depict any biblical scenes on their funerary monuments, see the discussion in the Introduction, section 0.3.2.1.2.

\textsuperscript{852} Gerke (1940) 120; Jastrzębowska (1979) 79.

\textsuperscript{853} E.g. Himmelmann (1973) 65, no. 50; Jastrzębowska (1979) 50, no. 44.

\textsuperscript{854} The sarcophagus has been frequently cited in books regarding early Christianity, with some special attention to the scene of Jonah, e.g. Prigent (1995) 172; or Schneider (1951), 194.
Although the combination of the biblical and dining scenes can undoubtedly be associated with Christianity, the elaborate inscription on the sarcophagus of Baebia Hermophile is religiously neutral and is designed to commemorate both the deceased and the commissioner, rather than to refer to their Christian faith. Therefore, the epitaph plays not only an informative role, but also presents the deceased as a member of the elite. The images, on the other hand, do not reflect the luxurious lifestyle, but demonstrate the idea of the preservation of the soul in the afterlife, achieved both by faith in God (Jonah), and by organising *refrigeria* in honour of the dead (dining scene). Therefore, the sarcophagi (and relief fragments) that are decorated with this particular combination of biblical and convivial motifs demonstrate the transition between the pagan and Christian ideas of life after death. On one side of the lid, Jonah represents salvation by God’s power, on the other, the dining scene portrays the traditional commemoration which was intended to help the departed souls exist happily in the afterlife. For this reason, it is possible that the dining scenes accompanied by biblical images could have carried a secondary function: the images themselves could have been a substitute for the commemoration and ensured the everlasting peace of the souls of the deceased, similar to certain painted images found in Roman tombs and catacombs, which were discussed in the previous chapters.

Looking at the style and the composition of Christian dining scenes, it is evident that most of them still represent outdoor picnics, though the food depicted at the meal consists only of bread and fish. However, this should not be taken as a criterion for identifying Christian scenes as the same food is often depicted, for instance, in picnic scenes related to travel. The depiction of

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855 See the discussion in Chapter 3, section 3.2.2.
856 There have been several attempts at attributing certain details (fish and/or bread, or cross markings on the loaves) to Christian monuments [e.g., Rossi (1864–77) II, 244-341, or Gerke (1940) 126-36] and there were equally many arguments against such classification [e.g. Dölger (1922-45) V, 394-540; Jastrzębowska (1979) 80]. Dölger’s extensive research into the history of the representation of fish in ancient art (reaching as far back as the Babylonian empire) proved the popularity of the motive in all of the Mediterranean cultures. In addition, a recent isotope study of some archaeological remains from the catacomb of San Callisto demonstrates that freshwater fish was consumed by people living in Rome on a daily basis [Rutgers-Strydonck-Boudin-Linde (2009) 1129-31]. As fish carried a strong sacred meaning for the early Christians, it is possible that they
baskets full of loaves of bread has (incorrectly) been seen by some as a criterion for the identification of a relief fragment as Christian. However, only four out of nine fragments do contain baskets of bread, whereas the same representations also appear on monuments classified as non-Christian.

Only the sarcophagus of Baebia Hermofile is decorated with a meal scene which is not represented in any particular setting. The depiction of the convivium on this sarcophagus resembles a relief fragment from the cemetery on the Via Anapo (no. 96). The composition of the decoration on both reliefs is almost identical, which makes it possible that they were produced in the same workshop. However, even this does not corroborate Christian ownership of the fragment from the cemetery on the Via Anapo.

As the Christian collective dining scenes, which were most likely designed to represent the refrigeria, depict only male participants it is unlikely that they portray real events. For this reason, they should be viewed as a pattern taken directly from the vita humana repertoire, which must have been well known in all sarcophagi workshops. They are similar to the picnic scenes from the vita humana sarcophagi, which were just one of several designs that could have been used to express the idea of the elite villa lifestyle. The Christian dining scenes would have been used interchangeably with biblical images referring to the theme of salvation, as they were all intended to ensure a happy afterlife for the deceased. This also strengthens the possibility that the function of the dining scenes was the substitution for actual commemorative rites.

Apart from the nine fragments discussed above, there are two fragments of sarcophagus lids with dining scenes depicted in the vicinity of female orants

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858 Jastrzębowska (1979) no. XXIV, or no. 31.
859 The cemetery on the Via Anapo is close to Via Tiburtina, near which the sarcophagus of Baebia Hermofile was found (unfortunately Ghislanzoni does not provide an actual find spot for the casket). This strengthens the possibility of the two reliefs being produced in one workshop.
860 The fact that the designs were used from "pattern-books" is supported by the similarities between two fragments (no. 128 and 129), which must have been produced in one workshop. The fragments also demonstrate that the patterns gave some leeway for the design: the servant depicted in fragment no. 128 is replaced by a tree on fragment no. 129, while a shepherd is replaced by a tall basket. Otherwise, the diners are represented in an identical way on both reliefs.
(nos. 127 and 128), which have been recognised as Christian by the majority of scholars.\textsuperscript{861} However, the presence of the praying figures may not necessarily suggest Christian ownership of an object as they also appeared on some first- and second-century AD pagan monuments and symbolised \textit{pietas}.\textsuperscript{862} The remaining decoration of the two lids with meal scenes and orants is fragmentary and religiously neutral (a seated philosopher reading from a scroll accompanied by a young man dressed in a toga standing and holding a scroll – no. 127, and a shepherd dressed in a short tunic standing – no. 128). In addition, Jastrzębowska rightly pointed out that even a catacomb provenance of the finds does not corroborate any affiliation with the Christian religion, as in fact the majority of sarcophagi found in the Roman catacombs are not necessarily Christian.\textsuperscript{863} It is, therefore, impossible to confirm whether these two fragments indeed belonged to, or were commissioned by, a Christian client. However, their composition suggests that they were intended to represent \textit{refrigeria}.

5.4. Summary

From the discussion presented above it is evident that the majority of dining scenes depicted on sarcophagus relief has a different function to the painted and mosaic representations of collective meals found in Roman tombs. The earliest convivial images appeared on Roman sarcophagi much later than the painted scenes from Roman tombs, and initially depicted gods and mythological heroes dining outdoors. However, despite the fact that the meals represented particular mythological stories, dining events were never actually included in any of the known literary narratives. Therefore, they should be viewed as images designed to fill the available spaces on the sarcophagi lids, either spread along the entire length of the lids, or depicted in individual registers.

During the third century AD the mythological scenes were gradually replaced by the \textit{vita humana} imagery, though the designs were taken directly

\textsuperscript{861} E.g. Deichmann (1967) 97, no. 151 or Jastrzębowska (1979) 79.
\textsuperscript{862} Klauser (1959) 115–45; Klauser (1960) 133, no. 1; Matz (1968) 300, no. 1; Huskinson (2015) 198
from their predecessors. The dining scenes on the *vita humana* sarcophagi also represented picnics, but with hunters or travellers, and in this way reflected the elite villa lifestyle. The transition from mythological scenes to images depicting a luxurious lifestyle can also be deduced from the overall message that stands behind the imagery: the mythological decoration was intended to demonstrate one’s deeds through comparison with the virtues of a legendary hero, while the *vita humana* representations were designed to signify the status of the deceased by representing the luxurious activities of the elite. Therefore, the decoration of the *vita humana* sarcophagi is suggestive of the *kline* scenes, which were also intended to demonstrate the status and importance of the deceased.

This chapter also demonstrates that at least some early Christian clients did not refrain from choosing religiously neutral decoration, and that it reflected their social status rather than religious affiliation. What is also noticeable is that several known sarcophagi (e.g. the Sarcophagus of Lot or the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus) contain both elaborate Christian scenes and imagery referring to the elite lifestyle. It is, therefore, possible that at least some of the relief fragments which depict picnic scenes might have originally belonged to caskets commissioned by Christian clients. However, there are also examples which, despite having been previously classified as ‘Christian’ might have equally belonged to non-Christian clients (e.g. the sarcophagi of Bera and of Curtia Catiana).

Finally, when it comes to Christian dining scenes represented on Roman sarcophagi, these can be identified only when accompanied by biblical scenes. As I have argued, there are only nine surviving examples of this kind, which makes it an extremely uncommon motif in the funerary relief repertoire. What is more, the majority of the scenes depict picnics similar to the representations of meals associated with the *vita humana* imagery. Only one example - the dining scene on the sarcophagus of Baebia Hermofile - closely resembles the composition of scenes from the Roman catacombs. Nonetheless, all the convivial images accompanied by biblical scenes should be viewed as representations of *refrigeria*. However, these scenes did not depict real events, but rather an idea of commemoration, and they were most likely perceived as a substitute (or,
perhaps, an enhancing) of the actual commemorative rites, similar to the cases of dining scenes found in Roman catacombs.

The aim of this chapter was to demonstrate that, apart from a few Christian dining scenes accompanied by biblical motifs, the convivial images depicted on the sarcophagi were used as episodes in mythological stories and hunt or travel imagery, and were secondary to the main decoration which they complemented. They never played any prominent role apart from emphasising the convivial, rural and cheerful character of the overall narration.

On the contrary, the Christian dining scenes were used not as a part of any particular story, but as images/reminders of commemorative rituals that were intended to ensure a happy afterlife for the deceased, and they should also be viewed as a transition between traditional pagan and Christian funerary rites.
Chapter 5: The dining scenes in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino – a case study

After presenting the convivial scenes found in Roman tombs and catacombs it is now worth focusing on one particular catacomb, which contains more dining scenes than any other burial complex in Rome. The cemetery in question - the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino - is located at the third mile outside the Aurelian city walls on the ancient Via Labicana (modern Via Cassilina). This catacomb is especially interesting as it contains chambers decorated not only with images of collective dining (with diners represented on stibadia couches), but also with two painted kline scenes, which were a very rare motif in the repertoire of catacomb imagery.

The catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino is also known under the name *inter* (or *ad*) *duas lauros*, and was recorded as such in the sixth-century *Liber Pontificalis* with reference to the basilica dedicated by Constantine the Great to the martyrs Peter and Marcellinus.\(^864\) Both its Latin name and the dedication of the land by the emperor suggest that the cemetery was established on imperial property.\(^865\) What is more, the area had been used for burials since republican times, and from the beginning of the second century AD it was also designated as a cemetery for the *equites singulares* Augusti.\(^866\) After the battle at the Milvian Bridge in AD 312, during which the cavalry fought on Maxentius’s side, Constantine demolished not only the famous *Castra Praetoria* and the New Fort on the Lateran Hill, using the land for the basilica of San Giovanni, but also destroyed the horsemen’s cemetery on Via Labicana and used their smashed tombstones as building material for laying the foundations of the basilica of SS. Pietro e Marcellino.\(^867\)

\(^{864}\) *Liber Pontificalis* 34.26: *Eidem temporibus fecit Augustus Constantinus basilicam beatis martyribus Marcellino presbitero et Petro exorcistae in territirio inter duas lauros et mysileum ubi mater ipsius sepulta est Helena Augusta, via Lavicana, miliario III.* [ed. Douchesne (1886) 182].

\(^{865}\) Guyon (1987a) 8; Borg (2013) 80; Drijvers (1992) 30-3.

\(^{866}\) Guyon (1987a) 11-32.

\(^{867}\) Speidel (1994) 156-7; Guyon (1977); Guyon (1987a) 30-2; Holloway (2012) 86-93; Cowan (2016) 87. The destruction of New Fort of the Pretorian Guards in Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 2.17.2: ‘but he [Constantine] abolished the pretorian troops, and destroyed the fortress in which they used to reside’ [tr. Vossius (1814) 44]. The fate of the *equites singulares* in The Latin Panegyric 12.21.2-3: ‘[…] [Constantine] preserved for you whatever soldiers survived the war. Now they fight for you,
As I outlined before, the subterranean cemetery originated in the late third century AD from the appropriation of abandoned water tunnels and cisterns, which must have been connected to an imperial villa located on the estate.\textsuperscript{868} It is also evident that the first nuclei (the oldest galleries in regions Y, Z and X) developed as separate burial complexes, and were connected into a larger network of corridors during the course of the fourth century.\textsuperscript{869} This indicates that neither the origin, nor the development of the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino differed from those of other catacombs around Rome.

However, what makes this catacomb distinctive is the presence of inscriptions that refer to \textit{Agape} and \textit{Irene}, which supplement seven out of fifteen collective dining scenes located in its \textit{cubicula}. The inscriptions are unique and can be found only in the north-western part of the catacomb (regions A, Y and I: Map 1.).\textsuperscript{870} As I shall argue, their uniqueness in a funerary context in the City of Rome suggests the foreign provenance of the \textit{cubicula} users/owners, who most likely migrated to Rome from the Rhine region. For that reason, I will demonstrate that the Roman catacombs should not only be studied in the context of various religions, but should also be seen as providing evidence for social and political interaction during the Late Roman Empire.

The following chapter will present all the painted dining scenes found in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino as they demonstrate perfectly the diversity of the composition, meaning and function of convivial images represented in funerary decoration. The scenes will be divided into five groups, which reflect these differences. I shall begin with a presentation of two known \textit{kline} scenes. The second section will discuss two convivial scenes combined with images of working class people carrying out their daily activity. I shall also discuss one convivial scene that can be identified as a biblical story, and two scenes which portray family or \textit{collegia refrigera}, but do not contain any particular inscriptions. This will be followed by a discussion of images which

\textsuperscript{868} Borg (2012) 80; Guyon (1987a) 37-50. See the discussion in the Introduction, section. 0.4.2.
\textsuperscript{869} Guyon (1987a) 62-86 and 322-30.
\textsuperscript{870} Map 1 after Deckers (1987), see Appendix 2.
have inscriptions referring to Agape and Irene, and their connection with funerary customs known from the Rhine region. The last section focuses on the decoration of arcosolium 75, which contains two different convivial images: one with an inscription referring to Sabina, and one, surprisingly overlooked in the scholarship to date, that most likely represents Mithras dining, which would be the only known example of such a representation found in a Roman funerary context.

5.1. Kline scenes

The two known representations of reclining figures decorate the walls of cubicula 10 (region X) and 59 (region Y). It has been suggested that the scene from the early fourth-century cubiculum 10 portrays the deceased, as the inscription BINKENTIA (with KEN painted above the reclining figure) provides the name of the person depicted in the scene (fig. 49).871

![Fig. 49. The reclining figure (BINKENTIA) in cubiculum 10, the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino](image)

She is represented reclining on a large brown cushion, though the kline itself is missing. The poor preservation of the image prevents any further identification of the scene. The figure is depicted alongside images of four servants: two standing on either side of the kline with their arms raised in a gesture of prayer, and two depicted on either side of the doorway holding banqueting paraphernalia. The number of servants reflects the status of the

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871 Zimmermann (2009) 180; Deckers (1987) 209-10 with references to previous interpretations.
reclining figure (regardless of whether she was the deceased or the owner of the tomb, or both). The rest decoration found in cubiculum 10 is religiously neutral (floral motifs) therefore it is likely that it did not belong to a Christian owner. Even the representation of a crux gammata on the vault in cubiculum 10 cannot corroborate any Christian interpretation of the monument, as it most likely simply represents solar or cosmic symbolism rather than a Christian cross.

Cubiculum 59, which dates to the first quarter of the fourth century, was also decorated with religiously neutral images and floral motifs. The kline scene, represented on the back wall of the arcosolium, portrays a young man reclining and wearing a short white tunic decorated with clavi (fig. 50). The man reaches towards a female servant who holds a cup in her right hand. The ceiling of the arcosolium contains images of two young men wearing similar short tunics: one holding a codex, and one raising his hands in a gesture of prayer.

Fig. 50. Kline scene in cubiculum 59, the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino

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872 The cubicula in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino have been commonly interpreted as Christian, solely on the basis of the nineteenth-century understanding of the development of the catacombs, see Introduction, section 0.4.1. It has also been acknowledged as such by, e.g. Deckers (1987) 209-10; ICUR 16812. Interestingly, the idea of Christian ownership of cubiculum 10 must have been abandoned: during my last visit to this catacomb (May 2016) I was told by the tour guide that there is no point in seeing this particular chamber as it is ‘just a pagan tomb’.


It is very likely that all three images of young men were intended to represent the same person, the deceased buried in this *arcosolium*. Combination of the images of the man praying and holding the codex was probably designed to represent the deceased as an educated and pious youth, while the depiction of him reclining was intended to show (or elevate) his status. Unfortunately, the early twentieth-century discoverer of the *cubiculum* did not mention any inscriptions that might be associated with the tomb, therefore any further identification of the reclining figure is impossible.\(^875\)

Despite the fact that the two *kline* representations from the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino decorate chambers located in two separate areas and which were painted around 20 years apart, they are surprisingly similar. They both represent figures reclining on high, round-backed couches. They are depicted in almost identical poses, and are wearing similar clothes. Perhaps they were based on the same sketch book design. In addition, bearing in mind that the emphasis of the decoration is not placed on representing the religion of the deceased, it is likely that the images were intended to convey the status of the depicted figures. If so, they resemble all other *kline* scenes, which were intended to portray the deceased as (or elevate them to the level of) members of the Roman elite.

### 5.2. Convivial scenes combined with images of members of the working class

The two dining scenes that will be discussed in this section decorate the walls in *cubicula* 13 and 14 in region X (nos. 18 and 19 respectively) and can be dated to the end of the third, or the very beginning of the fourth century AD.\(^876\) Both tombs have been previously interpreted as belonging to Christian owners based on one assumption only: that region X was developed and maintained solely by Christians.\(^877\) However, while tomb 14 could potentially be argued as

\(^{875}\) Kanzler (1914) 67-8.

\(^{876}\) The decoration of *cubiculum* 14 was created slightly later than that in *cubiculum* 13. For the discussion on the possible dating see Zimmermann (2002) 179-81 with references.

belonging to a Christian owner, chamber 13 does not contain any decoration that could endorse a similar interpretation.\textsuperscript{878}

The dining scene in \textit{cubiculum} 14 is also unusual as it depicts only two women sitting on a \textit{stibadium}, being served by two attendants. The dining scene is combined with another figural representation depicted on the left of the \textit{convivium}, which also portrays two women (one taller and better dressed than the other, which may imply that the smaller person is intended to represent a slave) in the process of dyeing cloths.\textsuperscript{879} The figure of the taller woman is identical to the diner resting on the left side of the \textit{stibadium}, while the servant resembles the figure of a female attendant approaching the meal from the right. It is an unusual representation, which indicates that the \textit{cubiculum} might have belonged to the women portrayed in the dining scene. The scene on the left also shows one of the reclining women working, which provides a rare insight into the skilled Roman working class. As the middle section of the panel is missing, it is impossible to guess whether the cloth-dyeing scene and the meal were composed to form a narrative, but the fact that they are placed close to each other suggests that they were intended to stand together. It is also evident that the tomb owner chose to represent her profession rather than any particular religious beliefs on her final monument, and that this is how she wanted to be remembered.

