The Roman Catacombs

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The writer has consulted and used the following : - Armellini, Archaeologia Christiana, Rome, 1898; Catholic Encyclopaedia, see the article, 'Catacombs' {The whole Encyclopaedia, including this article, is accessible on the internet}; Marucchi, Archaeologia Christiana, Rome 1923; Marucchi, Le Catacombe Romane, Rome, 1905; Dr. Ryan, The Roman Catacombs, in The Irish Ecclesiastical Record, April, 1925; P. Syxtus, Notiones Archaeologiae Christianae, Rome, 1909.

The Church is the possessor of an earthly inheritance of immense and manifold interest. In that patrimony of hers, which the piety, skill and learning of her children combine to enlarge in every age, the Roman catacombs hold a place of unique importance. Their position can be recognized at once when it is stated that they are among the oldest monuments of the Church's, long history, and that they make her early years live again for us in a way that nothing else can.

A study, then, of these venerable monuments - compendious though it must be, within the limits of this booklet - should be of interest not only to those who have had the good fortune to visit the Eternal City, or to those who will one day visit it, but to all Catholics who desire to know something of the early life and customs of that glorious Mother, the Church, whose children humbly, and yet proudly, they claim to be.

We shall divide this study into two parts. In the first part, we shall consider the origin and nature of the catacombs. In the second, we shall review their history.

ORIGIN AND NATURE.

The term "catacombs" designates the underground galleries at Rome used by the early Christians as burial-places of their dead. [Footnote: Catacombs exist elsewhere, as at Albano, Syracuse, and various other places, in Italy; in Malta, in Northern Africa, etc., but the best studied and most famous are those of Rome. See Catholic Truth Society of Ireland pamphlet number BH. 607A, for "Exploring the Roman Catacombs"]

The name is not of ancient origin; for these burial places were known as coemeteria (cemeteries) during the centuries when they were in use. Coemeterium is a Latin translation of the Greek word koimeterion (from koimaein, to put to sleep), which means a dormitory; for according to the beautiful Christian concept of death, which was known to the Jews also, [Marucchi, Archaeologia Christiana, 3rd ed., p. ,79.] and was approved by Our Lord Himself, [Matt, 27; 52; John, 11; 11.] the human body, far from being doomed to remain for ever dead, is only laid to rest or sleep, in suspended animation as it were, until the morning of the General Resurrection shall come. The application of the word "catacomb" to all the underground cemeteries of Rome find's a parallel in the way the English word "bridewell," which once meant a particular prison near St. Bride's Well in London, finally came to be synonymous with "prison" in general.

The ancient cemetery, of the third century, that lies under the district of the Via Appia where the church of St. Sebastian now stands, was known for hundreds of years as the coemeterium ad catacumbas, or simply catacumbas. This name is a combination of two Greek words, kata meaning downwards and kumbe, a hollow or depression.

The significance of the name is justified by either or both of the facts that there is a considerable depression in the surface of the soil of this region, and that a deep, hollow space which recent excavations have brought to light, lies close under the church of St. Sebastian. In the Middle Ages the ancient Christian cemeteries were abandoned and soon even forgotten, with the exception of this cemetery ad catacumbas which the monks of St. Sebastian kept accessible and. which still. continued to be visited by devout pilgrims. The constant use of the phrase ad catacumbas in connection with this much frequented burial-place would naturally give rise to the idea of identifying the terms "catacomb" and "cemetery", as if they were synonymous.

Accordingly, after the tenth century, the name was applied to any underground cemetery at Rome; and the re-discovery of the other ancient burial-places, towards the end of the sixteenth century, continued and handed on that practice.

It should be emphasized that the catacombs were intended to serve as burial-places of the Christian dead, because there exists a popular misconception that they were used principally as places of worship. The early Christians of Rome carried on their corporate worship within the city itself; at first in the domestic churches [Cf. Rom., 16; 5]. in the houses of their wealthier brethren, later, in the third century, in the tituli (titles) or parish churches. Thus St. Peter lived and exercised his sacred ministry for some time in the house of the noble senator Pudens, [Later St. Paul also enjoyed the hospitality of Pudens. Cf. 2 Tim., 4; 21.] on the site where the church of Santa Pudenziana (a saint who was a grand-daughter of Pudens) now stands. In the dark days of persecution, when to gather in the city would be to invite danger, the catacombs were undoubtedly used as places of worship, and as places of refuge from the persecutors, but this use was temporary and exceptional. In days of peace, the only religious functions held in the catacombs were those connected with burial, or those which took place at the tombs of the dead, and especially of the martyrs, on the anniversaries of their death or martyrdom.

