



Early Christian Catacombs

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What is a catacomb?

Catacombs are subterranean human passageways for religious practice. Any chamber used as a burial place can be described as a catacomb, although the term is more commonly associated with the Roman empire.

History of catacombs



Appian Way, Rome

How the transition from cremation to burial resulted in the creation of catacombs

1. Practical necessity
2. Strengthen Christian community
3. Belief in resurrection

Uses of catacombs



Place for pilgrimage- Catacomb of San Sebastiano.

Catacomb layout



Sarcophagus in the catacombs of Saint Callistus in Rome



Arcosolium in Domitilia Tomb Of Veneranda



Loculi in San Callisto

Catacomb symbolism & decoration



Rome, Catacombs of St
Marcellinus and Peter-
Jonah is vomited out.

Rome, Catacomb of St.
Sebastian- funeral inscription
with Christian symbols.



Sacromonte, Spain



Left- St Cecilio, the patron saint of Grenada, Spain
Below- The forged Los Plomos del Sacromonte lead plates.



Summary

When? Catacombs first emerged in the first half of the second century when Christians began burying their dead underground.

Why? They believed in burial as opposed to cremation due to their beliefs in resurrection and to provide a place for Christian symbolism and unity. Often used simple symbols and frescoes to depict biblical messages and scenes.

Used for? In addition to burials, catacombs were used as places of pilgrimage and are also argued to have been hiding places for persecuted Christians.