In a similar manner, the dining scene in \textit{cubiculum} 13 (no. 18) is combined with a scene of workmen during their daily activity: two \textit{fossores} cutting rock. The convivial image belongs to a standard repertoire and presents six participants resting on a \textit{stibadium} with three tables situated in front of the couch. The plentiful food is demonstrated through the depiction of three tables

\textsuperscript{878} \textit{Cubiculum} 14 contains only floral decoration on the walls, combined with a depiction of a ram bearer and four praying figures on the ceiling. As I demonstrated in the Introduction, section 0.3.2.1., the combination of religiously neutral images do not provide sustainable evidence for a Christian interpretation of the chamber. Moreover, the presence of religiously neutral images, and the lack of any biblical scenes, in \textit{cubiculum} 14 is even more surprising as two out of five neighbouring \textit{cubicula} (11 and 12), that were constructed at more or less the same time, do contain several Christian images (Daniel, Abraham, Moses and Lazarus). The other three chambers in this part of region X (9, 10 and 13 which were discussed earlier) contain religiously neutral images of flowers, birds and animals.

standing in front of the couch. The participants were probably all male, though a seventeenth-century reconstruction of the painting depicts at least three women sitting amongst the diners. The remaining decoration of cubiculum 13, of which only the rear wall has survived, does not contain anything that could be recognized as specifically Christian.

It appears that the owners of cubicula 13 and 14 chose to illustrate their professions rather than their religious affiliation on their funerary monument. However, as the dining scenes differ in the number of participants, it is possible that tomb 13 belonged to a collegium of fossores, while chamber 14 was, most likely, used by members of a familia, and the depicted women may represent the deceased. The combination of dining scenes with images of professionals found in cubicula 13 and 14 resembles the decoration of columbarium 31 in the Via Laurentina Necropolis, and cubiculum A3 in the catacomb of San Callisto discussed in Chapter 3. It is evident that this kind of decoration reflects the profession of the owners of these particular tombs, while the convivial scenes were intended to represent certain activities, which most likely refer to refrigeria organized by families and collegia to honour their deceased members. For this reason it can be deduced that the images were also intended to perform a commemorative function, and to strengthen, or even be a substitute for, the actual rites.

5.3. Biblical convivium and refrigeria

The following group contains three examples of dining scenes linked together by a Christian eschatological meaning. The convivial images do not contain any specific inscriptions, but all come from Christian cubicula decorated with multiple biblical scenes.

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880 Bosio (1632) 83. However, the early seventeenth-century reproductions should not be taken as indisputable proof of the original designs of catacomb paintings, as in several instances the images were misinterpreted [e.g. an image of Noah in the ark was interpreted by one of the copyists as Pope Marcellus preaching, see Stevenson (1978) 48-9] or even ‘adjusted’ to fit the contemporary ideology (e.g. Sante Avanzini drew a picture of Saint Catherine on top of the original painting with fossores in cubiculum 21 in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino). One example will also be discussed in section 5.3.2.

881 See Chapter 3, sections 3.1.3.2. and 3.2.2.2. respectively.

882 Nestori ([1975] 57, no. 60) mentions one more dining scene, which is now completely lost.
5.3.1. *Refrigerium in cubiculum 48 and biblical convivium in cubiculum 62*

The convivial scene depicted on the lunette of an *arcosolium* in *cubiculum 48* (no. 2.3), despite being mostly destroyed, is still quite recognisable. The fragments of the painting portray four men resting on a *stibadium* and a servant standing in front of the couch on the right.\(^{883}\) The scene has been interpreted as a symbolic representation of the miracle in Cana, which is especially surprising because an actual depiction of this particular miracle with twelve disciples resting on a *stibadium*, and Jesus standing before them and changing water into wine, decorates *cubiculum 62* (no. 26) which is situated in a parallel gallery approximately 40 meters away.\(^{884}\) An almost identical representation also decorated a small hypogaeum called ‘Cava della Rossa’ on the Via Latina (no. 32), therefore such depictions were not unknown. It is possible that this incorrect interpretation was based on an assumption that the dining scene in chamber 48 is accompanied by two scenes of Jesus performing miracles and by Noah in the ark depicted on the ceiling of the *arcosolium*. Thus, the images would be linked into a narrative despite the fact that the dining scene represents no more than seven participants.

However, it is more likely that the convivial scene in *cubiculum 48* depicted a private (family) *refrigerium*,\(^{885}\) while the images on the ceiling were intended to represent the power of God and are most likely linked to an early Christian funerary prayer.\(^{886}\) The combination of biblical images with a dining scene also resembles the decoration of Christian *cubica* in the catacombs of San Callisto or Priscilla, which allows us to identify the convivial scene as a commemorative meal. As for the scene of the miracle in Cana, it evidently represents the power of God, and conforms to the eschatological reading of the biblical scenes decorating Christian *cubica*.\(^{887}\)

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\(^{883}\) The fragment with the head of a bearded man on the left has been reconstructed wrongly and should probably be placed in the middle of the representation instead. Wilpert ([1903] 303) proposes that the scene might have shown seven participants.

\(^{884}\) Wilpert (1903) 302-4.

\(^{885}\) Jastrzębowska (1979) 27 and 89.

\(^{886}\) See Chapter 1, section 1.3.3.

\(^{887}\) Zimmermann (2013) 254.
5.3.2. *Arcosolium 52*

The dining scene that decorates the wall above *arcosolium 52*, located in region Y (no. 25), was ‘altered’ by Sante Avanzini (one of the illustrators of Bosio’s *Roma Sotterranea*), who added some symmetrical lines changing the depiction of the *stibadium* into a rectangular table.\(^{888}\) Unfortunately, the current state of preservation of the fresco makes it almost impossible to identify the original layout of the painting.\(^{889}\) According to Deckers, the diners are all male, and, judging by their clothes, are most likely of a military background.\(^{890}\) In addition, the man approaching the meal from the left wears similar clothes to the diners, and carries a long cane, which makes it likely that he was intended to represent a traveller.\(^{891}\) For that reason it is likely that the dining scene was intended to show either a commemorative meal (*refrigerium*),\(^{892}\) or a celestial meal with a traveller joining his deceased companions for the eternal celebration.\(^{893}\)

As I outlined above, the catacomb *ad duas lauros* originated on land that was associated with the burials of *equites singulares*, and so the fact that the scene portrays men of a military background should not be surprising. However, the cemetery of the horse guards was most likely located further to the east, where the basilica of SS. Pietro e Marcellino was built,\(^{894}\) while *cubiculum 52* was probably constructed after Constantine entered Rome in AD 312.\(^{895}\) It is possible, therefore, that the tombs were associated with a different group of soldiers.

This takes us to the next group of convivial images, which may shed more light on the owners of the *cubicula* located in the north-western part of the catacomb.

\(^{888}\) Wilpert (1903) 517. For more ‘alterations’ made by Avanzini see Ghilardi (2013).

\(^{889}\) According to Wilpert [(1903) 516-18] it represents a traditional Todtenmahl (sic), which should probably be understood as a meal with the dead.


\(^{891}\) Wilpert (1903) 517-18.

\(^{892}\) Klauser (1928).

\(^{893}\) Though, perhaps, not as strongly Christian as was suggested by Hennecke (1896) 261-9.

\(^{894}\) Guyon (1987a) 32.

\(^{895}\) Deckers (1987) 287.
5.4. Dining scenes with inscriptions referring to Agape and Irene

There are seven convivial scenes still in existence with inscriptions referring to Agape and/or Irene. In addition, these inscriptions reflect a certain drinking custom of mixing wine with hot water, though the phrases differ slightly in each cubiculum. For instance, the inscriptions above the dining scene in chamber 39 (no. 20) are IRENE DA CALDA (‘Peace, give [us] calda’) and AGAPE MISCE MI (‘Love, mix for me’), while in the neighboring cubiculum 45 (no. 21) they say AGAPE MISCE NOBIS and IRENE PORGE CALDA. As I outlined above, these inscriptions can only be found in the north-western section of the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino. These dining scenes have been vigorously debated, though only with regard to the connection between the inscriptions and the female figures that appear in the convivial images. However, as the following sections will demonstrate, these unusual dining scenes not only provide an insight into certain funerary practices and beliefs, but also present some interesting evidence for social interaction and migration of foreign groups to the city of Rome.

5.4.1. Previous interpretations

Due to the presence of the unique phrases above the dining scenes the images have been interpreted as carrying a different message and meaning from any other convivial scenes found in Roman catacombs and tombs. However, as shown in the table below (Table 3), it is evident that the main issue which has challenged scholars over past centuries is the relationship between the inscriptions referring to Agape and Irene and the female figures represented in

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896 Another dining scene in which only fragments of a decorated arcosolium are preserved is in tomb 73 (no. 27). The scene originally contained an inscription, though only three letters survived: NOB […] (most likely from MISCE NOBIS – ‘mix for us’). The representation of the diner (his formal posture, standardized hairstyle, clothes and facial features) shows a similarity with the figures from the scenes with Agape and Irene, see Dückers (1992) 158. The arcosolium is situated in close proximity to both tomb 75 (with the decoration referring to Sabina), and cubiculum 76 (with the inscription mentioning Irene), but it is impossible to determine the name in the inscription. For that reason, this scene will not be included in the discussion of the other dining images with Agape and Irene.