A still graver error would it be to imagine that the catacombs were the ordinary dwelling-places of the early Christians. The members of the youthful Church at Rome were men and women drawn from all classes of society, who lived like their pagan fellow-men, by the exercise in normal social life of the various callings which are found in every civilized community. "We do not separate ourselves from the world," says Tertullian with his usual energy of style, "sailors, soldiers, labourers, merchants, traders, artists, - we live like you [the pagans] and by our dealings with you: excess, abuse, - this alone is what we avoid." [Apology 42, Armellini, op. cit., Pt. :1, c. 4.]

It was a logical outcome of their Faith that the Christians should have special burial-places distinct from the burial-places of the pagans. A prominent feature of every religion is its teaching concerning the Last Things, which rules also its conduct towards its dead. To have a separate place of burial for the deceased members of a religious body is but an extension of the practice of having a separate place of worship for the living members. The Christian mind would therefore shrink from being associated in death with the idolatrous forms of belief that found expression at pagan tombs. While, even in those early days, there were Christian cemeteries above ground, whose existence

was safeguarded by law - as we shall see more in detail later - for the most part, the ancient Christian cemeteries were underground.

Several factors influenced this choice of burial-site. In the first place, the Christians favoured inhumation, or the burial of dead bodies, instead of cremation, or the burning of them - the ashes of each body being gathered in an urn, which was then placed in a private tomb or in a public columbarium, that is, a tomb with niches for holding such urns. [The use of the word "ashes" with reference to a corpse arose from this practice of cremation, in which the description is literally verified.]

Cremation was, with a few exceptions, commonly practised in the pagan world of Rome. (One of the exceptions was the ancient gens Cornelia, or family of the Scipios, whose hypogeum, or underground burial-chamber, can still be seen on the Via Appia, mid-way between the Baths of Caracalla and the so-called Arch of Drusus.) In selecting; this mode of burial, the Christians were inspired by the example of Christ's burial, and by their reverence -for, the human body, which Revelation had told them becomes in Baptism the temple of the Holy Ghost, and is destined to become after the General Resurrection a participator in the heavenly glory of the soul.

Secondly, they wished to imitate the tomb of Our Lord, which was cut out of the solid rock [Luke, 23; 53.] according to Palestinian custom. Some influence may have been exercised also by the practice of subterranean burial among the Jews who had settled in Rome, as it was practised at that time indeed amongst most Oriental peoples. Lastly, there was the consideration that underground burial afforded greater freedom and greater security from molestation at the hands of an infuriated mob. For while the law conceded protection to their cemeteries, whether above or below ground - or better, while there were means of bringing their cemeteries, wherever placed, within the protection of the law, - yet the Christians knew that pagan Rome was hostile to them; and prudence dictated the following of the safer course of underground burial. There was special need for caution, since, unlike all others who practised subterranean sepulture, the Christians frequently visited the tombs of their dead, to pray for the souls of the departed, and to venerate the martyrs whose bodies were deposited there.

Are the catacombs of purely Christian workmanship? Before the time of Padre Marchi, S.J. (+ 1860), the master of the great de Rossi, it was commonly held by archaeologists that the catacombs are merely disused sand-pits and stone-quarries of ancient Rome, pre-Christian in their origin, but adapted by the Christians to purposes of sepulture. To Father Marchi belongs the credit of proving the falsity of this opinion.

