

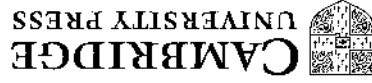
This book offers a radical new survey of more than a thousand years of religious life at Rome: from the foundation of the city to its rise to world empire and its conversion to Christianity. Religion was central to Roman culture; it was part of the fabric of politics and warfare, imperial power and its opponents, domestic life and philosophical theorizing. This authoritative account sets religion in its full cultural context, whether in the primitive hamlet of the eighth century B.C. or the cosmopolitan multicultural society of the first centuries of the Christian era.

The narrative account is structured around a series of broad themes: how to interpret the Romans' own theories of their religious system and its origins; the relationship of religion and the changing politics of Rome; the religious importance of the layout and monuments of the city itself; changing ideas of religious identity and community; religious invasion – and, ultimately, revolution.

The companion volume, *Religions of Rome 2: A Sourcebook*, sets out a wide range of documents (including paintings, coins, sculpture and inscriptions) richly illustrating the religious life of the Roman world.

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Mary Beard, John North, Simon Price
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Religions of Rome
Volume 1
A History



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A History

VOLUME 1

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October 1996

M. B.
 J. A. N.
 S. R. E. P.

Many people have helped in different ways and at different points over the decade that we have been working on this volume and its companion. We would like to thank Andreas Bendlin, Robin Cornack, Michael Crawford, John Curran, Denis Feeney, Martin Goodman, Keith Hopkins, Christopher Kelly, David MacMullen, Lucia Nixon, Nicholas Purcell, Joyce Reynolds, Helen Weston, Greg Woolf, and staff in the Ashmolean Library, Oxford, the Classics Faculty and Library, Cambridge, the Institute of Classical Studies, London, as well as the Institute of Advanced Studies, Princeton, the Libraries of the British and American Schools in Athens and the Ward Chipman Library of the University of New Brunswick at Saint John.

In particular, we have used (and enjoyed) the comments of John Henderson, who read the whole manuscript and are grateful for the care and patience of Pauline Hire, who finally extracted it from us.

Earlier versions of three chapters have already appeared in volumes of *The Cambridge Ancient History* 2nd edn (Chapter 1 by J. A. N. in VII. 2; Chapter 3 by M. B. in IX; Chapter 4 by S. R. E. P. in X). Anyone who chooses to compare what is printed here with those earlier versions will see how profound the effects of collaboration have been.

Acknowledgements

In A.D. 495 (or thereabouts) the Bishop of Rome sent a stern letter to some of his fellow Christians in the city, denouncing those who continued to celebrate the ancient ritual of the *Lupercalia*.¹ Almost two hundred years after the emperor Constantine had started the process of making Christianity the 'official' religion of the Roman state, in a city that must in some ways have seemed a securely *Christian* environment (with its great churches – old St Peter's, St John Lateran – rivaling in size and splendour the most famous buildings of the pagan past), Bishop Gelasius was faced with the problem of an old pagan ritual that would not die. Many members of his flock watched eagerly, it seems, as every 15 February a group of youths, very scantily clad, rushed around the city (as similar groups had done for more than a thousand years), lashing with a thong anyone who came across their path. But these Christians were not just eager, interested or curious spectators. It was even worse than this from Gelasius' point of view; for they claimed that it was vital to the safety and prosperity of Rome that this ancient ritual should continue to be performed – a claim that had always been one of the most powerful, and most commonly repeated, justifications of the traditional (pagan) gods and their cult. Proper worship of the Roman gods ensured the success of Rome: that was an axiom not easily overturned, even by Christians in the late fifth century A.D.

In mounting his attack, Gelasius looked back over more than a millennium of Roman history to the very origins of the *Lupercalia* – and to the prehistoric inhabitants of the seven hills, who invented the ritual (so Roman myths claimed) generations before Romulus arrived on the scene to found *Rome* itself. Gelasius may have publicly set himself against the traditions and mythologies of his pagan predecessors; but he knew his enemy and confidently appealed to the history of the institution he was attacking, spanning the centuries between Christian Rome and the earliest years of

1 Gelasius, *Letter against the Lupercalia* extract (ch.16) = *Religions of Rome* 2, 5.2e; Hopkins (1991); and below, p. 388.

2 Throughout this book we have used the word 'pagan' or 'paganism' to refer to traditional Roman religion. We do this fully aware that it has been decided by some historians as a loaded term, in origin a specifically Christian way of describing its enemy (below, p. 312). No doubt an ideologically neutral term would be preferable; but we have found 'traditional civic polytheism' (and similar alternatives suggested) more cumbersome and no less – if differently – loaded.

traditional Roman paganism. These are precisely the centuries that we explore in this book: the millennium or more that takes Rome from a primitive village to world empire and finally to Christian capital.

The history of Roman religion (our history, Gelasius' history...) is a history of extraordinary change; it is nothing less than the story of the origin and development of those attitudes and assumptions that still underlie most forms of contemporary religious life in the West and most contemporary religions. This is not just a question of the growth of Christianity. In fact, as we shall emphasize at many points in what follows, early Christianity was a very different religion from its modern descendant – much less familiar in its doctrines, morality or organization than we might prefer to imagine. Nonetheless in the religious debates and conflicts of the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. we are in a world that is broadly recognizable to us: we can see, for example, issues of religious *belief* being discussed by both pagans and Christians; we can observe religious *committees*, with their own hierarchy and officials, representing a focus of loyalty and commitment quite separate from the political institutions of the state; we can see the range of religious *choices* available (between different communities or different beliefs), and how those choices might have an impact on an individual's sense of identity, on their ambitions, and their view of their place in the world.