897 Calda refers to a mixture of wine with hot water, see Fevrier (1977) 35.

898 For other variation see the Catalogue, nos. 22, 24, 29-31.
These scenes\textsuperscript{899} have always followed two directions: whether the female figures were intended to represent servants or participants in the meals\textsuperscript{900} and whether they represent real women or should be understood as personifications of peace and love\textsuperscript{901}. However, it has also been noted that it is impossible to provide a single answer to any of these questions as the images vary too greatly\textsuperscript{902}.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scholar</th>
<th>Interpretation of the dining scenes with Agape and Irene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De Rossi (1882)</td>
<td>Celestial meals during which the blessed are served by the symbolic representation of Christian peace and love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hansenclever (1886)</td>
<td>Christian funerary meals that evolved from pagan funerary practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilpert (1903)</td>
<td>Representations of heavenly Christian meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Février (1977)</td>
<td>Charitable meals (agapae) organized by the early Christians to honour their dead and the martyrs. Février also connects the Christian agapae with the traditional commemorative meals called caristiae, which used to be held by families at the end of the festival of parentalia in order to re-establish peace and unity in the family (hence references to Agape and Irene)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jastrzębowska (1979)</td>
<td>Family funerary gatherings of charitable character (funerary agapae)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunbabin (2003)</td>
<td>The inscriptions should be read in an allegorical way. Dunbabin, however, does not provide a single interpretation of the dining scenes, but suggests that they may reflect family funerary meals, or commemorative meals; they may also allude to Christian agapae, or may express ‘fraternal charity and good fellowship’ that was common during normal (i.e. non-funerary) meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tulloch (2006)</td>
<td>The inscriptions referring to Agape and Irene should be understood as dialogue reflecting toasts raised during family funerary meals, where the female figures are the hosts for the convivia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{899} Dückers (1992) 161-2.
\textsuperscript{900} Dückers (1992) 159-61.
\textsuperscript{901} Dückers (1992) 162-6.
\textsuperscript{902} Dückers (1992) 166-7.
Christian family funerary/commemorative meals (*refrigeria*), in which the participants are both living and departed family members: both celestial meals of the deceased and the funerary meals of the living family members interwoven into single depictions

Table 3.

An example of how difficult it may be to interpret the scene is provided by the inscriptions from *cubiculum* 50 (no. 24) which mention two women: *AGAPE QA CALQA* (sic) and *IRENE MISCE*. However, the servants represented at the dining scene are a boy and a woman, which makes it rather unlikely that it is to them that the inscriptions refer.\(^{903}\) Another example is provided by the decoration of *cubiculum* 76 (no. 29) where the inscription *MISCE MI IRENE* is written above a woman on the left dressed in a reddish tunic and holding a cup. An additional representation of a woman dressed in a white tunic and standing next to an *authepsa* (a water heater) is depicted to the left of the dining scene (fig. 51).

As the additional scene portrays the process of mixing wine with hot water, the inscription most likely refers to this particular figure. Judging by her clothes and hairstyle, the woman who mixed the wine is also represented seated.

on a high-backed chair to the right of the *stibadium*, while the woman, above whom the inscription is written is depicted as rising a cup in a toast. It is therefore possible that the inscription is in fact part of a conversation, though speech bubbles were not yet in use when the painting was created. Therefore, it is likely that the woman on the left addresses *Irene* - the woman on the right, to mix wine for the diners. If the inscription was intended to refer to the woman as a servant, it would rather say *DA CALDA*.

Looking at the previous interpretation of the dining scenes accompanied by the inscriptions referring to *Agape* and *Irene* (Table 3) it is also evident that the function of the inscription has never been considered. In fact, the only scholar to have considered the scenes and inscriptions in the wider context of funerary decoration was Dunbabin. However, all of the dining scenes are accompanied by biblical images that reflect the theme of salvation (Jonah or Noah) or orants, which, as rightly pointed out by Dunbabin, ‘evokes the power of prayer to save the Christian soul’.\(^{904}\) It is, therefore, possible that the dining scenes were intended to carry out a similar function to the other images, which was not only to represent a commemorative rite, but also to be a substitute for such practices and ensure the salvation of the deceased’s souls in the afterlife. In such a case, they would have played a similar role to the convivial scenes found in other Roman tombs and catacombs. This is especially evident through the example of the dining scene in *cubiculum* 50 (no. 24), where no biblical images accompany the convivial scene, while the adjacent depictions of orants must have enhanced the prayer itself. In the case of this chamber, the most important image is the dining scene represented in the lunette of the *arcosolium* situated opposite the doorway. Therefore, as the orants were a substitute for prayer and the convivial scene not only showed the commemorative rite but also served as a substitute for it when required, the combination of both motifs must have been powerful enough to ensure the happy existence of the deceased in the afterlife.

As for the inscriptions referring to Agape and Irene, it is necessary to consider them in the exact funerary context in which they were placed. As mentioned before, such inscriptions are unique to the north-western part of the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino. This demonstrates that they must have reflected fashion or practice known only to a small community of Christians living in Rome. This, however, has never been taken into consideration, and so the following section will investigate the dining scenes with Agape and Irene further, as they may provide a clue to the origin of those Christians.

5.4.2. A different approach

What has been overlooked in the scholarship to date is the unusual design of the dining scenes themselves, which is not found in any other funerary context around the City of Rome. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the typical Roman collective convivial images represent diners resting on stibadia, whereas three out of seven scenes in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino also include women, seated on chairs with high backs, and resemble the female figures found in the much earlier Totenmahl motif of eastern origin, where women were not represented reclining during dining. What is interesting is that this particular design with men reclining and women represented seated on separate chairs with high backs became especially popular from the mid-second to mid-third century AD amongst military veterans in the Germanic and Gaulish provinces (e.g. fig. 52). A common design of the gravestones of military officers represented reclining must reflect a third-century fashion, as stelae which are very similar in style, are well known from the demolished cemetery of the Roman equites singulares, discussed earlier. It is worth noting that in the Gaulish examples there is a difference in the depictions of the three-legged tables which are shown in the meal scenes as covered with cloths.

907 See Chapter 2, section 2.4.
Fig. 52. Gravestone of C. Iulius Maternus, a veteran of legio I Minerva, and his wife Maria Marcellina, late second century AD, now in the Roman-Germanic Museum in Cologne

What is more, during the third century this design evolved into representations of family meals, which included more than one male diner resting on soft mattresses rather than on klinai, and usually also included two women sitting on separate chairs on each side of the couches (fig. 53).\textsuperscript{908} Occasionally, the scenes include children who are often represented seated on mothers’ laps or next to the diners on the kline.\textsuperscript{909} In addition, the figures represented in the family funerary reliefs wear Gaulish rather than Roman clothes.\textsuperscript{910} This design developed mainly in the province of Belgica, and is especially characteristic of the area around Augusta Treverorum (modern Trier). In addition, it was often, but not always, used on gravestones of military veterans.\textsuperscript{911}

The representations of single men reclining on klinai have been interpreted as demonstrating their status and, as they were often combined


\textsuperscript{909} E.g. A third-century family grave stone from Bonn with a child seated on mother’s lap, now in the Rheinisches Landesmuseum, see Noelke (2000) 69, Pl. XXVIII.1, Noelke, Kibilka, Kemper (2005) 198, fig. 42; A child on kline next to his mother is known from a seventeenth-century reproduction of a lost grave stone from Vetera, see Noelke, Kibilka, Kemper (2005) 168, fig. 13.

\textsuperscript{910} Noelke (1998) 413.

\textsuperscript{911} Colling (2011) 175, Noelke, Kibilka, Kemper (2005) 205-11.
with other scenes of men with horses, this appeared to emphasize the military rank of the deceased veterans.\textsuperscript{912} Because the family meal scenes evolved from the \textit{kline} design, they have also been viewed as showcasing the status of the family of a military officer, or, for instance, in the case of the Igel column (fig. 53), a family of cloth merchants.\textsuperscript{913} However, their location on funerary stelae also suggests that they perhaps reflected the eternal pleasures of families at the table.\textsuperscript{914} The similarity between the eastern-Gaulish family meal scenes and the dining scenes from \textit{cubicula} 39, 45, and 76 is striking, though their narrow regional distributions may seem to be rather random.

Fig. 53. Top left: Funerary stela in the Mainz Museum, late second to early third century AD. Top right: Funerary monument from the \textit{civitas Treverorum}, now in the Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art, Luxembourg, late second to early third century AD. Bottom: Fragment of the Igel Column – a mid-third century AD 23-metre-high funerary monument of the Secundinii family from Igel, near Trier. The original column still stands in its place.

A similar type of collective meal scene is also known from the third- to second-century BC grave stones from Kyzikos, in modern Turkey (e.g. fig. 54).\textsuperscript{915} therefore it would be perfectly possible that all three designs might have

\textsuperscript{914} Noelke (1998) 418.
\textsuperscript{915} Karlsson (2014) 160, no. K105, pl. 47.1.
developed independently from one another. In fact, the designs are not only separated by a considerable period of time and location, but also differ in their meaning as the near-eastern images portray men dining, and women mourning their male relatives, and not family meal scenes.\footnote{Karlsson (2014) 244-52.}

![Fig. 54. Second-century BC funerary stela from Kyzikos, now in the British Museum](image)

However, certain details known from the Rhenish funerary stelae, such as tables covered with cloths (see figs. 52 and 53), which were so unusual in convivial representations in the city of Rome, also appear on four other dining scenes in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino. The best example is provided by cubiculum 78 which contains two convivial scenes with this sort of design. In addition, tables covered with cloths appear in the scene of the miracle in Cana in chamber 62 and, most likely, cubiculum 52, where the diners have also been recognized as wearing clothes characteristic of military officers.\footnote{See above, section 5.3.2.} For this reason, the eastern-Gaulish family meal scenes and the dining images in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino may have more in common than it has previously appeared.

