# Jewish Names from the Roman Catacombs

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The Jewish community of Rome is the oldest in Europe. The earliest Jews known to be in Rome were Jason ben Alexander and Eupolemus ben Johanan, sent there as envoys by Judah Macabbee[1] in 161 B.C.E.[2] Large numbers emigrated after Palestine was taken by Pompey, and Judea became a client kingdom in 63 B.C.E. By 59 B.C.E., the Jewish community was large enough that Cicero claimed that the number of Jews crowding the courtroom area during the trial of Flaccus, the proconsul of Asia, was enough to intimidate the jury.[3] Judea became a Roman province in 6 C.E. The rebellion of 66-70 C.E., which resulted in the destruction of the Temple, and the Bar Kochba war of 132-136 C.E. swelled the community with refugees, prisoners, and slaves. A number of the oldest, extant Roman Jewish families: De' Rossi, De' Vecchi, De' Pomi(s), Pintelli, and Anau, claim decent from prisoners or slaves brought to Rome at this time.[4]

Both Julius and Augustus Caesar granted rights to the Jews. Besides being allowed to send money to support the Temple in Jerusalem, they could become Roman citizens, and have lawsuits between Jews settled by Jewish, rather than Roman law. If the Roman's monthly distribution of grain to the poor fell on the Sabbath, the portion allotted for the Jews was reserved until the next day.[5]

At the same time, Jews were regarded as a strange and barbarous people. They were mostly poor, abstained from eating pork, refused to obey Roman law (using Jewish law instead), and set one day in seven aside for laziness (refusing to work on the Sabbath).[6]

Another difference between the Jews and their Roman neighbors was that the Jews buried their dead in communal artificial caves, catacombs, rather than cremating them in the Roman style. There were several reasons for this. The Jewish religion held that the dead would be resurrected, so their bodies should not be mutilated or destroyed. The communal caves were less expensive than buying individual plots of land. Finally, it was a custom among the Jews of Palestine that went back to the burial of Abraham and Sarah in the cave of Machpelah[7] and that was still in use among such groups as the Essenes in Qumran.[8]

Wood fragments from the oldest Jewish catacombs have been dated back to around 50 B.C.E, at least a century before the more famous Christian catacombs. Since Christianity originated as a Jewish sect, the early Christians quite probably modified the design of the Jewish catacombs for their own use.[9]

Five Jewish catacombs have been identified around the city of Rome:

- on the Via Nomentana near the Villa Torlonia,
- on the Via Labicana outside the Porta Maggiore,
- on the Via Appia Pignatelli (beyond the second milestone, closer to the city than the Christian catacombs),
- on the Via Appia (Via Cimarra),
- on the Via Ostiensis, at Monteverde.

The Monteverde catacomb is both the largest and the oldest. Inscriptions refer to freed slaves, who must have been prisoners of war brought to Rome by Pompey after his conquest of Judea in 63 B.C.E.[10]

Inscriptions on the tombs mention almost a dozen synagogues, whose locations can be estimated because people would bury their dead in catacombs near to them. Both the synagogues and the catacombs are shown on the table at right.

| Catacomb | Synagogue(s) |
|---|---|
| Via Nomentana | Synagogue of the 'Agger'<br>Synagogue of the Subura |
| Via Labicana | Unknown synagogue |
| Via Appia Pignatelli | Synagogue of the Field of Mars |
| Via Appia | Synagogue of Elaias |
| Via Ostiensis | Synagogue of the Agrippaeans<br>Synagogue of the Augustiales<br>Synagogue of the Hebrews<br>Vernacular synagogue |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Synagogue of Volumnius<br>Synagogue of the Tripolitans<br>Synagogue of the Calcaresians |

The great majority of the inscribed names contain Latin elements (54.3 percent) or Greek elements (37.4 percent), with only 14.5 percent having Semitic elements. Mixed element names such as Aurelius Alexander and Claudius Ioses make up 13.9 percent of the names.[11] Another example of this heavy use of Greek may be found in Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* 16.5-15, which contains 18 people with Greek names, 4 with Latin names, and 2 with Hebrew names.[12]

The specific breakdown is shown below.