The soil of the Roman Campagna, in which the catacombs are situated, is of volcanic origin, and contains three strata of tufa. The uppermost stratum is a loose sand called pozzolana, [* So called from the town of Pozzuoli, on the Bay of Naples, where a similar volcanic ash is found.] which when mixed with lime forms an excellent hydraulic cement. Next is a stratum called granular tufa, dark-red in colour. The lowest stratum is composed of a hard, stony tufa, also dark-red in colour, which was used in many of the buildings of ancient Rome, and is still used in modern constructions. The middle stratum is useless for building purposes: its combination in some degree of the properties of both the other strata renders it unadaptable to the specific use of each of them in building. Being of a soft, porous nature, it could not serve as stone, and yet is too hard and stony to be used for cement. Now, it is in this middle stratum that the great majority of the catacombs are

found; its softness rendered it comparatively easy to excavate, while at the same time its, consistency was such as to guarantee safety from collapse when tunnelled.

There was the further advantage that its porous quality afforded protection from damp. The situation of the catacombs is surely an indication that these galleries were not excavated in pre-Christian times; for the excavation of them would have been without purpose. The catacombs, therefore, are the work of Christians.

This conclusion is supported by another consideration. The galleries of the catacombs are usually about three or four feet wide, sufficient space being excavated to permit of a bier being carried by two fossores or grave-diggers, one behind the other. The tunnels of the quarries on the contrary, are about fifteen feet in width, wide enough to permit the passage of a horse and cart. The galleries of the quarries, besides, are short and irregular, with the sides sloping towards the top; while those of the catacombs are straight with vertical walls.

Our conclusion is borne out also by the paintings of the catacombs, which represent the fossores or diggers at work excavating the tufa; and by the inscriptions erected to some of the fossores, which state that they worked all over the cemetery.

In a few instances quarries were adapted as Christian cemeteries - the precise reason for this is not yet known - but in these cases walls had to be built into the galleries, a task which required much expense, and labour, and time. Cemeteries are also found communicating with quarries, which communication was advantageous in times of persecution, for it allowed the Christians to enter the cemeteries through the quarries without arousing attention, and even to escape the soldiers who were posted at the usual entrances. When, therefore, in the martyrologies, mention is made of a quarry, e.g., in arenario, as the burial-place of a martyr, one must be careful to discover whether such a phrase is intended to signify the quarry-like appearance of the catacomb, or the fact that the catacomb lay beside a quarry. Failure to interpret this and similar phrases correctly has in the past led archaeologists into the error which we have been refuting.

The Roman catacombs, which are about fifty in number, are of vast extent. Michele Stefano de Rossi reckons the total length of their galleries at 587 miles. It has been calculated that if placed in a straight line, they would extend the whole length of. Italy. Father Marchi estimates that between six and seven million bodies were laid to rest in them. Still, they do not penetrate so far underground as one might suppose on first considering these calculations. The excavations were made on different levels or storeys, three, four, or sometimes five in number, one above the other, between which communication was established by means of steps. On each of these levels runs a veritable labyrinth of passages, intersecting one another very frequently.

In the past, some exaggerated notions about the extent of the catacombs were entertained, even by archaeologists, the echo of which is still heard among the common people of Rome. It was thought that the whole soil of the Roman Campagna was honeycombed with them, that they extended in an outward direction as far as Tivoli, Albano, and to the sea at Ostia, and reached on the inner side into the heart of Rome itself, penetrating under the Vatican, and meeting under various churches. [P. Syxtus op. cit., vol. I, pp. 264-5.] They were thought to communicate with one another, and to run under the beds of the Anio and Tiber.

This fantastic picture fades before the solid test of facts which careful exploration has established.

The Roman catacombs lie along the consular road leading from the city, and are situated, all of them, between the first and third milestones from the Aurelian wall [Marucchi, Le Catacombe Romane, 2nd ed., p. 24.] which, though built in the years 270-275 A.D. marks the point to which the city had extended before that time. The catacombs that lie beyond the third milestone belong to the local village or town, which in some cases no longer exists. There are no catacombs within the city; because the burial or the cremation of a dead body within its precincts was prohibited by a law of the Twelve Tables, first enacted in 450 B.C., and re-enacted several times during the Empire, even so late as under the Christian Emperors, Theodosius and Justinian, in 381 A.D. [P. Syxtus, loc. cit., vol. I, p. 266.] To this law a. very few exceptions were permitted: for example, the burial of Emperors and Vestal virgins within the city was allowed. The only Christian tomb inside the city before the seventh century was that of the brothers, Saints John and Paul, on the Coelian Hill, where stands the church which bears their names. They were buried in the place where they suffered martyrdom, in their own house.