Moreover, the design of high-backed chair that appears in one of the dining scenes in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino (no. 29) recalls the furniture portrayed on kline scenes, where a woman seated on such a chair
often accompanied a male diner reclining on a couch.\footnote{918} The high-backed chairs appear in the context of family funerary dining on the examples in the Gaulish provinces. The high-backed chairs are not only depicted on northern grave stones (e.g. see figs. 47 and 48) but two life-size chairs, sculpted in limestone, were found inside a tomb on Aachener Strasse 1328 in Cologne (fig. 55).\footnote{919} Thus, the design of the high-backed chair in a family scene in cubiculum 76 must also have been been influenced by the funerary practices of northern provinces.

\begin{center}
Fig. 55. Second-century tomb found in 1843 on Aachener Strasse 1328 in Cologne. The tomb was originally built on Via Belgica necropolis and was used until the fourth century AD
\end{center}

It is, of course, essential to note here that, according to archaeological evidence from the Gaulish provinces, the production of grave stones decorated with family meal scenes ceased during the second half of the third century,\footnote{920} which makes them theoretically relatively distant in time from the fourth-century paintings from the Roman catacombs. Having said that, the majority of Gaulish stelae were preserved until the present day because they were used as building material during the fourth century. This implies that until then they were still visible to people who visited the cemeteries in the early fourth

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{918} See Chapter 2, section 2.3, fig. 16, and 2.5., fig. 32.
\item \footnote{919} Noelke, Deckers (1980).
\item \footnote{920} Noelke (2000) 69-70.
\end{itemize}
century. Thus, the cessation in production does not necessarily imply that the design was forgotten, and it is likely that some memory of it continued into the next generation.

Strong evidence for the correlation between the two types of representations of family meals is found in the inscriptions referring to Agape and Irene. As I outlined above, the phrases DA (or PORGE) CALDA and MISCE MI (NOBIS) reflect the Roman custom of mixing wine with hot water. Similar inscriptions, though without the names Agape or Irene, are well known from the mid-third- to mid-fourth-century black-slipped ware (drinking cups, jugs and vases) produced in Trier (fig. 56). Other examples of pottery which is close in style come from other provincial cities, such as Cologne, though only in Trier were the vases decorated with written inscriptions. Trier was one of the major centres of wine production in antiquity, and it supplied both local and distant markets. It is likely that the inscribed black-slipped vessels were sold/purchased containing Trier wine, and in such a way their popularity spread around northern Roman provinces. Moreover, they are often found as grave goods, particularly in the northern provinces, although the analysis of the vessels suggests that they had been used for drinking and mixing before being offered to the dead.

As for the words or phrases written on the Trier black-slipped ware, this particular type of pottery is also known to scholars as ‘Spruchbecherware’, which suggests that the inscriptions most likely reflect toasts that could have been raised during convivia. It is also worth noting that finds in the

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922 Künzl (1997). The connection between the inscriptions from the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino and the drinking paraphernalia from Trier has been noted by Tulloch (2006) 187-90, though Tulloch has not acknowledged that both types of phrases appear only locally in Trier.
923 Harris (1986) 106.
924 Loeschcke (1933) 57.
925 Several examples were found in sites in Roman Britain, see Mudd (2014).
926 Harris (1986) 107; Pirling, Siepen (2006) 79-100; Künzl (1997) 17. Other find spots include production kilns, see Künzl (1997), and occasionally military camps or domestic sites, see e.g. Mudd (2014) 89-90.
928 Künzl (1997) 8. The inscriptions vary significantly, but most often refer to drinking, and include MISCE, DA CALDUM, PIE ZESES, BIBE, VIVAS, DAMI, and many others, see Künzl (1997) 252-9.
manufacturing sites indicate that the words were painted on after the vessels were fired, and each workshop could produce different, often custom made, types of vessels and decoration.\footnote{Künzl (1997) 94-107. However, the vessels that were produced for export were less likely to be custom made, see Mudd (2014) 92.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{fig56.jpg}
\caption{Fig. 56. A late third- / early fourth-century jug with an inscription MISCE ('mix'), Rheinisches Landesmuseum Trier}
\end{figure}

From the large amount of Trier black-slipped ware found in the cemeteries of the northern provinces it is evident that such vessels played an important role, or were fashionable in, in provincial funerary rites of the late third and early fourth century AD.\footnote{See Map 2 in Appendix 2 for their distribution and discovery sites, after Künzl (1997) 108-9, fig. 44 and 45.} However, not even one example of such a vessel has been found in Italy to date. Therefore, the inscriptions found in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino are clearly connected with provincial rather than local drinking customs and funerary rites.

The style of family dining scenes, unusual for the City of Rome, and the inscriptions which reflect certain drinking habits, both point to the foreign design of convivial scenes with Agape and Irene, and specifically to the area of Trier, which is the place of origin of both pieces of evidence. As the dining scenes in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino were commissioned and produced around AD 320-340 (with a small margin of a few years either way)
we would be looking for a community of foreigners who arrived in Rome from the Rhine frontier or, more specifically, from the area of Trier during the reign of Constantine I.\textsuperscript{931}

The connection between \textit{Augusta Treverorum} and Rome in the early fourth century is clearly significant. It was from Trier that Constantine left for a campaign against Maxentius in AD 312, which culminated in the famous battle at the Milvian Bridge and Constantine’s victorious entry into Rome in October that year.\textsuperscript{932} Constantine had stationed himself in Trier in order to control the Rhine frontier, and had partly inherited, and partly recruited, an army which incorporated a vast number of soldiers from the Frankish, Gaulish and Germanic tribes.\textsuperscript{933} What is more, one of Constantine’s private bodyguards, and the deputy commander of one of the detachments, was Florius Baudio, of Germanic origin, who died during the Italian invasion in AD 312.\textsuperscript{934} This suggests that soldiers of foreign origin might have been promoted to the higher military ranks.\textsuperscript{935}

After the battle Constantine did not stay long in Rome,\textsuperscript{936} though he left a few trusted officers to keep a close watch on matters in the city.\textsuperscript{937} He also claimed Maxentius’s imperial villa and land of \textit{inter duas lauros} on the ancient Via Labicana, which shortly afterwards became the property of Helena, Constantine’s mother.\textsuperscript{938} As I outlined above, the cemetery of the \textit{equites singulares} was demolished and their gravestones used as building material for

\textsuperscript{931} For the dating of the \textit{cubicula} in mind see Deckers (1987) confirmed by Zimmermann (2002).

\textsuperscript{932} The earliest account of the events comes from an anonymous \textit{Latin Panegyric} 12(9).16-17 from AD 313, see Nixon and Rogers (1994) 294-333. It was also noted by Lactantius (\textit{On the Deaths of the Persecutors} 44), Eusebius (\textit{Ecclesiastical History} 9.9), or Zosimus (\textit{New History} 2.15-16). For recent commentaries of the events see, e.g. Barnes (2014) 80-5; Bardill (2012) 92-3; Cowan (2016)


\textsuperscript{934} ILS 2777: D(is) M(anibus) / Florio Baudioni viro ducenario / protectori ex ordinario leg(ionis) II Ital(icae) / Diviti(e)nsium vix(it) an(nos) XL mil(itavit) an(nos) XXV Val(eri)us / Var(i)o opti(um) leg(ionis) II Ital(icae) Diviti(e)nsium / parenti carissimo / m(onumentum) f(aciam)ur(it). The inscription is now in the Museo Archeologico Statale, inv. CS 1736.

\textsuperscript{935} The example of Flavius Stilicho suggests that a Germanic officer could even become an important general, see Heather (2005) 216-23.

\textsuperscript{936} The \textit{Latin Panegyric} 12 was presented to Constantine in Trier in early 313 AD, see Nixon and Rogers (1994) 289-90. Also in Barnes (1982) 70-1.

\textsuperscript{937} Le Bohec (2006) 68.

\textsuperscript{938} Drijvers (1992) 31.
the basilica of SS. Pietro e Marcellino and a grand mausoleum originally intended for Constantine himself, but eventually used for the burial of Helena.939

As the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino was established on imperial ground it is very likely that it was administered by the members of the imperial household. The *equites singulares*, who were the imperial bodyguards had also been granted privileged cemetery space on imperial property. After the demolition of their cemetery this location would also appear to be a natural choice of burial site for Constantine’s officers who replaced the previous imperial guards.940 Even though Constantine himself did not stay long in Rome, the fact that the imperial property was acquired by Helena suggests that she, her household and some other members of the imperial court, lived in Rome after AD 312. It is therefore likely that at least some of the soldiers who entered Rome with Constantine, and/or members of the imperial household and court who arrived later with Helena, were buried in the area of *inter duas lauros*. The fact that at least some of the dining scenes represent families at the table suggests that some of the soldiers and court members brought their families with them, while others might have started new families in Rome.

This would explain why the design of funerary family meal scenes and drinking toasts known from the area of Trier appeared in *cubicula* decorations in the eastern part of the city of Rome. It is very likely that the soldiers who arrived in Rome with Constantine in AD 312, and/or the members of the imperial household and court who came shortly after with Helena, were of foreign origin or, perhaps, had been stationed on the Rhenish frontier long enough to adopt regional rites and customs. It is essential to stress here that Germanic, Gaulish or Frankish origin does not imply that the soldiers were not Roman citizens.941 Therefore, the rites and the designs would not be foreign, but provincial.