| Language of Name by Sex of Bearer[13] | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sex of Bearer | | | | | | | |
| | Male | | Female | | Unknown | | Total | |
| Language | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Latin Only | 142 | 44.0% | 110 | 51.2% | 2 | 15.5% | 254 | 46.1% |
| Greek Only | 121 | 37.5% | 50 | 23.3% | 4 | 30.8% | 175 | 31.8% |
| Semitic Only | 43 | 13.3% | 25 | 11.6% | 4 | 30.8% | 72 | 13.1% |
| Latin/Greek | 13 | 4.0% | 22 | 10.2% | 0 | 0.0% | 35 | 6.4% |
| Latin/Semitic | 4 | 1.2% | 8 | 3.7% | 0 | 0.0% | 12 | 2.2% |
| Doubtful | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% | 3 | 23.1% | 3 | 0.5% |
| Total | 323 | 100.0% | 215 | 100.0% | 13 | 100.0% | 551 | 100.0% |

Inscription on Gravestone in the Vigna Cimarra at Rome. "Catacombs", *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

Of the 538 names on the catacombs, 438 are single element names (81.4 percent); 285 (88.2 percent) of the male names, and 153 (71.2percent) of the female names. Double element names make up 16.7 percent of the names (9.3 percent of male names, 27.9 percent of female names), and 1.9 percent are triple element names (2.5 percent of male names and 0.9 percent of female names).

In some cases, both a Latin or Greek name and a Semitic name are given, such as Cocotia "also named Juda."[14] This is an early case of the practice of giving Jewish babies a Hebrew name, used for religious ceremonies, and a secular name for every day use. Hebrew names may also have been translated to their Latin equivalent. Leon suggests that Dativus and Donatus are translations of Natan; Gaudientius, and Hillarus of Isaac; Theodatus and Theodorus of Jonathan; Iustus and Probus of Zadok; Vitalio, Zosimus, and Zoticus of Chayim; Theophilius of Jonathan; Irene and Irenaeus of Shelomith and Solomon, respectively; Regina of Malcha; Dulcitia and Dulcia of Naomi, and Felicissima and Felix of Simcha.[15]

The Roman practice of naming a child for its parent was followed to some extent by the Jews. There are ten cases of a son having his father's name. There are also two cases where the son had the masculine version of his mother's name: Petronia/Petronius and Severa/Severus, and six cases of a daughter with the feminine version of her father's name. There were also cases of mother and daughter having the same name. This differs form the more modern Jewish practice of not naming a child for a living relative.[16]

Roman names had three elements: praenomen, gentile name, and cognomen, such as Gaius Julius Caesar. In the four cases where a Jewish father and child had two element names, the child had the father's gentile name and a different cognomen. In the largest single case, Lucius Maecius had two sons, Lucius Maecius Constantius and Lucius Maecius Victorinus, and two daughters, Maecia Lucianis and Lucia Maecia Sabbatis.[17]

Semitic names were given in their Latin or Greek forms. Annia, Aster, Eusabbatis, Ioses, Iudas, Mniaseas, Museus, and Sabbatuis are the Hebrew names Anna (Hanna), Esther, Sabbatai, Joseph, Judah, Manasseh, Moses, and Sabbatai.[18]

The names given below are listed by Harry J. Leon in *The Jews of Ancient Rome* as having been found on one or more of the catacomb inscriptions.[19] Frequency counts are not given since many names occur only once, while, in other cases, more than one inscription may refer to a single individual. An example of this would the husband's name being on both his own and his wife's tomb. It should also be remembered that Latin lacks the letter J, so such names as Iovinus, Iulianus, Iulius, and Iustus would be better rendered as Jovinus, Julianus, Julius, and Justus.

### *I. Latin Names*

I.A1. Latin Single Names (Male)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abundantius | Dativus | Gaudentuis | Marinus | Proculus | Telesinus or |
| Aelianus | December | Germanus | Maro | Proiectus | Telesinius |
| Agrippinus | Digitius | Honoratus | Maronius | Quintianus | Ursacius |
| Adiutor | Domnus | Impendius | Maximus | Quirinus | Ursus |
| Amabilius | Donatus | Iovinus | Monninus | Reginus | Valerius |
| Annianus | Faustinus | Iulianus | Notus | Renatus | Verecundus |
| Annuis | Felicianus | Iulius | Munnus | Rufinus | Vernaclus |
| Aper | Felicitas | Iustus | Oclatius | Rufus | Victor |
| Caelius | Felix | Leo | Orstorius | Sabinus | Vindicianus |
| Castricius | Fofotis | Lucinus | Petronius | Salvius | Vitalio |
| Clodius | Fortunatianus | Lucius | Plotius | Salutius | |
| Claidius | Fortunatus | Maevius | Pomponius | Severus | |
| Cocotia | Fostinus | Mannacius | Priscianus | Sicilius | |
| Cossutius | Fronto | Mannus | Probus | Sossianus | |
| Constantius | Gaius | Marcellus | Proclus | Successus | |

