Apart from a storage vessel in tomb 2022, there were no grave goods in the burials in the SmVltdRm and tunnel 1. However, the 'portraits' of the infant Florentia (2619; fig. 9.45) and toddler Elia Theodora (2620) in the SW corner of the LgeVltdRm included depictions of the sorts of apotropaic jewelry buried with infants in an earlier period, such as *bullae*, amulets and glass-bead necklaces, compensating for a life cut short.[130] Might these depictions, like Florentia's tattoo, have been seen as having protective power? Perhaps the images replaced grave goods in the tomb. Similarly, the depiction of an *ampulla* (pilgrim's flask) on the tomb mosaic of Renobatus at Sidi Abich, perhaps a 'stand in' for a personal item belonging to the deceased, both blessed and protected him in this life and the next.[131] Likewise, the prominence of rosebuds on the panels, in addition to representing paradise, may have stood in for the flowers which Romans brought to the graves of deceased relatives on the Rosalia.[132] The bunch of grapes held in one hand and a bird held in the other by each of the three little girls in the LgeVltdRm, in addition to expressing a balance between the spiritual and material worlds, probably carried the same message as Roman funerary images of infants and young children with bunches of grapes (or other fruit) and pets (dogs or birds), as fortunate and forever young.[133]

*Families*

Inscriptions on tomb mosaics in N Africa rarely mentioned family relationships. The comparatively homogeneous assemblages of tomb mosaics in Christian basilicas stressed individuals' membership in the Christian community over family ties.[134] Yet this cannot be taken as evidence that Christian families were less engaged than Roman families in the burial and commemoration of kin. While family ties were not expressed in the inscriptions on the tomb mosaics known in the underground complex, there were at least two family plots in the LgeVltdRm and one family *cubiculum* (the SmVltdRm). Far less visible than the above-ground family monuments and mausolea of Romans of an earlier age, the two low-profile family plots in the N part of the LgeVltdRm singled out the male adults, who were perhaps their founding members. The extraordinary size, austere colour palette and simple inscription of Vincitius' panel (2636) stood out among the other members of his family, Pelagia (2635) and the anonymous male (2634). Likewise, the elaborate scene on the very large mosaic for Fortucius (2626) dominated the comparatively modest size and imagery of Afrodite's panel (2627), while incorporating the place-holder for a future burial (2624/2625). The third potential family plot, in the children's section in the S part of the LgeVltdRm, included the burials of infant Florentia (2619) and toddler Elia Theodora (2620). The location of Florentia's mosaic against the S wall of the LgeVltdRm, along with her larger and more elaborate panel, may indicate that she was the family's first deceased child, followed rapidly by another related child (Elia Theodora).

In the SmVltdRm the two most distinctive tombs are that for Eolius, with its highly unusual mosaic in the white plaster finish of his slab-tomb (2044), and the bed-shaped monument (2026). The two individuals in these tombs were deliberately more visible than the other four individuals buried in the room, but only Eolius was named, perhaps because he was the family's progenitor. A tentative case can also be made for the kinship of individuals in tunnel 1 on the basis of two pairs of unnamed individuals buried in separate but physically connected tombs: the child in a sarcophagus (3021) stacked on top of a similar tomb for an adult (3022); and a baby buried in a niche (2719) that was cut into the S edge of the shaft of a recently buried adult (2717). Both pairs are reminiscent of the tombs shared by a subadult and an adult in the "pagan" sector.

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130 Dasen 2003; Carroll 2018, 99-102. Compare the richly-drawn garments and jewelry of the little daughter of Theotecnus in the late 5th- to early 6th-c. painting in the catacombs of San Gennaro in Naples (Bisconti 2015, 24 fig. 16).

131 Terry 1998, 112.

132 Terry 1998, 94.

133 Carroll 2018, 215.

134 Yasin 2005, 446; Burns and Jensen 2014, 122.

The individuals and families of the SmVltdRm and LgeVltdRm may have been at the forefront of a late 4th- to 5th-c. trend of expressing their status in a private and protected commemorative space instead of displaying it publicly in above-ground mausolea.[135] This movement is attested by the late 4th- to 5th-c. abandonment and robbing of mausolea at Leptiminus, including Compound 4 in the "pagan" sector and mausoleum 20 at Site 10;[136] the dismantling of a substantial mausoleum at nearby Site 200 may have begun as early as the late 3rd c.[137]

*Community in the large vaulted room*

Community in this room is reinforced at its most basic level by the large image format shared by most of the mosaic panels that maps the body with an inscription over the head, as if the deceased were speaking, a portrait of the deceased (or a Good Shepherd) over the body, as if still alive, and symbols of paradise over the feet, as if conveying the deceased to the desired destination. Nevertheless, small variations in the iconography linking the tomb mosaics in different sequences engage the viewer in conversation.[138] The Good Shepherd on Pascassus' panel is more sombre and dressed for a colder season than Afrodite's, perhaps reflecting their seasons of death. Fortucius' Good Shepherd wears a fancier tunic than those seen on the other two panels, with wide *clavi* and decorative *orbiculi* that are in keeping with Fortucius' high status.[139] The canopy of roses surmounted by a central star that links the infant Agapia's panel (2621) to the adult Pelagia's (2635) compares the charm of their respective ages and perhaps weighs their respective loss. The bird held by Florentia and Elia Theodora in the left hand was subtly altered for Agapia's panel: in a kind of mirror image of the adjacent panels, the shining white dove in Agapia's right hand stands out next to the larger, more ornamental birds which blend into the garments of Florentia and Elia Theodora; Agapia's simpler tunic also contrasts with the fine clothing and jewelry of the other two girls.

