author admits temporary defeat, leaving the question open and suggesting that uncertainty is often the price of objectivity. The book deserves a second edition.

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The early modern invention of late antique Rome. By Nicola Denzey Lewis. Pp. xviii + 426 incl. 15 ills and 2 maps. Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. £34.99. 978 1 108 47189 3
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When tourists visit Rome's catacombs today what do they see? What are they told? As Nicola Denzey Lewis recounts, drawing on her own experiences, tour guides share colourful stories and anecdotes of early Christians to (usually) believing visitors. As she admits, Lewis is definitely not one of them. This book is essentially about debunking commonplace notions of the catacombs and indeed other religiously-interpreted archaeological sites, and framing them instead as historical inventions. At its core, the book contends that our understanding of Rome's early Christian remains, principally the catacombs, is grounded on an early modern construction of the late antique Christian world, elaborated and confirmed by renewed historical and archaeological interest in the nineteenth century.

To be more precise, as Lewis states towards the end of the book, this is about the early modern invention of a specifically Catholic Rome. That point is important. In the wake of Catholic Reform, from the mid-sixteenth century, the rediscovery and ideological re-categorisation of Rome's antique remains allowed the Church to assert its authenticity and continuous history in the face principally of challenges from Protestantism and its *ad fontes* counter-claims. Rome, so the narrative developed, was literally built on the remains of early Christians, who defined and powered the city as a uniquely authoritative sacred dynamo.

The academic treatment of early modern Roman archaeology is to a degree well-established. Accordingly, most of the book's focus is not in fact on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as it moves around its three periods of interest from late antiquity to the nineteenth century. More particularly, the book engages principally with late antiquity itself. In one sense this entails challenging historiographical ideas that Rome was already conceived as a sacred Christian city by the fourth century. More to the point, in the context of the book as a whole, this in turn underpins the arguments about the specifically 'early modern' invention of Rome's sacred geography.

Much of the book examines in detail often uncertain historiographies about precisely what catacombs might have signified in their late antique contexts and about burial practices amongst early Christians, and indeed about what the dead signified. It also traces the relatively recent mapping of Rome as a sacred city, in effect imposing on Rome a spiritual geography that was not applied in the fourth century. In another chapter, Lewis takes St Peter's basilica as a case study, unpicking its traditional associations as the place of St Peter's burial. The picture that emerges of late antique Christianity in Rome is considerably messier than we might assume.

Significantly too, the author draws attention not only to Christian catacombs, but also to what have been categorised as Jewish catacombs. The distinction between

these, as Lewis contends, was itself calculated and confessionally-tinged. It reflected an intention to define Rome's Jewish people as a distinct community, separate and indeed separable from its Christians. It was, of course, during the sixteenth century that Rome's ghetto was formalised. Rather, as Lewis seeks to argue, the material evidence gathered from supposedly 'Jewish' catacombs – especially material objects such as gold, glass and lamps, along with inscriptions – do not in fact definitively demonstrate that there was a defined and distinct Jewish community in Rome. Instead, Jews lived by what is termed 'voluntary association', practising a 'small group religion', organically integrated into Roman society.

Late antique Rome, then, was not a city defined by corporate religious communities, or necessarily by confrontations between defined blocs of pagans and Christians. It was considerably more fluid than that. What is more, Christians 'located' themselves in various ways in and around Rome, and not solely or even primarily by fixed sacred sites. According to this book, it was not until demographic and economic problems began to create wider problems for Rome from the fifth century, alongside the barbarian invasions, that Church institutions began to shape the city more significantly, in effect filling a vacuum.

As the conceptualisation of Rome's ancient remains was thus created during the early modern period, so it was confirmed and romanticised in the nineteenth century. Lewis illustrates this by drawing attention to a series of rather fanciful paintings from the 1800s depicting scenes of burial and indeed of worship in a clandestine world of early Catholic faith, when it was still persecuted. In various instances, too, nineteenth-century archaeological endeavours were themselves predicated on the ideological categorisations created in the early modern period, not least in the treatment of what have been seen as Jewish catacombs.

The book is written with a conversational tone, perhaps a little too conversational in places, with repeated contractions in the prose. While the references to very contemporary aspects of Rome's catacombs – the visitor experience at particular sites, for example – gives the book a sense of lively immediacy, I also wonder if they could date it quite quickly. I, as a reader, would have preferred a firmer editorial hand. Perhaps also the images could have been a bit larger and, in a couple of instances, a little sharper. Those quibbles aside, this is a wide-ranging and engaging book that engages skilfully with a very considerable body of historiography, methodological reflection and source material. It should encourage us to think again about how Rome's sacred geography took shape, from uncertain beginnings in late antiquity to ideological clarity in the sixteenth century, and then to the more romanticised and historically sanitised visitor experience of our modern world.

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Erasmus on the New Testament. Selections from the Paraphrases, the Annotations, and the writing on biblical interpretation. By Robert D. Sider. Pp. xvi + 331. Toronto–London: University of Toronto Press, 2020. $47.95. 978 1 4875 2410 4

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The great Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus began writing about the New Testament relatively late in his career. Though he had published the notes on