I.A2. Latin Single Name (Female)

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aelia | Damnata | Iulia | Marosa | Primativa | Simplicia |
| Annia | Domitia | Iusta | Martina | Proca | Statoria |
| Antonina | Dulcia | Iustissima | Matrona | Procla | Ursacia |
| Aquilina | Dulcitia | Lucilla | Maxima | Proclina | Valentiano |
| Belluls | Faustina | Lucina | Maximina | Quintiana | Valeria |
| Benedicta | Felicissima | Marcella | Numitora | Regina | Venerosa |
| Cara | Flavia | Marcia | Petronia | Restituta | Veriana |
| Centullia | Flora | Marciana | Pisinna | Sabina | Vibia |
| Crescentina | Gaudentia | Margarita | Polla | Salutia | Vitalis |
| Crispina | Gemellina | Marina | Prima | Severa | |

I.B1. Latin Double Names (Male)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aelius Aprilicus | Aurelius Crescens or | Cresces Sinicerius | Iunius Iustus |
| Aelius Primitivus | Aurelius | Flavius Constantius | Lucius Maecius |
| Aninus Sabinianus | Crescentius | Flavius Iulianus | Siculus Sabinus |
| Annius Genialis | Caelius Quintus | Flavius Sabinus | |
| Aurelius Bassus | Claudius Provinicius | Iulus Sabinus | |

I.B2. Latin Double Names (Female)

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aelia Patricia | Claudia Marciana | Flavia Flaviana | Lucretia Faustina |
| Aelia Septima | Claudia Prima | Flavia Iuliana | Maecia Lucianis |
| Aurelia Auguria | Domitia Felicitas | Flavia Vitalinis | Rufilla Pietas |
| Aurelia Celerina | Faustula Provincia | Iulia Aemilia | Sabina Palma |
| Aurelia Flavia | Flavia Antonina | Iulia Marcella | Ulpia Marina |
| Aurelia Quintilla | Flavia Caritina | Iulia Rufina | Veturia Paulla |
| Caelia Omnina | Flavia Dativa | Iulia Severa | |

I.B3. Latin Partial Double Names (Female; Part of Inscription Obscured)

These two names are listed because the elements that could be read in each name did not appear among the lists of single names.

Agentia ???ana ???ia Sabina

I.C1. Latin Triple Names

Gaius Furfanius Iulianus Lucius Maecius Constantius Lucius Maecius Victorinus

Lucia Maecia Sabbatis

***II. Greek Names***

Alexander, Epagathus, Himerus, Meander, Socus, Xanthias

II. A1. Greek Male Names

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aetetus | Cyrus | Euphrenon | Ionius? | Pancratius | Symmachus |
| Agathon? | Daphnus | Eupsychus | Irenaeus | Pardus | Theodorus |
| Agathopus | Delphinus | Eusebius | Isodorus | Paregorius | Theodotus |
| Alexander | Deuterus | Eutropius? | Leontius | Phillipus | Theophilius |
| Alypius | Dionysias | Eutychianus | Leus | Polycarpus | Trophimus |
| Amachius | Diophatus | Eutyches | Macedonius | Poly[me]nius | Tychius |
| Amarantus? | Epagathus | Eutychius | Meander | Procopius | Xanthias |
| Amelius | Epigenius | Galasius | Menophilus | Rhodion | Zenon? |
| Asias? | Eucarpus? | Helles | Monimus? | Salpingius? | Zosimus |
| Asterias | Eudoxus | Hermogenes | Musaeus | Seleucus? | Zoticus |
| Asterius | Eugraphius | Hillarus | Nicander? | Socus | |
| Athenion | Euhodius | Himerus | Nicetas | Sophronius | |
| Calandio | Eulogus | Iaso? | Nicodemus | Staphylus | |
| Chrysas | Euphranticus | Iason | Numenius | Stephanus | |
| Cyrillas | Euphrasius | Iocathinus | Pancharius | Straton | |