Nor was there underground communication, save in a very rare instance, between the various catacombs, which were independent of one another, even those nearest one another, as the cemetery of St. Sebastian and that of St. Callixtus, both on the Via Appia. The oldest galleries did not pass under the consular roads along which the catacombs lay, much less under the Tiber and Anio; the galleries which run beneath these roads are, for the most part, later than the year 313 A.D., when liberty was granted to the Church.

HISTORY.

It will be convenient to divide the ancient history of the catacombs into four periods, according to the plan followed by archaeologists.

The catacombs in the beginning were the private burial-places of the rich families such as the Flavii, the Acilii Glabriones, who had become Christians. The rich owners, inspired by that fraternal charity that is the mark of Christ's followers, [John, 13; 35.] admitted to them the dead bodies of their poorer brethren in the Faith. The catacombs of this period are called after their original owners. That of St. Priscilla on the Via Salaria is the oldest of all at Rome. going back as it does to the time of the Apostles. Others of this period are that of Lucina (now part of the catacomb of St. Callixtus) on the Via Appia; and on. the Via Ardeatina, the catacomb of St. Domitilla, which belonged to the family of Flavius Clemens, cousin of the Emperor Domitian, and cousin also of Domitilla whose name the cemetery bears.

These early catacombs enjoyed the double protection of Roman law, firstly as private property, and secondly as cemeteries. The law declared that every tomb was a sacred and inviolable place, and as such, was under the jurisdiction of the pagan Pontiffs, whose permission was required before even any important alterations could be made in the structure. The tomb with the enclosed piece of land around it was the inalienable property of the family whose dead were placed in it: it could not be bought or sold, nor pass into the ownership of a stranger by testament, by confiscation, or by any other arrangement. These legal safeguards, any infringement of which was severely punished, favoured the development of the early Christian cemeteries. In those laws we find also the reason why, during this early period, the catacombs were free from molestation, although their open entrances lay along the public highways and must have been well-known to the pagan passers-by.

The first period of the catacombs closes about the end of the second century.

Meanwhile, the number of Christians had increased so considerably at Rome that it became necessary for the Church to provide additional cemeteries for the burial of her deceased children. Accordingly, during the third century, we find catacombs which were under ecclesiastical ownership existing together with some private or family burial-places, such as have been noted earlier. We enter now upon the second period of the catacombs, which runs from the beginning of the third century until the year 313. During this period many new catacombs were excavated under lands which the Church had acquired by purchase or by donation. In addition, several of the cemeteries which formerly were privately owned passed into the ownership of the Church, and changed their name from that of the original owner to that of some Pope who had works of construction carried out in the particular cemetery, or to that of a martyr who was venerated there. Thus, for example, the cemetery of St. Callixtus on the Via Appia, which had been at first known as the cemetery of the family of the Caecilii, received its new name from the deacon Callixtus (afterwards Pope), who was placed in charge of the cemetery by Pope St Zephyrinus, when it had passed into the ownership of the Church.

The corporate ownership of cemeteries by the Church during this period is an historically established fact, [For proofs, see Marucchi, Archaeologia Christiana, pp. 94-95.] but it suggests a difficulty. The Christian religion was illegal according to Roman law; it does not seem likely, therefore, that the law would have permitted the possession of cemeteries by the Church as a religious society. The solution of this difficulty, propounded by Giovanni Battista de Rossi, and adopted by the majority of historians and archaeologists, is a, follows. Since the days of the Republic there had existed in Rome funerary associations composed of members of the various trades, such as goldsmiths, carpenters, cooks. The purpose of these societies was to contribute towards acquiring a common tomb for the members of each trade: it had usually no direct connection with religion. The law recognized the existence and corporate ownership of such associations. Taking advantage of this law, the Christians chose to be known to the civil authorities as a burial association, whose responsible head was, at Rome, the Pope, and in other cities of the Empire, the local Bishop. Thus while Christianity was forbidden as a religion, it was recognized as a funerary association under some name which - though full of meaning to a Christian - sounded innocuous to the ears of a pagan, such as those found in an inscription in Algiers: Cultores Verbi; "Worshippers of the Word," or Ecclesia Fratrum, "The Assembly of Brethren."

