

# Christians may have copied Jewish rites

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Scientists say radiocarbon dating of organic material from the catacombs of ancient Rome indicates Christians might have copied Jewish burial customs.

Leonard Rutgers of Utrecht University in the Netherlands said he and his research team discovered one of the Jewish complexes pre-dates its Christian counterparts by at least 100 years.

Writing in the journal *Nature*, Rutgers said his team collected the organic samples from chambers in the Jewish Villa Torlonia catacomb and dated them to between 50 B.C. and A.D. 400, consistent with the chronological layout of the underground so-called "city of the dead."

Rutgers said the new evidence indicates the Villa Torlonia catacomb came into use more than a century before the building of the earliest Christian catacombs.

The researchers argue it is possible early Christian funerary practices were influenced by Jewish customs -- which could also explain the physical similarities between the oldest Christian underground cemeteries and the Jewish Villa Torlonia.

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