II.A2. Greek Female Names

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alexandra | Asclepiodote | Eugenia | Hermia | Leotia | Trophime |
| Alexandria | Asteria | Euhodia | Hermione | Melitium | Tryllis |
| Alexe | Chrysis | Eulogia | Hilara | Plane | Zotice |
| Ammias | Daphne | Eupore | Irene | Poemenis | |
| Ammias | Dionysias | Eusebia | Irenes | Sirica | |
| Anastasia | Doris | Eusebis | Isia | Sophronia | |
| Aphrodisia | Eparchia | Eutychesm | Isodora | Thalassa | |
| Archigenia | Epiphania | Eutychis | Istasia | Theodora | |

### *III. Semitic Names*

III.A1. Semitic Male Names

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abas | Gadias | Ioses | Lazar | Salo | Zabuttas |
| Beniamin | Iacob | Isaac | Mniaseas | Samuel | Zortasius |
| Eli | Ionathan | Iudas | Sabbatius | Simon | |

Also a two-element male name: Tubias Barzaharona

III.A2. Semitic Female Names

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aster | Besula | Marta | Sabbatia | Simonis |
| Badiz? | Mara | Rebecca | Sabbatis | |
| B?]alsamia | Maria | Sabbasa | Sara | |

### *IV. Latin Greek Double Names*

IV.A1 Latin-Greek Male Doulble Names

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Agris Euangelus | Aurelius Hermias | Caelius Anastasius | Sempronius Basileus |
| Aurelius Alexnder | Aurelius Olympius | Pompeius Eutyches | Tyllius Irenaeus |

IV.A1 Latin-Greek Female Doulble Names

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Aelia Alexandra | Aurelia Protogenia | Fabia Asia | Marcia Tryphera |
| Aemilia Theodora | Aurelia Zotice | Gargilia Eufraxia | Marcia Zenodora |
| Alexandria Severa | Caelia Eudous | Iulia Alexandra | Naevia Cyria |
| Aurelia Althea | Cattia Annias | Iulia Alexandria | Tyrisia Profutura |
| Aurelia Helenes | Claudia [Bere?]nice | Iulia Aphrodisia | Varia Zotice |

IV.B1 Latin-Greek Male Triple Names

| | |
|---|---|
| Atronius Tullianus Eusebius | Quintus Claudius Sysnesius |
| Marcus Quintus Alexus | Tettius Rufinus Melitius |

IV.B1 Latin-Greek Female Triple Names

Iulia Irene Arista

### *V.Latin-Semitic Double Names*

V.A1 Male Latin-Semitic Double Names

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Arelius Ioses | Claudius Ioses | Pompeius Ionata |

V.A2. Female Latin-Semitic Double Names

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Appidia Lea | Benedicta Maria | Flavia Maria | Titinia Anna |
| Aurelia Maria | Fabia Mauria | Pticia Aster | |

V.B. Latin-Semitic Triple Names

| | |
|---|---|
| Lucius Domitius Abbas | Lucia Maecia Sabbitis |

Footnotes

[1] Roth, Cecil. "Rome: The Classical Period", *Encyclopedia Judaica,* Jerusalem: Massadah Publications, 1971, Vol. XIV, p. 240-242.

[2] For obvious reasons, Jews do not use the more common system of B.C. and A.D. to indicate years. Instead, B.C.E, (Before Common Era) and C.E. (Common Era) are used. This practice will be followed here.

[3] Flauccus was accused of embezzling funds that Jews throughout the Roman Empire had collected and were sending to Jerusalem for upkeep on the Temple. Cicero won the case, but the Jews were allowed to continue sending the funds. Roth. What book?

[4] Roth. What book? The Jewish community bought the freedom of many of these slaves.

[5] Livius.Org. "The Jewish Diaspora: Rome," Livius.Org, ***http://www.livius.org/di-dn/diaspora/rome.html*** (accessed April 30, 2007).

[6] Livius.Org. ibid. citing the poet Juvenal in *Satire* 14.96-106.

[7] Genesis 23:19 describes how Abraham buries Sarah in the cave of Machpelah. His own burial beside her by his sons, Isaac and Ishmael is, in turn, described in Genesis 25:9.

[8] Livius.Org. ibid. Also, see "Catacombs," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 1906. ***http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=262&letter=C&search=catacombs*** (accessed April 30, 2007). For those interested, including any fantasy role players, the ground plan of the Jewish catacombs at Venosa is included at the end of this paper.

[9] Rutgers Leonard V., van der Borg Klaas, de Jong Arie F.M., and Poole Imogen. "Radiocarbon Dating: Jewish Inspiration of the Christian Catacombs." In "Brief Communications" *Nature*, 436, 339 (21 July 2005), online at ***http://nature.com***.