It is also evident that the dining scenes with inscriptions referring to *Agape* and *Irene* are not identical to the Rhenish examples. For instance, the

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tables represented in chambers 39, 47, 50 or 76 (no. 20, 22, 24 and 29 respectively) are not covered with cloths. In addition, as I discussed above, each cubiculum contains a different set of inscriptions which, despite being very similar, still differ from one another. In chambers 47 and 50 there are no depictions of female figures seated at the ends of the couches. These small differences and lack of certain details indicate that these scenes were most likely painted by Roman rather than provincial artisans. It is evident that they were not accustomed to provincial designs, and in most instances they might not have fully understood the commissioners’ requirements. It is also likely that certain details did not really matter as long as the overall message behind the image was still recognisable.

The small variations between the designs may also suggest that the rites evolved, or were assimilated with local Roman customs. The best evidence for this is the inscriptions, which in some instances clearly refer to the seated figures, although in other chambers they name the female servants, or do not relate to the figures represented at all. It is possible that the inscriptions reflect a local rite that developed from provincial drinking culture into a funerary or commemorative toast to the dead, and was used by a small community of Rhenish soldiers, or members of the imperial court, who buried their deceased in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino. It would still conform perfectly to commonly practised funerary rites, which were based on drinking and dining in honour of the deceased.\textsuperscript{942}

As for the invocations to Agape and Irene, the idea of seeking peace, love and harmony during late antique funerary dining was also widespread around the Empire. The discovery of an ancient funerary structure in Tipasa in the early 1970’s may also corroborate such an explanation.\textsuperscript{943} The funerary complex, which consisted of an enclosure with two rooms designed for dining and several graves, contained a floor mosaic with the representation of fish and sea

\textsuperscript{942} The excessive drinking during the festivals of parentalia and the commemoration of the dead was strongly criticised by Christian authorities: see the discussion in Chapter 1, section 1.3.2.
\textsuperscript{943} Volp (2002) 218.
creatures, and inscription *IN Ἐ DEO PAX ET CONCORDIA SIT CONVIVIO NOSTRO* (`In Christ our God, may there be peace and concord at our banquet’) (fig. 57).\(^{944}\)

Given that the mosaic decorated a funerary area used for dining, and the presence of holes in the floor, indicates that liquids must have been poured over it during celebratory meals, which led researchers to conclude that the inscription must have referred to Christian *refrigeria* which most likely reflected the character of charitable *agapae*.*\(^{945}\) The mosaic was, therefore, understood as comparable with the convivial scenes showing *Agape* and *Irene* from the catacomb of Ss. Pietro e Marcellino.*\(^{946}\)

![Mosaic from a fifth/sixth century funerary complex in Tipasa](image)

**Fig. 57.** Mosaic from a fifth/sixth century funerary complex in Tipasa

The invocations to *Agape* and *Irene* can be understood as the way in which the Rhenish soldiers added a Christian accent to their practices. It is possible that calling on Christian virtues of peace and love was supposed to justify the excessive drinking during such meetings.*\(^{947}\) Another possible explanation is that the inclusion of Peace and Love might have reflected their wish for peaceful lives in the Christian heaven, which would be a perfectly

\(^{944}\) Bouchenaki (1974).

\(^{945}\) Marrou (1979) 268-9, Février (1977); see Chapter 1, section 1.3.1.2.

\(^{946}\) Février (1977).

\(^{947}\) For the excessive drinking during *refrigeria* see Chapter 1, section 1.3.2.
understandable desire for soldiers who spent most of their earthly lives in battle. It is likely that the local toasts raised during funerary and commemorative *convivia* were, in fact, a kind of prayer or wishful thinking. The fact that no two inscriptions are the same points to the informal character of such an invocation, though its local importance is emphasized by the popularity of the inscriptions.

However, several questions about these inscriptions still remain. Why *Agape* and *Irene* and not *Caritas* and *Pax*? Would the idea behind these Greek names have originated from the charitable meals called *agapae*? Even if the names from these inscriptions do refer to the female figures represented on the frescoes, do they portray real women who performed special roles at the meals, or perhaps allegorical figures of *Love* and *Peace*? If the dining scenes depict real women, they most likely represent family meals, perhaps *refrigeria* during which toasts were raised and women played an important role in performing the rites. If, however, the figures are metaphorical, it is possible that the dining scenes portray heavenly banquets where Peace and Love join the diners at the tables. Or, perhaps the scenes should be viewed as a combination of the two options. Unfortunately, any further interpretation would only be possible in the light of new finds, for which we can only hope. In any case, the dining scenes carry an evident eschatological message and, combined with biblical images, were most likely intended to perform a similar function to other commemorative convivial scenes from Roman tombs and catacombs.

However, not all of the inscriptions from the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino draw upon Christian values, and the following example provides evidence for pagan migrants from the Rhenish frontier.

### 5.5. Two dining scenes in *arcosolium* 75

The two final convivial scenes found in the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino decorate *arcosolium* 75 (no. 28): the painting in the lunette is accompanied by an inscription *SABINA MISCE* (‘Sabina, mix!’), which closely

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948 As suggested by Zimmermann (2012) 181-3.
resembles the inscriptions of Agape and Irene discussed above. For this reason, the arcosolium has been commonly interpreted as Christian and not much attention has been paid to the rest of the tomb’s decoration.\footnote{E.g. Jastrzębowska (1979) 22, Nicolai (2002) 111 or Dunbabin (2003) 178.} However, the scene with Sabina is not unique because of its unusual inscription but because firstly, it is not combined with any image that could potentially reflect the Christian faith (i.e. a biblical or miracle scene or even an orant) and secondly, an additional dining scene is represented on the wall above the arcosolium.

The second convivial scene is mostly destroyed but a figure of a diner, wearing a radiate crown and a chlamys (or exomis), and holding a cup in his right arm, is still visible (fig. 53).\footnote{Deckers (1987) 337.} As this figure resembles the seated shepherd depicted in arcosolium 30 in the catacomb of Domitilla, it has been viewed as such;\footnote{Jastrzębowska (1979) 22.} however, the representation rather suggests that the depicted figure is dining.\footnote{Nestori (1975) 61, Ferrua (1970).} The radiate crown that is clearly visible on the head of the represented figure has never been discussed.\footnote{It is not mentioned in Deckers (1987) 337, though it’s clearly visible on the original painting: personal observation. Sadly, I was not able to obtain any proper reproduction of the painting as it has not appeared in any publications as far as I am aware, and it is forbidden to take photographs in the catacombs.}

The composition of the painting suggests that only one other diner could have been depicted at the meal. The second half of the fresco most likely represents a fossor cutting a rock.\footnote{Deckers (1987) 337.} The larger size of the grave-digger rules out his potential identification as a servant, and evidently points to the separation of the two scenes (fig. 58). This is especially intriguing, because representations of two diners, of whom one wears a radiate crown, are well known from ancient art and depict Sol and Mithras dining.\footnote{Griffith (2010) 63-77. An example of a representation of Sol dining with Mithras can be found on a late second-/ early third-century marble relief from Fiano Romano on the outskirts of Rome, now in the Louvre Museum, see Brenk (1983-1984) 536, n. 142; Vermaseren (1956) 238, no. 641; Merkelbach (1998) 319, fig. 70.}

This interpretation, however controversial it may appear, is not impossible. Firstly, the fact that painted images of Sol and Mithras dining are not
known from Roman tombs and catacombs does not necessarily mean that they were never placed there. Images of Sol and Mithras dining are known from provincial gravestones,\textsuperscript{956} while painted and sculpted representations of this kind have been discovered in non-funerary contexts all over the Empire, including the City of Rome itself.\textsuperscript{957}

Moreover, as I discussed in the introduction, the number of known Mithraea from Rome suggests that there must have been a relatively large number of Mithraic congregations living and eventually dying in Rome.\textsuperscript{958} The fact that the archaeological material provides evidence for only two graves of followers of Mithras indicates the poor preservation of such tombs. Moreover, the decoration of the Roman catacombs is mostly destroyed, and in several

\textsuperscript{956} E.g. the stela from Ladenburg, now in Heimatmuseum in Landenburg, see Schwertheim (1974) 188, no. 144.

\textsuperscript{957} An example of a painted scene with Sol and Mithras dining was found in the early twentieth century in the Mithraeum under the church of Santa Prisca in Rome, see Ferrua (1940) 71; Vermaseren (1956) 198, no. 483. A painted representation was also found in the famous Mithraeum of Dura Europos, see Vermaseren (1960) 68, no. 49; Markelbach (1998) 274-8, figs. 15 and 16b. The motif appeared also on pottery, for instance on a third-century \textit{terra sigillata} shallow bowl from Trier, see Schwertheim (1974) 239, no. 206, Merkelbach (1998) 338, fig. 93.

\textsuperscript{958} See the Introduction, section 0.3.1.1.
places the evidence indicates that the paintings were damaged intentionally.\footnote{E.g. in the ‘cubiculum of the coopers’ in the catacomb of Priscilla [Nestori (1975) 22, no.5] the faces of the coopers have been erased. It is impossible to determine the reason for such action, but most likely it happened after the cubiculum ceased to be used.} It is, therefore, possible that the apparent lack of Mithraic tombs might have been caused in late antiquity when also the majority of the Mithraea were intentionally destroyed by Christians.\footnote{Sauer (2003) 131-42.}

At this point it is worth noting that the inscription \textit{SABINA MISCE} written above the dining scene on the back wall of this \textit{arcosolium} reflects drinking toasts found on Trier black-slipped ware, of which several pieces carried decorations and inscriptions referring to the Mithraic cult.\footnote{Künzl (1997) 105.} It is also a well-known fact that soldiers were one of the largest groups of the followers of Mithras, and most evidence for the cult comes from the northern provinces.\footnote{E.g. Clauss (2001) 36; Goodman (1997) 318-21.} Therefore, it is likely that at least some soldiers and imperial personnel were followers of Mithras, and so such decoration should not be surprising in this part of the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino.