Another solution that could be put forward is that the catacombs, while in reality belonging to the Christian community, were legally the private property of some individual member of the Church, and thus were brought within the protection of the law. We have seen recourse being had in modern times to such an expedient, in order to save ecclesiastical or monastic property from the confiscatory laws of hostile governments.

In spite of the law, however, the Emperor Valerian confiscated the catacombs in the year 257 A.D., and prohibited the Christians from assembling in them. This prohibition they evaded with some success by opening entrances to the catacombs through the disused sand-pits (as was explained already), by removing staircases and blocking galleries, that their pursuers, should they enter, might be baffled and foiled at every turn. The edict of Valerian was revoked by Gallienus, who succeeded Valerian in the year 260, and who restored the catacombs to their rightful owners. During the persecution of Valerian, Pope Sixtus II with his two deacons was seized (in the year 258) during a meeting of the Christians at the catacomb of Callixtus, was taken to Rome, and condemned to be put to death with his deacons in the cemetery where they had been apprehended.

Another confiscation of the catacombs took place under the Emperor Diocletian, in 304.

Finally, peace came under Constantine with the publication in 313 A.D. of the Edict of Milan, which proclaimed the legal existence of the Church as a religious society, recognized her right to possess property, and returned to her the confiscated cemeteries.

About the middle of the period which we have been considering the catacombs were connected with the twenty-five titles, or parish churches in the city, each of them being placed under the control of the nearest title. That of St. Callixtus was directly in charge of the Pope himself, and became, during the third century, the official burial-place of the Popes, whose tombs may still be seen in the Crypt of the Popes.

The third period runs from the peace of Constantine until the invasion of Rome by Alaric in the year 410, In this period the catacombs still grew in extent, and were held in great veneration as sacred places. Churches were often erected above ground, over the graves of the martyrs.

Special mention must be made of the work of Pope St. Damasus in fostering veneration for the catacombs. This Pope, during his Pontificate from 366 to 384, manifested an unremitting zeal and love for the ancient cemeteries. He restored the crypts of the martyrs, adorned them with paintings, and placed in them beautiful marbles, on which by his orders were incised verses of his own composition, that the memory of the martyrs' lives and sufferings might be saved for posterity. Many of these inscriptions have come down to us. The verses, most of which are in hexameters, are of a distinct literary style, and are easily recognizable by the beautiful and special form of the letters deeply carved in the marble. The engraver whom Damasus employed was Furius Dionysius Philocalus The literary and artistic elegance of these Damasian inscriptions is not their only merit. They are, besides, of the highest historical and topographical value, because Damasus shows himself to have been a conscientious investigator of the facts which he relates, and cites occasionally the source of his information; nor does he fear to speak with hesitancy, when he is not sure of his statements. Moreover, he must have been well acquainted with the documents concerning the persecutions which were preserved in the archives of the Roman Church (by the site of the present Cancelleria), where, following his father's first profession, he worked as a notary during his early life.

The great veneration felt for the martyrs led, during this period, to the wish to be buried near their tombs, a privilege, we are told, quod multi cupiunt et rari accipiunt, "which many desire and few acquire." The satisfaction of this desire gave rise to a practice which we cannot but regret: the paintings over the older tombs were cut through, that room might be found for more recent burials. Inscriptions still exist which record the purchase of a burial-site near a martyr's tomb, from the fossores, who seem to have acquired considerable authority at this time; occasionally the price paid for the site is mentioned.

Towards the close or this period, burial in the catacombs became rare. Christianity had now definitely triumphed over pagan opposition and persecution, and could with safety exercise its varied life in the open. There was no longer any cogent reason for the labour of excavating graves underground. Cemeteries were now laid out above ground, usually over the catacombs. (These cemeteries have disappeared, owing to the buildings and many changes of later ages.) About the time of the invasion of Rome by Alaric in 410, burial in the catacombs had practically ceased. The devastation wrought in the Campagna during that invasion hastened the movement away from the ancient burial-places.