So far as we can tell, the religious world of the earliest periods of Roman history was quite different, and much less recognizable in our own contemporary terms. Of course, a lot hangs on '*so far as we can tell*'. Before the third century B.C. (already centuries after the origins of some of the city's most important religious institutions) no Roman literature of any sort survives – let alone any direct comments on the gods or the city's rituals. We have to reconstruct early Roman religion from discussions in much later authors and from a variety of archaeological traces: temple remains, offerings made to the gods, occasionally texts inscribed on bronze or stone recording such dedications. It is a tantalizing, tricky and often inconclusive procedure. But one thing does seem clear enough: that many of our familiar categories for thinking about religion and religious experience simply cannot be usefully applied here; we shall see, for example, how even the idea of 'personal *belief*' (to us, a self-evident part of religious experience) provides a strikingly *inappropriate* model for understanding the religious experience of early Rome. Part of the fascination of these early phases of Roman religion is their sheer difference from our own world and its assumptions.

The importance of this *difference* is one thing that lies behind our decision not to provide any formal definition of 'religion' at this (or any) point in the book: what we have written is the product of a necessary compromise between our own preconceptions, our readings in cross-cultural theory and the impact of the Romans' own (changing) representations of religion and

religious life, their own debates about what religion was and how it operated. We have not worked with a single definition of religion in mind; we have worked rather to understand what might count as 'religion' in Rome and how that might make a difference to our own understanding of our own religious world.³

The book focusses on the changes in religious life at Rome over the millennium that separates the origins of the Lupercalia from Gelasius' spirited (and learned) attack. It is not a matter of tracing a linear development, from primitive religious simplicity in the early city to something approaching modern sophistication a thousand years later. In fact our reconstructions will suggest that, as far back as we can trace it, traditional Roman paganism was strikingly complex – in its priestly organisation, in its range of divinities and in its relations with the religious systems of its neighbours. It is a question much more of exploring how religious change could be generated in Rome. How was religion affected by the political revolutions that defined Roman history? Could religion be untouched by the transition from monarchy to (quasi-democratic) 'republic' around the beginning of the sixth century B.C.? Or untouched again by the civil wars that brought autocracy back, first under Julius Caesar, finally under his adopted son, the first emperor Augustus? How again was it affected by the enormous expansion of Rome's empire? What happens to the religious institutions of a small city state, when that city state grows (as Rome did) to control most of the known world? And what happens to the religion of the conquered territories under the impact of Roman imperialism? How far did the cultural revolution of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. prompt specifically religious changes? When philosophy, science, history, poetry and visual imagery were all offering radically new ways of conceptualizing the individual's place in the cosmos, was religion to be left behind telling the same old story? But these questions inevitably raise the bigger question of what *constitutes* religious change and how we can recognise it. When Gelasius reprimands his fellow Christians for continuing to support the Lupercalia, in what sense should we understand the festival of the late fifth century A.D. as the *same* as the Lupercalia that was being celebrated back when Rome was a primitive village? To judge from Gelasius' description, many of the ritual details were pretty much identical to those we can attest at least five hundred years before: the whipping, for example, and the running about the town. But what of the significance, the 'meaning'? As we will discover, the Lupercalia was and is one of the most *disputed* festivals in the Roman calendar: Roman writers argued about its aims (a ritual of purification? of fertility?); they disagreed even about the exact course taken by the runners (was it *up and down*, or *round and round* the city?);⁴ But one thing is certain: no

³ For this 'open textured' approach, Poole (1986).

⁴ A number of different ancient accounts are collected at *Religions of Rome* 2, 5.2.

The history we have written in this volume depends on the ancient texts that are signalled in its footnotes. Though they are rarely quoted here at length, a large number of the passages we refer to are to be found in our companion volume, *Religions of Rome 2: A sourcebook* (from here on, all cross-references to Volume 2 are given by number in bold type, e.g. 4.3a). This sourcebook is concerned with the same thousand years of Roman history, but it focuses specifically on ancient documents (extracts from literary texts, inscriptions, coins, sculpture and painting); and these are arranged not to tell a chronological story (as in this volume), but thematically across the centuries — to highlight some of the ideas and institutions that serve to unify Roman religion through its long history. It also includes

tradition that stretches back to the ancient world itself.