[10] Livius.Org., ibid.

[11] Leon, Harry J. *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1960, Table VI, Single and Multiple Names by Sex of Bearer, pp. 111.

[12] Epistle to the Romans, *King James Bible*. Project Gutenberg. ***http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/bib4510.txt*** (accessed April 30, 2007).

[13] Leon, ibid.

[14] Leon, ibid. The inscription and its translation are given on page 292-293.

[15] Leon, ibid., p. 120-121.

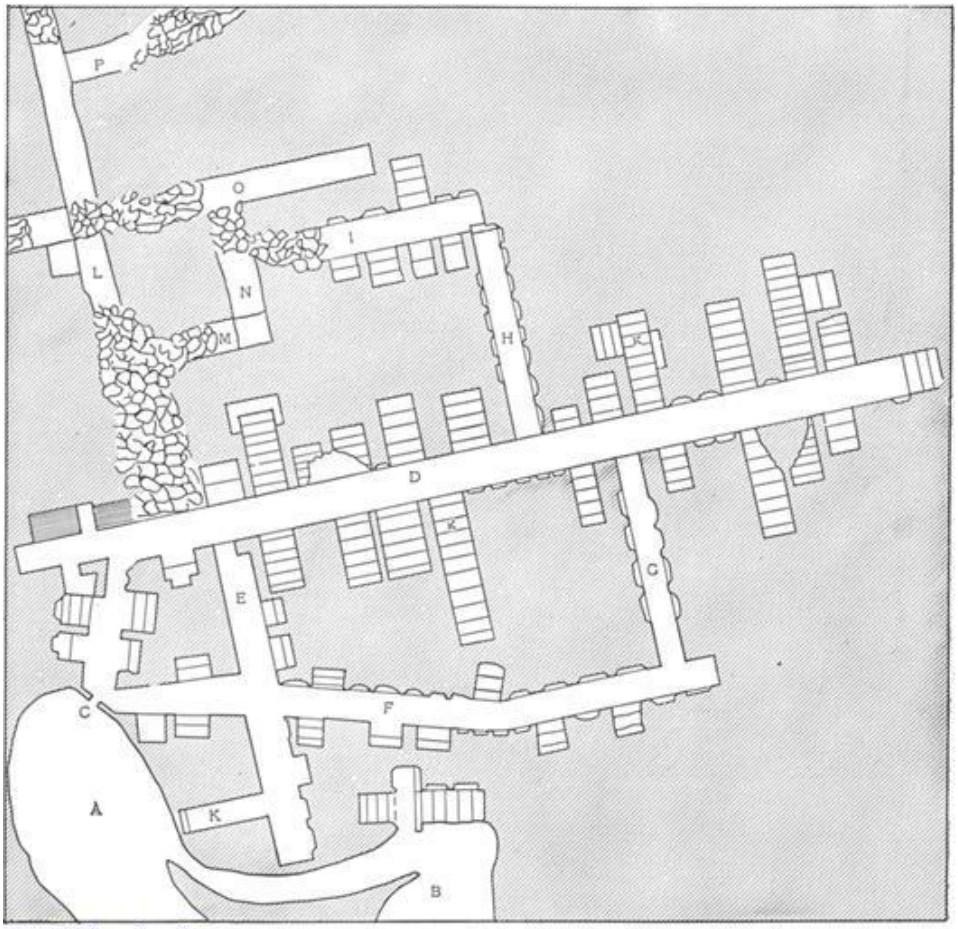
[16] Leon, ibid., p. 115. In most of the cited cases, the inscription was for a child or the text suggests that the son knew the parent for whom the inscription was written. While Ashkenazic Jews (northern and eastern European origin0 do not name a child after a living relative, some Sephardic Jews (Spanish/mediterranean origin) do.

[17] Leon, ibid., p. 116.

[18] Leon, ibid., 120.

[19] Leon, ibid. The Latin names are on pages 95-101. The Greek names are on pages 101-104. Semitic names are on pages 104-105, and combined Latin-Greek and Latin Semitic two element names are on pages 106-107. I confess that in some cases I may have erred in assigning a particular name as being male or female. I tried to check them as best I could, but this was not always possible.

From ***www.Jewish Encyclopedia.com***, "Catacombs", Ground-Plan of the Jewish Catacombs at Venosa. A, B, entrance grottoes; C, entrance to catacombs; D, principal corridor; E-K, side corridors; L-P, corridors in ruins.

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