We enter now on the fourth and last period of the ancient history of the catacombs, which begins in 410 and terminates with their abandonment in the tenth century. Though the catacombs were now but rarely used for burial, they were frequently visited as places of devotion, both by the Romans and by pilgrims from the Christian world. Many of these pious visitors left behind them a short record of their presence by scratching Latin or Greek inscriptions on the plaster near the tombs of the martyrs. Such inscriptions are known to archaeologists under the Italian name of graffiti (scratchings). They usually contain the name of the devout visitor and a short invocation to the martyr whose tomb he has visited, the martyr being often mentioned by name. In modern days, these graffiti have been invaluable to archaeologists in helping to determine the ancient name of the catacomb in which they are found and the exact position of the tombs of the martyrs who were venerated in it.

During the invasion of the Goths in 537-538, the catacombs suffered heavily, but were restored later by Pope Vigilius (537-555).

To the seventh century belong the great pilgrimages from the distant countries of Christendom, which led to, the compilation of the Itineraries or guide-books directing the pilgrim to the various shrines around Rome, and giving brief indication of the martyrs whose bodies were venerated in each place. Like the graffiti, these Itineraries have been of valuable service in the topographical reconstruction of the ancient cemeteries.

The catacombs again suffered severely during the invasion of the Christian Lombards in 755, who ransacked the cemeteries in search of the relics of the martyrs, which they carried away with them.

The various invasions to which Rome was subjected, and the diminution. of population caused by war and pestilence brought about the neglect of the cemeteries. Consequently, Pope Paul I, in 757 transferred the relics of many of the martyrs from the catacombs to the church of St. Sylvester (in Capite), which he built in Rome, on the site of his father's house in the Campus Martius. An inscription, still in the vestibule of his church, records the names of many of the martyrs whose remains were transferred on that occasion. Among the most notable relics were those of St. Tarsicius, the boy-martyr of the Holy Eucharist.

Hadrian I (772-795) and Leo III (795-816), his successor, unwilling to continue the translation of the martyrs' bodies from their resting-places, strove to restore the ancient cemeteries to their pristine glory, and to stir up affection for them in the hearts of the people. Under their directions various works of reconstruction were carried out, and they sought to preserve the custom of assembling for Mass and prayers at the tombs of the martyrs on the anniversaries of their martyrdom. Unfortunately, their efforts were doomed to failure; for the people of Rome had lost the habit of visiting the catacombs. Paschal I, in 817, was compelled to resume the translations rather than abandon the martyrs' remains to neglect. He brought to Rome the bodies of the Popes and the body of St. Cecilia which had been buried in the cemetery of St. Callixtus. An extensive translation of relics took place to the church of St. Praxedes

Though the catacombs now held little to attract the faithful, they were not yet wholly abandoned. They were visited occasionally, and Masses were said in them, until about the tenth century. Gradually, however, the number of them that were visited was reduced; the others were neglected, and many became filled with earth and ruins; of the few that were adjacent to churches, only the parts nearest the surface were known; until finally in the twelfth century, they were all - with the solitary exception of the catacomb of St. Sebastian - not only abandoned, but forgotten.

Thus were lost in oblivion those venerable monuments that bore witness to the eternal hopes of millions of souls, hopes which embraced in their objects the mouldering bodies wrapped within the earth along those rugged galleries. Happily, they were not doomed to be for ever forgotten.

In the Renaissance period, at the end of the fifteenth century, a few of the catacombs were visited by some of the humanists of Rome, but as their interests were centred wholly on monuments of pagan antiquity, of which they hoped to find some specimens underground, the. records of the Christian past held little to attract them, and failed to stimulate them to further research.