The 6 anonymous marble-slab place-holders in this room, chiefly for infants or children, also show variations which individualize the plots. The investment in marble panels, probably costlier than the commemorative tomb mosaics, reflects the value to the community of infants and young children, as does the special part of the room reserved for the very young. The first single panel of marble was probably 2628, a plot in an advantageous location against the S wall, perhaps followed by the adjacent 2629. One variation on the single slab was the place-holder 2641/2642 employing at least two smaller slabs of different white marble, perhaps a cost-saving measure. A more striking variation was 2631/2632 which combined a costly single slab of marble with a decorative head panel composed of irregular fillets of coloured marble in a *cipollino* frame. The small size of this plot and its placement south of the adults was probably meant for an infant or a young child. Another variation was 2624/2625, a place-holder included in the family plot of Fortucius. The innovation was that it was for an adult or adult child, a marble panel framed in mosaic. The latest marble place-holder (2622/2623/2644/2645, made up of 2 grey and 2 white slabs) straddled the divide between adult and child graves, reserving an especially privileged space for an adult against the central portion of the W wall, roughly where an underground structure of special significance to the community (perhaps a shrine) was located. We can only speculate on its appearance but it was probably built of masonry on a raised dais, decorated with marble revetment and mosaic, and may have featured the tomb(s) or relics of local saints. It might have resembled the rock-cut *arcosolia a tribuna* in the Rome catacombs that are sometimes decorated with marble and mosaic.[140] The shrine was likely to have been the *raison d'être* of the underground complex as a whole, raising the possibility that the tombs of the underground complex, especially in the large and small vaulted rooms, were burials

135 Ardeleanu 2023, 133.
136 *Leptiminus* 4, 68-69; *Leptiminus* 1, 191-94.
137 See Stirling above, 21-22.
138 On the interplay between mosaic epitaphs in burial churches, see Yasin 2005, 442.
139 A Good Shepherd of the mid-4th c. in the Catacomb of Domitilla (Machado 2021, 23 fig. 6) wears a tunic with *orbiculi* like Fortucius' shepherd and is flanked by two sheep like Afrodite's.
140 Fiocchi Nicolai 2025, 56.

*ad sanctos*, like those in the Rome catacombs around the saints' tombs celebrated by pope Damasus at the end of the 4th c.[141]

The Christian faith of 10 of the 11 individuals buried in our small section of the room was professed in images, inscriptions and symbols. However, the absence of 'ordinary' tombs in this communal cemetery, and even any proximity to such tombs, conveys the impression of the LgeVltdRm as a 'gated community', carefully curated and exclusive in its membership. At least one prerequisite was the high socio-economic status displayed on the commemorative markers, which were limited in number, sometimes unusually large and generously spaced[142] in a privileged location, also demonstrated in the investment in family or individual plots.[143] Further evidence of the community's affluence was the extraordinary craftsmanship and originality of the mosaics, including their generous palettes, the "painterly" style of Pelagia's portrait (2635), and the unusually small tesserae (in 2634),[144] as well as a generous use of glass tesserae. These tomb mosaics are some of the earliest archaeologically-dated funerary mosaics in N Africa. The earliest in *Byzacena* date to the first half of the 4th c.,[145] but in N Africa as a whole most are placed in the late 4th c. and later.[146] The outstanding workmanship, rich and varied iconography, and striking individuality of the tomb mosaics of the LgeVltdRm are in keeping with the rich tradition of figural floor mosaics at Leptiminus in late antiquity.

Two outstanding examples of figural floor mosaics at Leptiminus are the Venus and Leda mosaics, which date to the same period as the tomb mosaics of the LgeVltdRm.[147] The mythologically-themed mosaics in a domestic setting and the Christian tomb mosaics in the LgeVltdRm were the work of the last thriving workshop(s) of figural mosaics in Leptiminus, and probably in the Sahel as a whole. Together, these two types of figural floor mosaic suggest the dynamic and cosmopolitan cultural, economic and spiritual ambience of one port town in the mid- to late 4th c. During this period, mosaicists adapted Leptiminus' figural tradition and expanded its appeal by including both funerary portraits and avatars of Christ on the commemorative panels of 11 Christians buried in the most privileged part of a communal cemetery underground.