Thus, it is not entirely impossible that the dining scene depicted Sol and Mithras enjoying a meal. However, even if the scene was intended to represent shepherds dining,\footnote{Deckers (1987) 337.} or perhaps \textit{fossore}s (as in \textit{cubiculum} 13 which was discussed previously) it would still not necessarily make it a Christian depiction. The shepherds would rather reflect the bucolic (i.e. peaceful) character of the representation, while the \textit{fossore}s would indicate the profession of the deceased buried inside the tomb. In any case, it is unlikely that the decoration of \textit{cubiculum} 75 could be Christian.

Returning to the dining scene from the lunette of \textit{arcosolium} 75, it also differs from the typical representations of convivial scenes found in Christian \textit{cubicula}. The food depicted on the three-legged table is poultry and a large amount of typical drinking paraphernalia (a jug and a basin for washing hands, and a twin wicker carrier with two wine bottles) emphasizes the drinking character of the \textit{convivium}. As I demonstrated earlier, the presence of the

\footnote{E.g. Sauer (2003) 131-42.}

\footnote{Künzl (1997) 105-7.}

\footnote{E.g. Clauss (2001) 36; Goodman (1997) 318-21.}

\footnote{Deckers (1987) 337.}
drinking toasts on Rhenish black-slipped ware, and the fact that the majority of the vessels were found in a funerary context, indicate that drinking wine (or wine mixed with water) played an important role in provincial mortuary and commemorative rites and beliefs. Perhaps the dining scene in *arcosolium* 75 portrays an event where a toast was raised for the dead, or, equally likely, an Elysian feast in which the departed are partaking. The latter interpretation is especially plausible as the ceiling of the *arcosolium* is decorated with a floral motif of numerous tangled red roses, which evokes settings for the Elysian feasts discussed in chapter 3.964

For these reasons, the dining scene inside the *arcosolium* should be viewed as a decoration commissioned by a foreign client, possibly a member of the military, who arrived in Rome from the Rhine region in the early fourth century AD. The owner of the tomb was a pagan, probably a follower of Mithras, which can be deduced from the convivial image represented above the *arcosolium*. In addition, further evidence is provided by the servant, who is called *Sabina*, bringing mixed wine to the table. We have no way of knowing whether she was a real servant or perhaps an allegorical figure, but her name was probably an intentional juxtaposition to the Christian representations found in the neighbouring chambers, otherwise, why not call her *Agape* or *Irene*, which was so common in other Christian tombs?

5.6. **Summary**

From the perspective of a researcher studying dining scenes found in Roman funerary contexts, the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino is by far the most interesting. The site not only contains more painted convivial images than any other cemetery in Rome, but also provides evidence that dining scenes cannot be viewed as a motif with a single generalised meaning because their interpretation, meaning and function can vary according to the neighbouring images.

964 See the discussion on the representation of Elysian feasts in Chapter 3, section 3.1.1.
From the *kline* scenes representing the deceased, to the images of professionals dining, it is evident that certain convivial scenes were designed to demonstrate the status of the tombs’ owners. In addition, the dining scene in *cubiculum* 13 most likely portrays a *refrigerium* which was not only intended to depict a commemorative meal organized by a *collegium* in order to honour the deceased members of the guild, but also to augment or to be a substitute for the actual rites.

What is more, the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino also provides evidence of a group of foreigners who settled in Rome in the first half of the fourth century AD. The evidence suggests that they were either some of the soldiers from Constantine I’s army, or members of the imperial court and household, who might have arrived in Rome with Helena shortly after AD 312, or possibly both. The group definitely came from the area of Trier, from whence they brought their traditional funerary customs and provincial styles of tomb decoration.

It is not surprising that certain social or ethnic groups chose to be buried in particular areas of the catacombs or in separate cemeteries. Evidence for this comes from many funerary complexes: for instance, the famous tomb X from the catacomb of Pietro e Marcellino, which was mentioned in the introduction,965 was used by a group of people from North Africa for several centuries. In addition, the *Coemeterium Iordanorum* on the Via Salaria was most likely established and used by a community of Jordanians living in Rome.966 An example of a cemetery shared by a social group is the burial complex of the *equites singulares*, which was discussed earlier in this chapter. For this reason, it is very likely that a group of migrants, who came to Rome together at one time, was either given a burial area by the Emperor, or chose to be buried together to preserve their regional identity and share funerary customs.

The dining scenes with inscriptions referring to *Agape* and *Irene* not only provide evidence for toasts raised to the dead during commemorative meals, but also demonstrate how traditional pagan rites were incorporated into

965 See Introduction, section 0.3.1.1.
Christian ideas of peace and love. In addition, the inscription referring to Sabina clearly differentiates the convivial scene found in arcosolium 75 from other Christian examples from this region, and, combined with a unique representation of Sol and Mithras dining, may give an insight into the funerary tradition of the followers of Mithras. Therefore, it is evident that the dining scenes may provide new information about the social history of Rome in late antiquity.
General conclusions and final remarks

 [...] (the) tribute which Numa ordained should be offered year by year to the shades of our relatives, according as the nearness of their death of kinship demands.

 For the buried, as for those who lack earth to cover them, one rite suffices: to call on the soul by name counts for the full ceremony.

 /Ausonius, Parentalia, Item Praefatio Versibus Adnotata: 6-10/967

 The investigation of dining practices in the funerary context in the Roman world presented in this thesis clearly demonstrates the importance of convivial rites for ancient societies. Dining, which included funerary meals and commemorative practices shared by the living with the dead, was commonly performed, and depicted, by followers of practically all religions in the Roman Empire: from traditional pagan cults to Christians, Jews, and the followers of Mithras. The most recent research into the Roman tombs and catacombs indicates that until at least the fourth century pagans, Christian and Jews buried their dead in a similar manner in shared cemeteries.968 In addition, the provision of burial was the duty of family members or colleagues of professional guilds and not of any religious authorities.969 The idea of shared funerary practices and multi-religious cemeteries, however, was not commonly acknowledged until the end of the twentieth century which was, to a great extent, due to the politics of the post-medieval Catholic Church, and the commonly accepted belief in Christian superiority over other religions.970

 As I discussed in Chapter 1, both literary and archaeological examples provide excellent insight into the mortuary practices of the Roman people. Regardless of their religion, they all dined at their relatives’ graves, poured libations to refresh the souls of their deceased relations, and, according to Ausonius, cited above, they all commemorated their dead by recalling their names and deeds, a practice which was intended to preserve the deceased’s

967 For the discussion of Ausonius see Chapter 1, section 1.1.2.1.
968 Section 0.4.2.
969 Sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2.
970 Section 0.4.1.
memory and soul, and ensure their happy existence in the afterlife. The commemorative meetings took place on several occasions over the year: anniversaries and festivals for the dead; and from the third century onwards it developed into the rite of refrigerium, i.e. refreshment provided for the departed souls.\footnote{Section 1.3.1.2.} There is ample evidence for this practice in both pagan and Christian commemorative inscriptions, which confirms that it was commonly shared in the ancient world.

However, despite the similarities of the mortuary rites, it is possible to deduce that early Christians used their own funerary prayers that reflected the Christian eschatological beliefs in the salvation of souls through faith in God.\footnote{Section 1.3.3.} These prayers which called for the saving of the souls of the deceased were embodied in the depictions of biblical characters being saved by God, which are commonly found in the Christian parts of the Roman catacombs. It is essential, however, to stress once again that there is no evidence (either literary, or archaeological) that early Christians performed the rite of Eucharist during their funerals and commemorative practices. Moreover, until at least the end of the fourth century there was neither direct control of, nor intervention in, the family funerary rites by the Church officials, who instead regulated the cult of the martyrs.\footnote{Section 1.3.2.}

As for the representations of diners found in Roman funerary contexts, it is possible to distinguish two types of convivial depictions: the so-called kline scenes portraying single banqueters (rarely a couple) resting on klinai, and the images depicting collective meals held on stibadia.\footnote{Section 2.1.} The first motif, which evolved from much earlier representations of Babylonian kings dining, was subsequently used commonly around the Mediterranean World on gravestones and in tomb decoration until the late fourth century AD. However, despite its popularity in funerary culture, it is still impossible to determine a single interpretation of the motif, which suggests that the decorated memorials must have been produced according to each commissioners’ individual requirements.
The only two known examples which are supplemented with inscriptions referring to the scenes represented provide two separate explanations: one portrays the deceased in the way he spent most of his life (the monument of Flavius Agricola), and the other one presents the deceased in the way he wished he had spent his life: dining with his son, who unfortunately had died long before his father in military service (the gravestone of Rubrius Urbanus).  

Having said that, regardless of the interpretation and the religion of the deceased to whom a monument with a kline scene was dedicated, it is evident that the kline motif was intended to emphasize the status of the reclining figures.

The second type of meal scene originated from the representations of outdoor picnics for which portable soft cushions were much more appropriate than kline couches. Despite the strong unity of the design of collective dining scenes with stibadia, it is clear that they also do not carry a single meaning and the scenes can be divided into several sub-categories: Elysian picnic scenes, representations of the social status and prosperity of the deceased, images of refrigeria organised by families and collegia events, family celestial meals, mythological meal scenes or biblical convivial. This classification, however, is only possible by considering the meal scenes in the context of the wider decoration, as any differentiation of the scenes is based on their neighbouring images.