The re-discovery of the catacombs came about in the following way. On the 31st May, 1578, some workmen were digging for pozzolana near the Via Salaria, when the disturbance of the soil caused a collapse of earth beneath them, which revealed the existence of an under ground Cemetery. Galleries branched off in different directions, leading to chambers adorned with paintings and inscriptions undoubtedly Christian in character; tombs still intact abounded. This discovery aroused the greatest interest in Rome, especially among the learned; and crowds flocked to behold it. Among them was Baronius, the great Church historian, and beloved friend of St. Philip Neri. The Romans of that age realized for the first time the existence of another and older Rome beneath their suburbs. Hence arose the notion and name of Roma sotterranea (Underground Rome) which has since then been applied to the catacombs. Some archaeologists, especially Ciacconio, a Spaniard, and de Winghe, a Fleming, set about studying the re-discovered cemeteries.

But the first to combine methodical exploration of subterranean Rome with the study of the documents bearing on Christian antiquity was Antonio Bosio (1576-1629), a Maltese, who had come to Rome in his boyhood. He has been justly called "The Columbus of the Catacombs," and is rightly regarded as the founder of the science of Christian Archaeology. From the year 1593 until his death, he gave himself entirely to the study and exploration of the ancient cemeteries, copying the paintings and inscriptions. The fruits of his many years of labour were given to the world in his work Roma Sotterranea, which was published after his death by the Order of the Knights of Malta of which Bosio was a, member.

In the eighteenth century Bosio had as followers Bottari, Marangoni, Boldetti, and others, but it must be admitted that their work, compared with the careful and scientific work of Bosio, already marks a period of decadence in Christian Archaeology. They held many erroneous opinions about the catacombs, some of which were mentioned above. Their explorations were carried out solely with the purpose of finding relics of the martyrs. [Marucchi, Le Catacombe Romane, p. 19.]

Under Padre Marchi, S.J., a new era in Christian Archaeology opened, in the early part of the nineteenth century. Important as were the results obtained by him, they were eclipsed by the achievements of his pupil, Giovanni Battista de Rossi (1822-1894), "the new Bosio," as he is called, the modern founder, or the re-founder of Christian Archaeology.

In 1841 de Rossi visited one of the catacombs, for the first time, in the company of Father Marchi. An intimate and lasting friendship sprang up between the priest and the youth. From Father Marchi the young archaeologist leaned what proved to he the secret of his success, namely, the method of seeking light on the topography of the catacombs from a close study of the historical and documentary evidence bearing on them, He had the happy inspiration also to utilize the graffiti and the Damasian inscriptions in the work of identification. These and numerous subsidiary aids, added to more than forty years of excavation and exploration amid the accumulated ruins and rubbish of centuries, enabled him to give to the world the full and scientific knowledge of the catacombs that

we now enjoy. De Rossi's principal achievement was the discovery and exploration of the cemetery of St. Callixtus, the greatest and most important. of all the catacombs, which before his time was unidentified, being confused with other cemeteries in the neighbourhood, especially that of St Sebastian.

In 1851, under Pius IX, was founded the Commission of Sacred Archaeology to superintend the work of excavating and restoring the catacombs The expenses connected with this work were met out of an annual fund supplied by the Holy See. The Commission continued the work of De Rossi, faithfully following his scientific method. Several of its members - Armellini, Wilpert, Marucchi, - were pupils of the great master himself. The doings of the Commission are recorded in a periodical, Nuovo Bulletino di Archeologia Cristiana. Under the auspices of the Commission was founded the Collegium Cultorum Martyrum, a College or Society for the veneration of the Martyrs, which, on feast-days of the martyrs, holds religious celebrations in the catacombs, followed by popular lectures, relative to the celebrations. On these occasions the catacombs are so crowded that one feels they are winning back something of their former glory.

In 1927, Pope Pins XI established the Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology for the supreme direction and control of all branches of Christian archaeological work and study. The Institute has absorbed the former Commission of Sacred Archaeology and has taken the Collegium Cultorum Martyrum under its care. It is empowered to confer the Doctorate on students, on fulfilment of certain conditions, after a three years' course of study.

At the University institutions at Rome, for many years classes have been held in Christian Archaeology, which are attended by students from the whole Catholic world. In short, interest in the catacombs is now spread far beyond Rome; lovers of Christian antiquity are found everywhere; so that no visitor to Rome, least of all a Catholic, would consider a visit or a. pilgrimage complete, if he failed to spend at least some hours in examining one or more of the ancient Christian cemeteries.