

## Research statement for a TT position in Roman art history and archaeology

Jenny Kreiger

2017

My research takes interdisciplinary approaches to social history in the ancient Mediterranean, especially the Roman Empire. Using methods drawn from archaeology, art history, and classical philology, I try to illuminate the lives of “invisible people” in the past—those who, due to their gender, age, socio-economic status, or other factors, may not be fully represented in the products of elite culture. Theoretical perspectives from gender archaeology underlie my guiding questions: who is missing from our image of the past? And how can we learn about their lives? Within this broad area of inquiry, I focus on labor and funerary commemoration, two aspects of sub-elite life for which we have much evidence and yet many questions still to answer. Over the next several years, I plan to revise my dissertation for publication and write a second book that addresses these themes.

In my dissertation (*The Business of Commemoration: A Comparative Study of Italian Catacombs*), I examined catacomb painting and epigraphy to find new information about the workers involved in major suburban cemeteries in late antique Rome, Naples, and Syracuse. After nearly two centuries of modern catacomb scholarship, we still know little about these workers. A small corpus of paintings, a few dozen inscriptions, and minimal mentions in literary texts are all we have about the *fossore*s (catacomb gravediggers). Many other sorts of workers—painters, engravers, and various suppliers of goods to be consumed in the catacombs—have largely gone ignored. Using a novel combination of methods, including quantitative analysis of inscriptions and social network analysis, I proposed a new framework for analyzing catacomb cultural production that prioritizes worker-patron interactions, rather than the influence of the Church or the Christian elite.

As I revise the dissertation for publication, I am transforming its preliminary explorations of social network analysis into the main thrust of my first book. The book will offer a new interpretation of catacomb art, epigraphy, and architecture as the material manifestations of traditional worker-patron relationships taking place in the changing economic and social circumstances of late antiquity. In catacomb contexts, negotiation between workers and their patrons, often one-on-one, drove cultural production at least as much as any top-down influence did. Massive catacombs like those in Rome, Naples, and Syracuse should be viewed as sites not just of religious and commemorative behavior, but also of economic activity and the construction of workers’ identities. Chapters will address the relevance of actor network theory and social network analysis to cemeteries; the evidence for social interaction in and around catacombs; proposed models for catacomb social networks; the physical environments of catacombs that constructed and were constructed by social interaction; and a reexamination of catacomb art and epigraphy in light of social networks. In this book I hope to model new interdisciplinary approaches to catacomb studies and raise awareness of these fascinating sites as resources for research on Roman social history.

My second major project will explore the “visual worlds” of late antique cemeteries (including catacombs) and the physical experiences of those who used, visited, and worked in them. The backbone of this project will be a set of interactive plans of selected cemeteries plotting published data about images, inscriptions, architecture, and objects on their findspots. These plans will allow me to reconstruct the visual environments of cemeteries more richly than a traditional disciplinary catalog can, and with greater time-depth than a laser scan of a catacomb interior. Chapters will focus on the experiences of making, using, and viewing catacomb spaces from various points of view: workers, commemorators, religious leaders, pilgrims, and the dead.

As a researcher I believe I would find much common ground with members of both [Department] and [Institute]. I see my approach to catacombs as similar to that of [faculty member's project] to monasteries; I view my sites as shaping and being shaped by the human activities that take place inside them. My time at the American Academy in Rome taught me that the field of architecture has many valuable perspectives to offer on archaeological and art historical problems, and I would look forward to refining my thinking on catacombs as architecture in an art history department where architecture is so strongly represented. In the [Institute] I see a natural home both for my interdisciplinary approach to catacombs and for my fieldwork in Roman cities. My research in and out of the field revolves around material culture, social interaction, and economic behavior in (sub)urban environments, and these themes are well represented among the [Institute] faculty. Finally, the [Institute's] expressed commitment to diversity and inclusivity in scholarship and teaching aligns with my own interests in the social histories of "invisible" people and in fostering diverse perspectives in my classroom.