Rome? Writing the history of Roman religion, in other words, is to join a difference did the fall of the monarchy make to the religious institutions of after the events) was posing exactly the same question as we shall pose: what inextricably bound up with the analysis of Livy — who (five hundred years changes that coincided with the expulsion of the early kings of Rome is ment. As we shall see in Chapter 1, our own understanding of the religious- tion of the earliest phases of Roman religion and the history of its develop- engaged in a project similar in certain respects to our own: the reconstruction to be a 'source' for later historians. Some of these writers were even after all, writes objectively about religion; and no literature is written sim- san as Gelasius in his *Letter against the Lupericalia* (if less openly so): no one, tory written in dialogue with ancient writers, most of whom were as parti- the rule of the Roman emperors, the so-called 'principate', was). It is a his- monarchy to democracy and back to monarchy (for that is effectively what Rome and the expansion of its empire; though the political changes from between tell the story of religious change through the growth of the city of ter 1 and ends with Bishop Gelasius himself in chapter 8; the chapters in chap- This book starts with Romulus, the legendary founder of Rome, in chap-

that is not merely a history of outward form.

alive to just this kind of problem: how to write a history of Roman religion repeated in wildly different contexts. Throughout this book we shall be ing examples of outward continuity, behind exactly the same phrases some of the biggest changes in Roman religion lurk behind the most striking in which there was a choice of *god(s)* in which to believe. The paradox is that was inevitably different, even more loaded perhaps, when uttered in a world satefy of Rome depended on the gods' rituals being properly performed — the Tiber. And the claim to which Gelasius particularly objected — that the great imperial capital of the Roman empire or in the (as yet) small hamlet by bishop, as it had five hundred or a thousand years before — whether in the under a Christian emperor and the shadow of disapproval of a Christian ritual could mean the same when it was performed in a Christian capital,

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some reference material (a glossary of Roman religious terms, a list of epithets given to Roman deities) that is directly relevant to this book also.
Each of these volumes can be used independently. But we hope that the reader will explore them together. Some of the many voices of the *Religions of Rome* are to be heard best in the dialogue between the two.

Preface

1906–27)	
<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentes</i> , ed. R. Cagnat (Paris,	IGR
<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i> (Berlin, 1895–)	IG
(Florence, 1968)	
<i>Fragmenta Iuris Romani Anteiustiniani</i> , edd. S. Riccobono et al., 2nd edn	FIRA
1923–58)	
<i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> , F. Jacoby (Berlin and Leiden,	FGH
Leiden, 1961–)	
Études préliminaires sur les religions orientales dans l'empire romain	EPRO
<i>Codex Theodosianus</i> (Berlin, 1905)	CTb
<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>	CSEL
Vermaseren (Leiden, 1956)	
<i>Corpus Inscriptionum et Monumentorum Religionis Mithrae</i> , ed. M. J.	CIMRM
<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (Berlin, 1863–)	CIL
<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>	CAH
(London, 1923–)	
<i>Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum</i> , H. M. Martingly et al.	B. M. Coins
Bibliothèque des Ecoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome	BEPAR
<i>Bullerino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma</i>	BCACR
Haase (Berlin, 1972–)	
<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> , edd. H. Temporini & W.	ANRW
<i>L'année épigraphique</i> (Paris, 1888–)	AE

With the exception of the following works, we have used a fairly full form of abbreviation; any doubts about the complete version of periodical titles will be solved with reference to *L'année philologique*.