Alongside the variation in meanings of the convivial scenes there are also the different functions of the images. For instance, relief and painted representations of post-hunt picnics, or dining events that accompanied travel scenes, were evidently designed to portray the elite villa lifestyle and

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975 Section 2.5.  
976 Section 2.7.  
977 Sections 3.1.1 and 3.3.  
978 Sections 3.1.2 and 5.1.2.  
979 Sections 3.1.3, 3.3, 4.2 and 5.2.  
980 Sections 5.3.2 and 5.4.  
981 Section 4.1.1.  
982 Sections 3.2.2.1 and 5.3.1.
demonstrated the status of the tombs’ owners. Mythological picnic scenes found on Roman sarcophagi were used to enhance stories that are clearly associated with conviviality and/or the tranquillity of the countryside, for example Dionisiac picnics or post-hunt events with Meleager and Atlanta. In a similar way, the scenes of biblical convivia portrayed events with miracles that reflect the eschatological theme of Christian funerary imagery. What is also important is that images of both Christian and pagan refrigeria, organised by families or professional collegia, also conform to the theme of the salvation of souls, as the preservation of the memory of the dead was the primary purpose for these commemorative rites. This is especially evident in the Christian examples that are accompanied by biblical scenes of miracles, which were designed to stand for early Christian funerary prayers. The fact that the biblical scenes were often interchanged with scenes of refrigeria suggests that the images of commemorative meals were intended to perform a similar function and were a substitute for actual commemorative rites when needed. In fact, both Christian funerary prayers and pagan commemorative rites were intended for exactly the same purpose: to preserve the souls of the deceased in the afterlife.

The investigation of collective dining scenes in Roman funerary contexts also provided an interesting insight into late antique migration of rites and designs. Nine out of thirteen convivial images from the north-western part of the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino on the ancient Via Labicana portray family meal scenes supplemented with inscriptions referring to Agape and Irene (and one to Sabina), which are unusual for the City of Rome. A similar design of family convivial images is known from the Rhine region and Augusta Treverorum, which was also famous for the production of drinking paraphernalia decorated with drinking toasts that call to mind the unusual inscriptions from the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino. In addition, the

983 Sections 3.1.2.2 and 4.1.2.
984 Section 4.1.1.
985 Sections 3.2.2.1 and 5.3.1.
986 Sections 3.1.3.1, 3.1.3.2, 3.1.3.5, 3.2.2.2, 3.2.2.3, 3.2.2.4, 3.3 and 5.3.
987 Section 5.4.
catacomb was established on imperial property which was claimed by Constantine after his victory over Maxentius at the Mulvian Bridge in AD 312, and eventually given to his mother Helena who moved there from Trier with her court shortly after Constantine’s succession. These three major pieces of evidence suggest that the north-western part of the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino was used for burials of members of a community that arrived in Rome from the Rhine region with their own funerary traditions.

Despite this new approach to the scenes with *Agape* and *Irene*, it is still impossible to determine the exact meaning of the scenes and their inscriptions. As the images most likely portray family celestial meals, the inscriptions sometimes refer to the female figures represented in the scenes, but in other instances the names do not match the depicted people. For this reason, the role of the female figures remains a mystery, and we have no way of knowing whether they were intended to portray real participants or allegorical figures.

In addition, the catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino would seem to provide unique evidence for a grave of followers of Mithras who also came to Rome from the Rhine region. A dining scene with two individuals, one of whom wears a radiate crown, and which clearly resembles well known images portraying Sol and Mithras dining, has been overlooked in the scholarship to date. The Mithraic scene supplements another convivial image with inscriptions referring to *Sabina*, which does not resemble neighbouring Christian iconography. However, the fact that the grave with Mithraic images is located near Christian tombs confirms that members of a community were buried together despite their different religious affiliations.988

Finally, it is worth mentioning dining scenes that are often accompanied by images of members of the working class, for instance, port workmen,989 the *fossorese*990 and cloth dyers.991 In these cases, the convivial images also represent *refrigeria* during which family or *collegia* members commemorated their deceased relatives and colleagues, though the tombs’ owners/ commissioners

988 Section 5.5.
989 Section 3.1.3.2.
990 Section 3.2.2.2 and 5.2.
991 Section 5.2.
also chose to represent their profession as a means of preserving their memory. It is therefore evident that the dining scenes found in Roman funerary contexts not only demonstrate important funerary traditions, but can also shed light on certain social and ethnic aspects of the communities living in the Roman world.

Dining scenes, both with *kline* couches and *stibadia*, disappear from Roman funerary iconography by the end of the fourth century. *Kline* scenes must have become less and less popular due to decrees concerning usage of *kline* couches during dining, which is well documented through archaeological finds from all around the Empire.\(^{992}\) As to the *stibadia* scenes of collective meals, their discontinuation in funerary decoration must have reflected the fact that by the late fourth and early fifth century the Church had begun to control, and regulate, not only the cult of martyrs but also traditional commemoration of the dead.\(^{993}\) However, in contrast to the total disappearance of the *kline* design from Roman art, the images of collective meals held on *stibadia* continued their popularity in late antique and medieval secular art. The motif was widely used for different kinds of representations: from the engravings on silverware of post-hunt picnic scenes and outdoor meals held during travel (see examples nos. 129 and 130), and the depictions of historic royal banquets on manuscript illuminations,\(^{994}\) to outdoor picnics with shepherds on textiles,\(^{995}\) or even in the depictions of famous events from the life of William I and his conquest of England in 1066 on the Bayeux Tapestry (no. 140).

The motif of *stibadia* meal scenes was also adopted into early Christian religious, non-funerary art. One of the earliest examples is provided by the famous Brescia Casket, of which two sides are decorated with dining scenes: on the left is the Feast for the Golden Calf, while on the right is the Feast in the

\(^{993}\) Section 1.3.2.  
\(^{994}\) E.g. Dido’s feast depicted in late fifth-century Vergilius Romanus, Codex Vaticanus Latinae 3867, fol. 100v, now in the Vatican Apostolic Library, see Dunbabin (2003) pl. XVI; or Herod’s feast in the sixth-century Codex Sinopiensis Suppl. Gr. 1286, fol. 10v, now in Bibloteque Nationale in Paris, see Grabar (1967) 203-4.  
\(^{995}\) E.g. a fifth-century textile roundel from Egypt, now in the New York Brooklyn Museum, see Weitzmann (1979) 249-51, no. 230.
House of Jethro (fig. 59).\textsuperscript{996} However, the design of \textit{stibadia} meal scenes is best known from multiple depictions of the Last Supper, of which one of the earliest representations, abbreviated to portraying only four participants, was carved on a fifth-century ivory book-binding from the Cathedral Treasury in Milan (no. 133). The full representation of Jesus dining with his twelve disciples can be found, for example, on a mosaic in the early sixth-century church of San Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna (no. 134), several medieval manuscript illuminations (nos. 135 and 136), an early twelfth-century painting in the church of San Angelo in Fornis near Capua (no. 137), a late twelfth-century mosaic in the Cathedral in Monreale in Sicily (no. 138), and a late twelfth-century ivory antependium from Salerno in Italy (no. 139). It was only in late medieval or early renaissance art when the design of the Last Supper changed placing Jesus in the middle of the composition.\textsuperscript{997}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{The right side of the Brescia Casket (also known as \textit{Lipsanotheca}), late fourth century, now in the Museo di Santa Giulia at San Salvatore in Brescia, Italy}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{996} For the Brescia Casket see Watson (1981); Tkacz (2002).
\textsuperscript{997} E.g. the Altarpiece of the Holy Sacrament painted in 1466 by Dirk Bouts; or the Last Supper in The Hague manuscript, KB, 78 D 38 II Gospels, fol. 186v dated to 1460’s.
Despite the disappearance of dining scenes from Roman and early Christian funerary decoration in the fourth century, and the passing of control of the commemoration of the dead to the late antique Church, some elements of the traditional pagan cult of the dead were preserved until modern times. For instance, in Georgia, a post-soviet Orthodox country, people gather at cemeteries on Easter Sunday, and on several other occasions during the year, in order to honour their deceased relatives, when they pour wine at their graves, and feast ‘with the dead’. The opulence of the meals, the amount of wine poured over the graves, and the dancing and celebrating echoes the accounts of ancient commemorative events. Less convivial, yet still a nation-wide festival for the dead, is celebrated each year at the beginning of November in Catholic Poland, when, over two or three days, people travel across the country to visit their relatives’ graves, elaborately decorated for the occasion, and light candles for their souls. What is especially interesting is that during my most recent visit to Poland in November 2016 I asked several of my friends and family members for their views and beliefs on this particular custom. The most common answer was that this is the tradition: the younger generations celebrate ‘All Saints Day’ because this is what their parents do. It was only during conversations with my grandmother and her ninety-six-year-old sister that I found out that they actually believe that one can see the souls of the deceased who wander around and wait for prayers in the mist and candlelight smoke of the cemeteries. This idea, however, was not well received by the family priest, who called it a simple folk superstition. This, in turn, clearly reflects the situation that also emerges from ancient texts, when the Church tried to suppress the traditional commemoration of the dead and took control over the cult of martyrs. However, as seen through the example of my grandmother, who is the most devoted Catholic Christian I know, there is, and always has been, a huge difference between popular/folk beliefs and the teaching of the Church.

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998 E.g. Augustine, Confessiones 6.2.1-6, or Zeno, Tractatus 1.25.6.11, see section 1.3.2.