Since Greek names are well-attested on Early Christian funerary inscriptions in N Africa, the presence of names of Greek or E Mediterranean origin in the LgeVltdRm and SmVltdRm is not surprising, but their preponderance (8 of 11 individuals in the two rooms) is somewhat unusual.[148] Taken together with the scatter of Greek letters and possible Greek crosses on the panels, and the use of *dormit* (a Latin version of a Greek version of death) on the inscriptions of Pascassus, Afrodite, Eolius and Tripolius, it is tantalizing to wonder whether the commissioners of the underground complex may have been a Latinized Greek or Greek-descendant community in the town.[149] The marble funerary inscription for Apolinarious and Herodote at Dar-el-Kaïd that employed the verb κατακιτε, an equivalent of *dormit*,[150] attests to other Greeks at Leptiminus in late antiquity.

In intent, the portraits on the tomb mosaics of the LgeVltdRm are not unlike the 4th-c. fresco portraits of *domini*, *dominae* and their offspring in the *arcosolia* of family *cubicula* in the Rome catacombs, which displayed both their faith and their high social status. However, they appear more

141 Jensen 2008, 130.
142 An apparent slow rate of burial in all three vaulted rooms of the underground complex, alongside the absence of intercutting graves, is reminiscent of the same features in the uncrowded arrangement of graves in the "pagan" sector's "core" period: *Leptiminus* 4, 97.
143 See Duval 1986, 25-33. These tombs have elements of both prestige and privilege as defined by Baratte 2021, 415-28.
144 See *Leptiminus* 4, 534 fig. 14.33.
145 Terry 1998, 2.
146 Burns and Jensen 2014, 128.
147 See Ben Lazreg, below, 355-97; *Leptiminus* 2, 259-92, colour pls. H, J-N and P.
148 Eolius, Afrodite, Pelagia, Rebeccha, Pascassus, Agapia, Elia Theodora, Tripolius: *Leptiminus* 4, 515.
149 *Leptiminus* 4, 554.
150 L. Ennabli 2000, 22-23 no. 9.

individualistic, potentially more accurate than the painted portraits in the catacombs.[151] Furthermore, none of the LgeVltdRm's mosaic portraits have religious markers that show their subjects enacting their faith. Whereas individuals in the catacombs are regularly depicted as *orantes* in the act of prayer, none of the members of the LgeVltdRm community are so depicted; compare Pelagia, for example, to similarly-veiled 3rd- and 4th-c. lady *orantes* in the catacombs of Domitilla and Coemeterium Maius.[152] For those in the highest eschelons of the aristocracy, this tradition of self-representation blossomed again in the late 5th- and early 6th-c. fresco portraits in the Naples catacombs of San Gennaro, perhaps most notably in the portrait of Theotecnus and his family.[153]

The naming of individuals on epitaphs also reflected the socio-economic expectations of those buried in the "pagan" sector when one compares the crowded cemetery of similar date at Pupput where no epitaphs naming some of the 400 individuals buried there were found.[154] The universal practice of naming the deceased in the LgeVltdRm makes it less recognizable as a status-marker, but exceptional identifiers of the deceased, such as the day of death for adults, essential to anniversary rituals in church,[155] may single out as the most privileged individuals in the room Pelagia, Fortucius, Tripolius (who died on the Nones of December or December 5), and the infants Florentia and Elia Theodora. By contrast, the adult Restuta's slightly later burial in the corridor, and Paulina's in the E part of the LgeVltdRm, conform with a tradition of recording age at death for all individuals of families with the necessary resources to commission commemorative markers. In the W part of the room, the age at death for infants, emphasizing the pathos of their loss, may mark Elia Theodora and Florentia as more privileged than those children designated more simply as *innocentes*.

The SmVltdRm, on the other hand, was linked to the more egalitarian communal space in tunnel 1, with its burials of unnamed individuals, presumably of lower socio-economic status than those in the former room; they would be analogous to the individual burials in public space outside the compounds of the "pagan" sector. In the late 4th to early 5th c., the northern two-thirds of the corridor became a private burial room, probably for an affluent family, one perhaps also associated with the cemetery in tunnel 2. The often-elaborate 4th-c. family *cubicula* in the Rome catacombs were likewise linked to the more egalitarian tunnels containing the burials of lower-status individuals. In short, all three vaulted rooms of the underground burial complex were privileged parts of Site 304's underground cemetery, other parts of which accommodated the burials of individuals of all socio-economic strata, as the great underground funerary complexes in Rome's suburbs were designed to do.[156]

The most valuable legacy today of the LgeVltdRm may be that its mosaics still serve their original purpose in their original context. Unlike most Early Christian burial sites in N Africa from which tomb mosaics have been lifted and separated from each other and from their contexts, the small community of the LgeVltdRm remains intact. The chief contribution of the SmVltdRm, tunnel 1 and Compound F is the glimpse they offer into a larger, perhaps-more-egalitarian communal cemetery in the tunnels that is still unexplored: it represents a potential new avenue of research.

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151 Bisconti 2013, 64.
152 On religious markers, see Machado 2021, 16, and figs. 3 and 8.
153 Braconi 2016, 41-50.
154 *Leptiminus* 4, 131.
155 Jensen 2008, 120.
156 Fiocchi Nicolai 2025, 46.