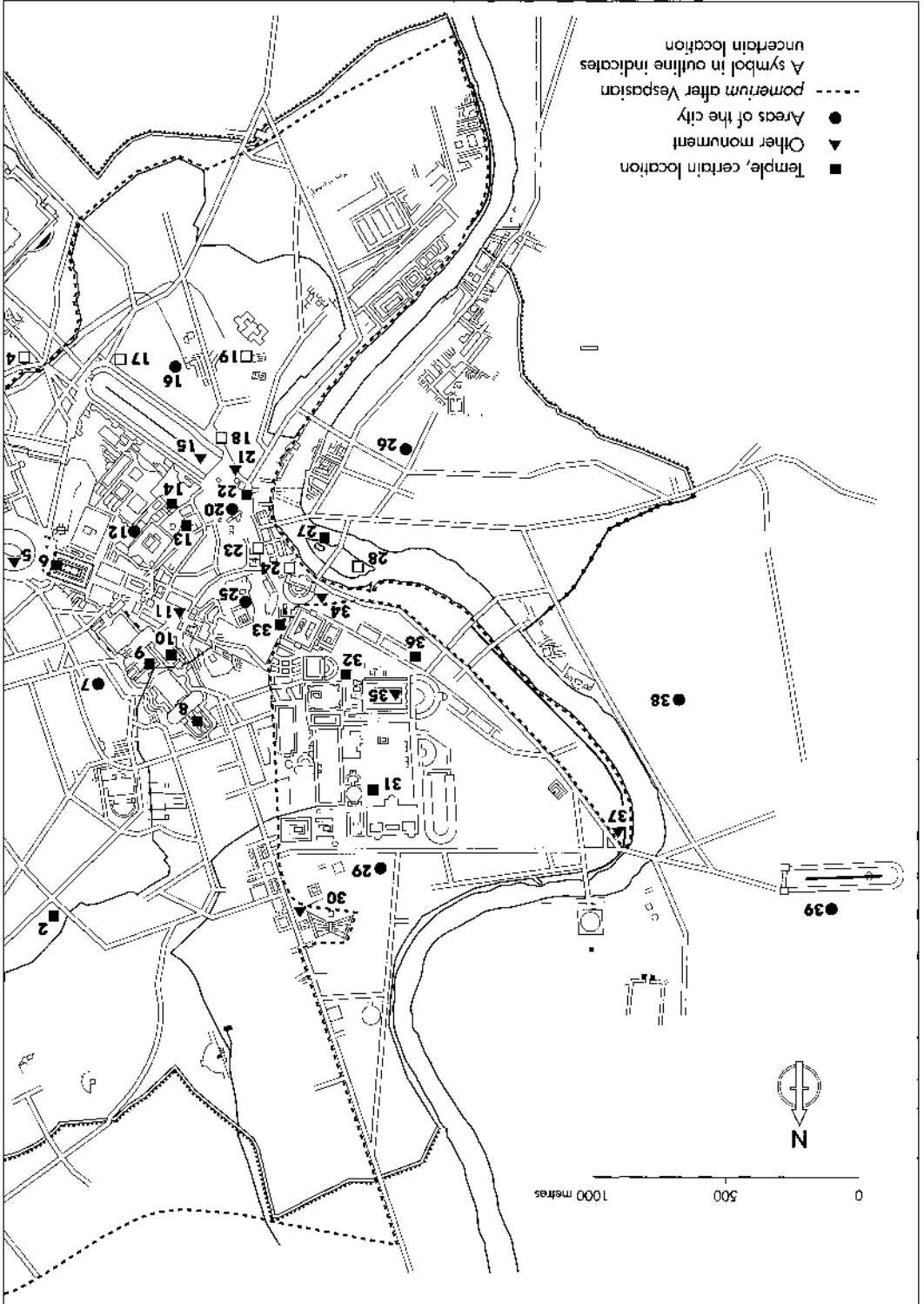
Abbreviations

Italics have been used for Greek or Latin words, which are either explained where they occur or in the glossary at the end of Vol. 2. Figures in bold type (e.g. 1.4b) refer to texts in Vol. 2.

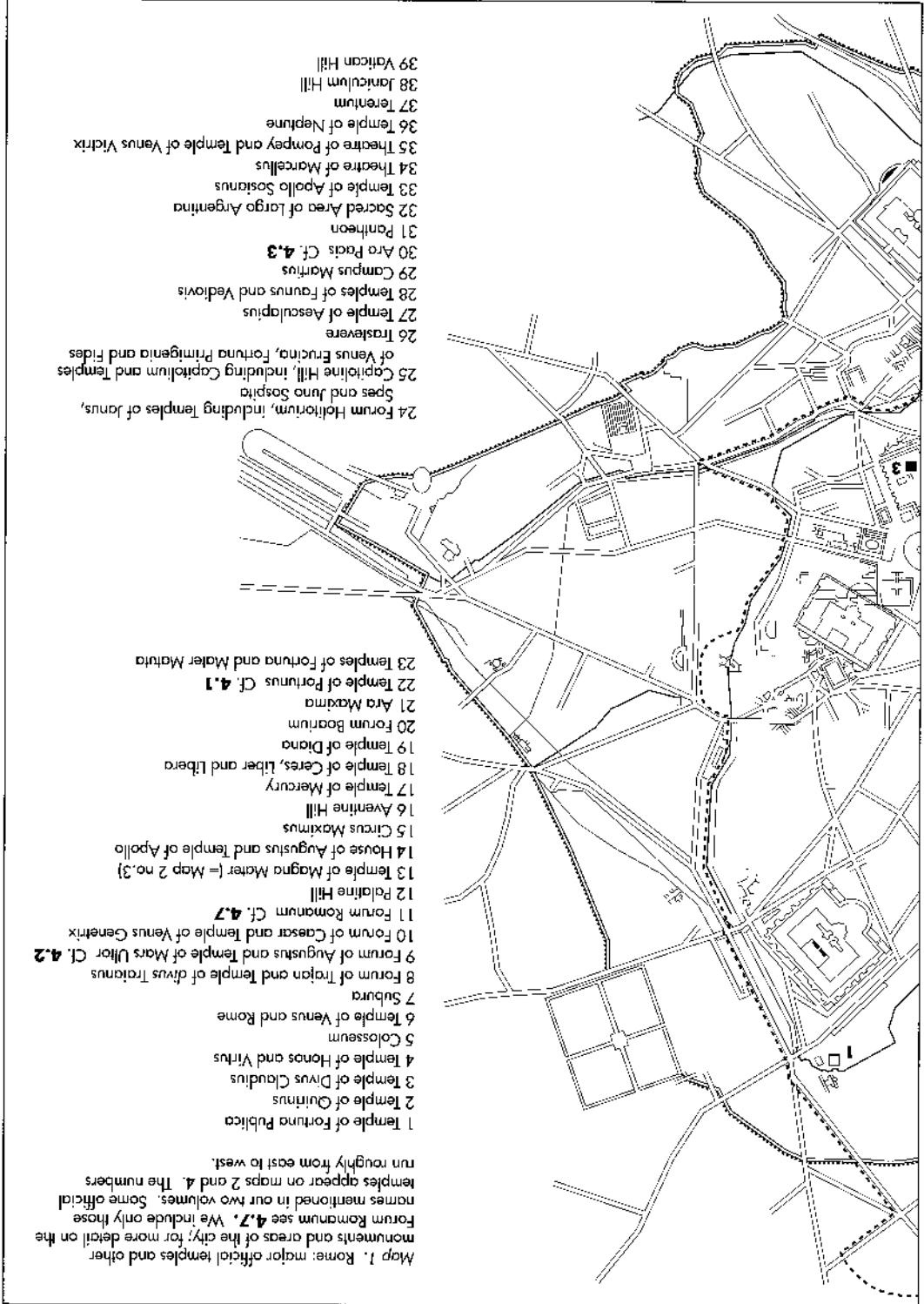
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Conventions and abbreviations

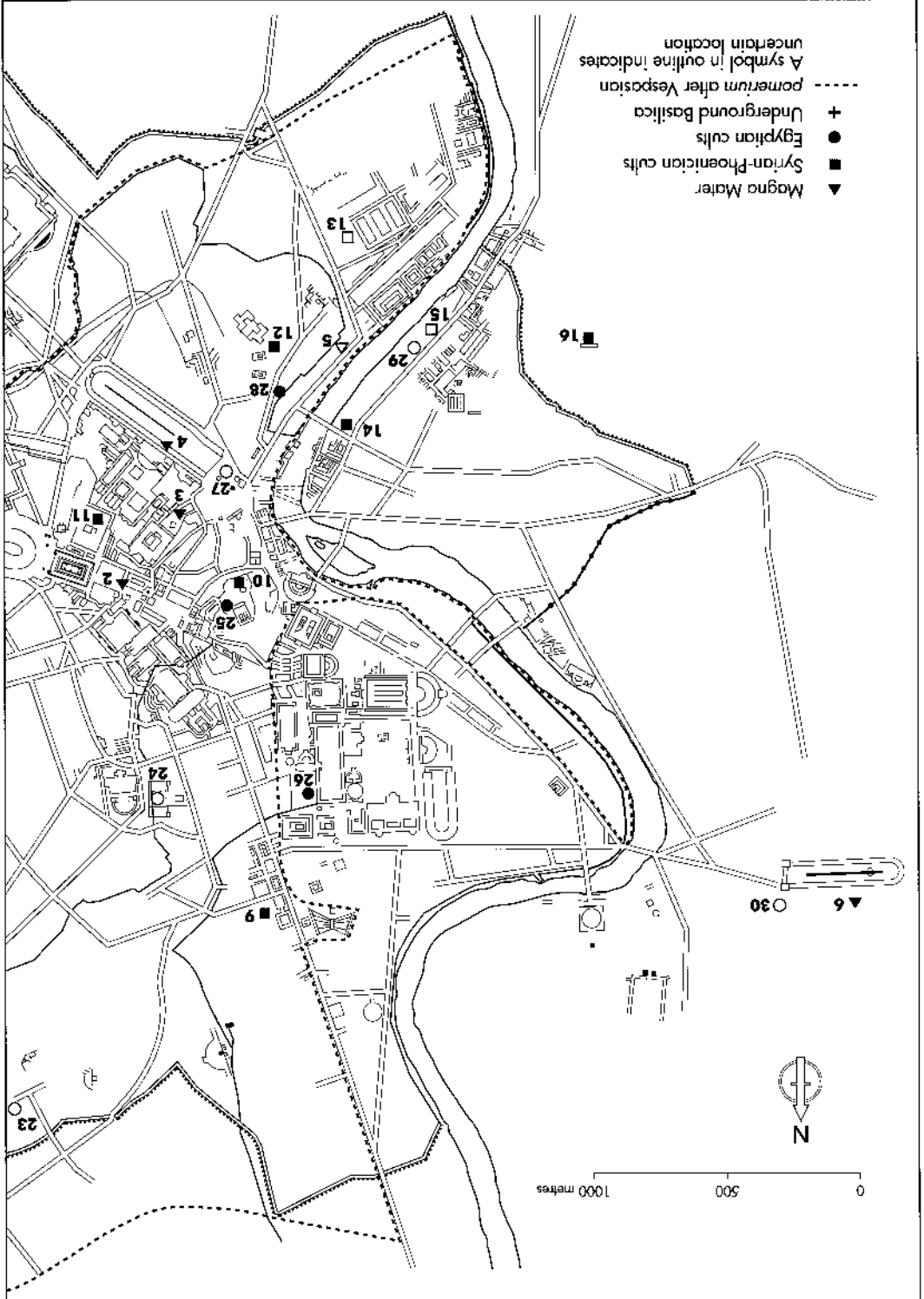
- IGUR *Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae*, ed. I. Moret (Rome, 1968–)
- ILAF *Inscriptions latines d'Afrique*, edd. R. Cagnat et al. (Paris, 1923)
- ILCV *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres*, ed. E. Diehl (Berlin, 1925–31)
- ILRP *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Reipublicae*, ed. A. Degrassi (Florence, 1957–63)
- ILS *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, ed. H. Dessau (Berlin, 1892–1916)
- JRS *Journal of Roman Studies*
- MEFR(A) *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome (: Antiquité)*
- MRR *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic*, T. R. S. Broughton, 4 vols (New York, 1951–86)
- PdP *Parola del Passato*
- RE *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, edd. G. Wissowa, E. Kroll et al. (Berlin & Stuttgart, 1893–78)
- RIB *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain I*, edd. R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright (Oxford 1965, repr. Stroud, Glos. 1995)
- RIC *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, edd. H. Mattingly et al. (London, 1926–)
- ROL *Remains of Old Latin*, ed. E. H. Warmington (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge MA and London, 1935–46)
- SIG³ *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd edn, ed. W. Dittenberger (Leipzig, 1915–24)
- ZPE *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*



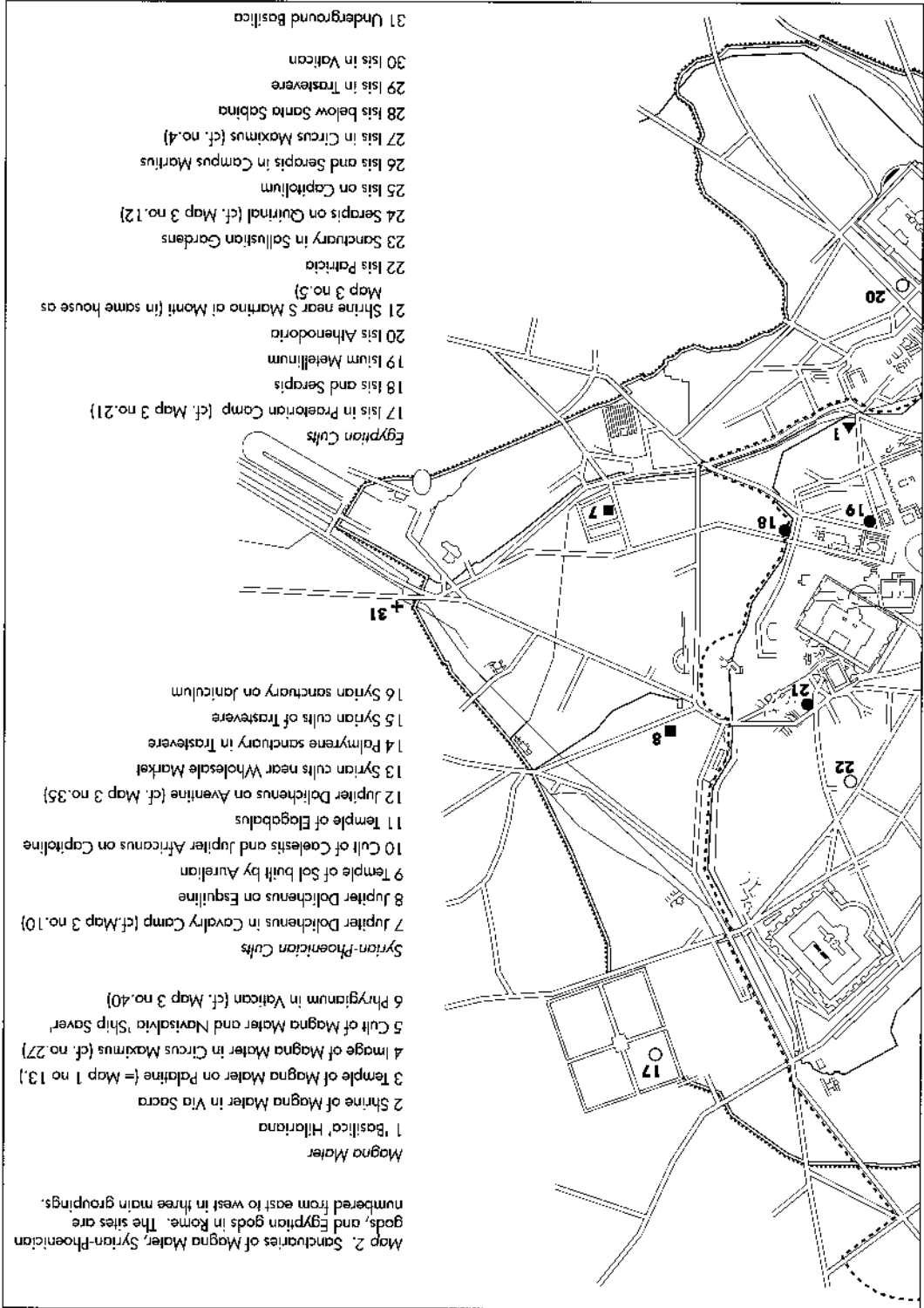
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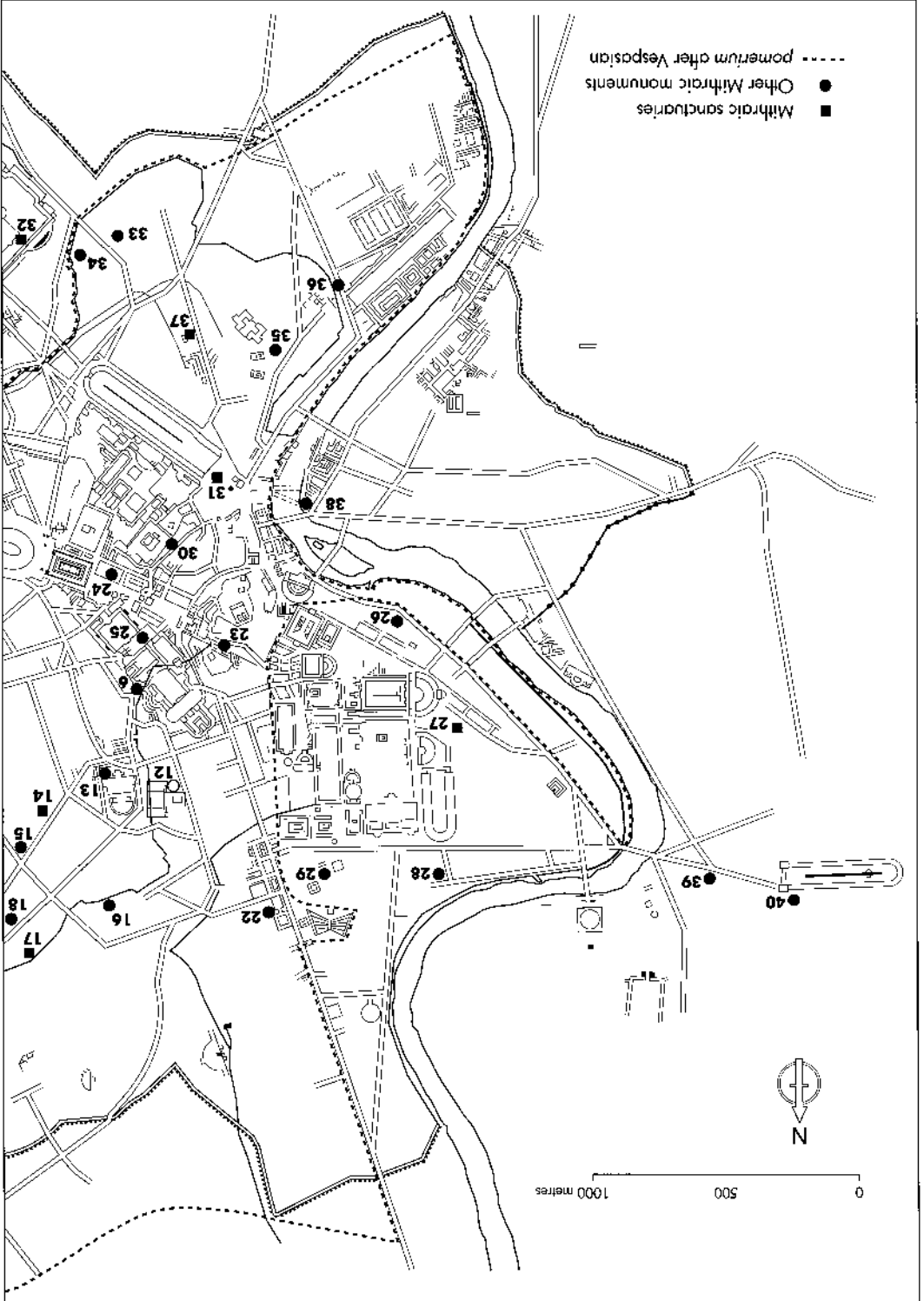
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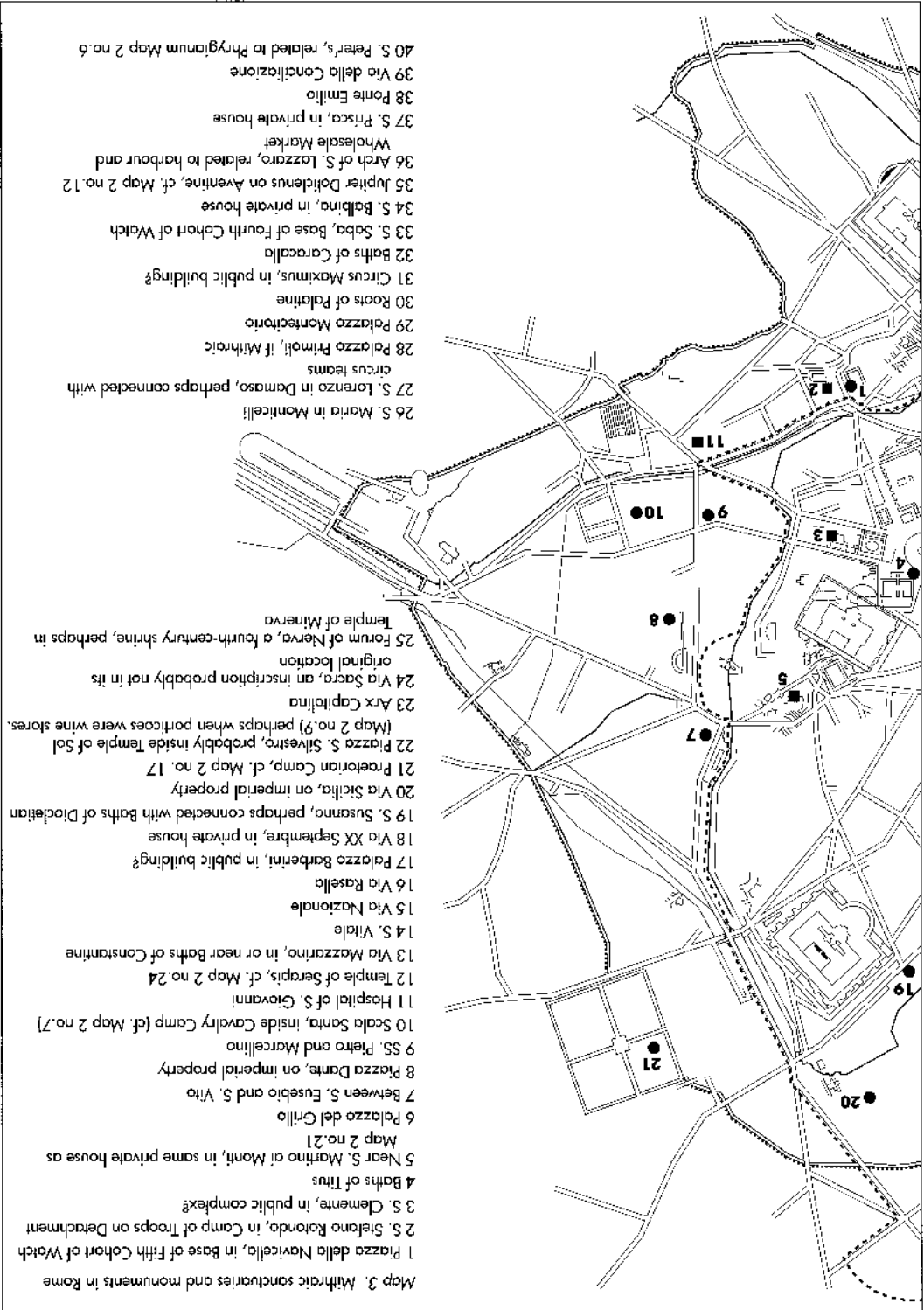
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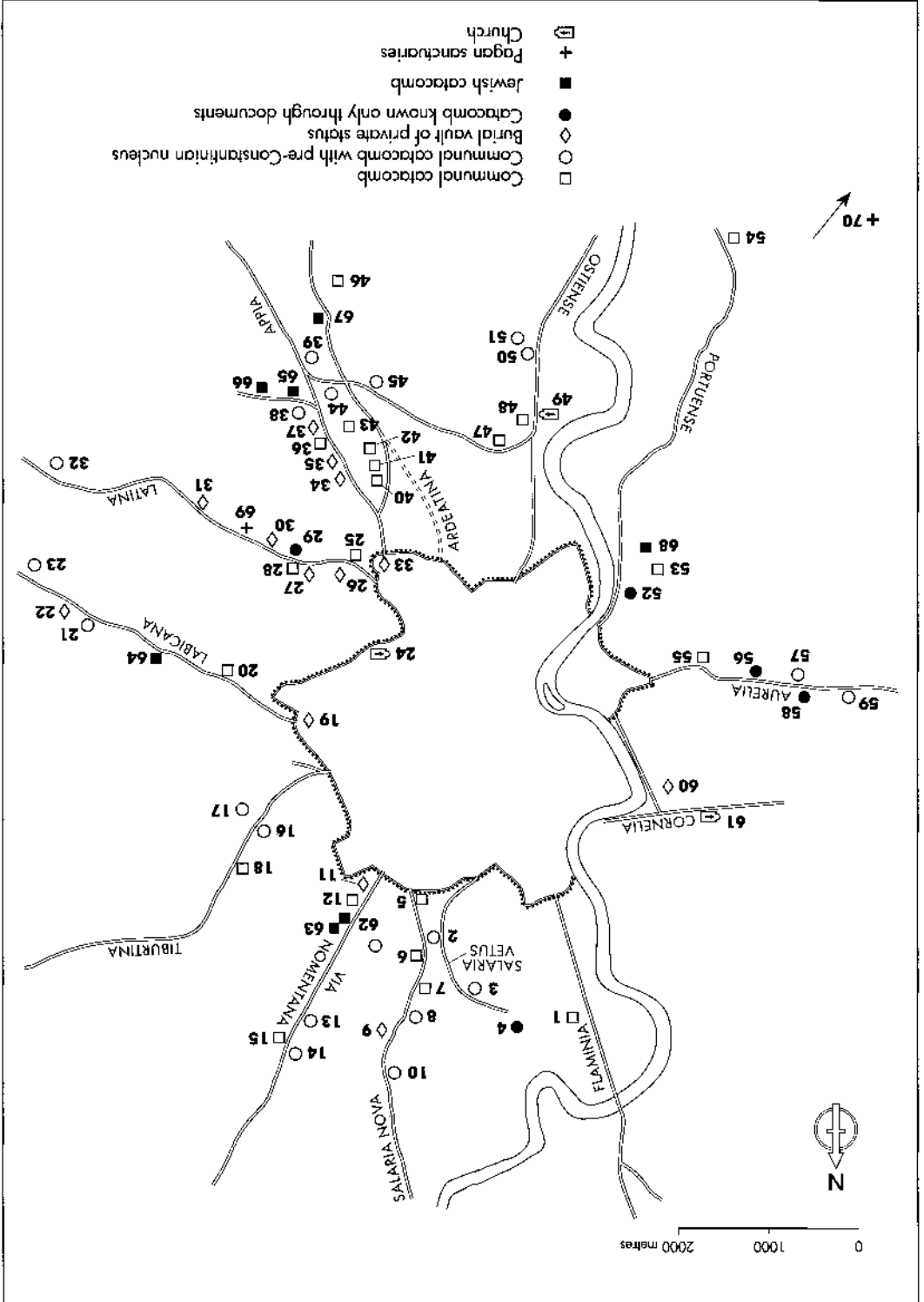
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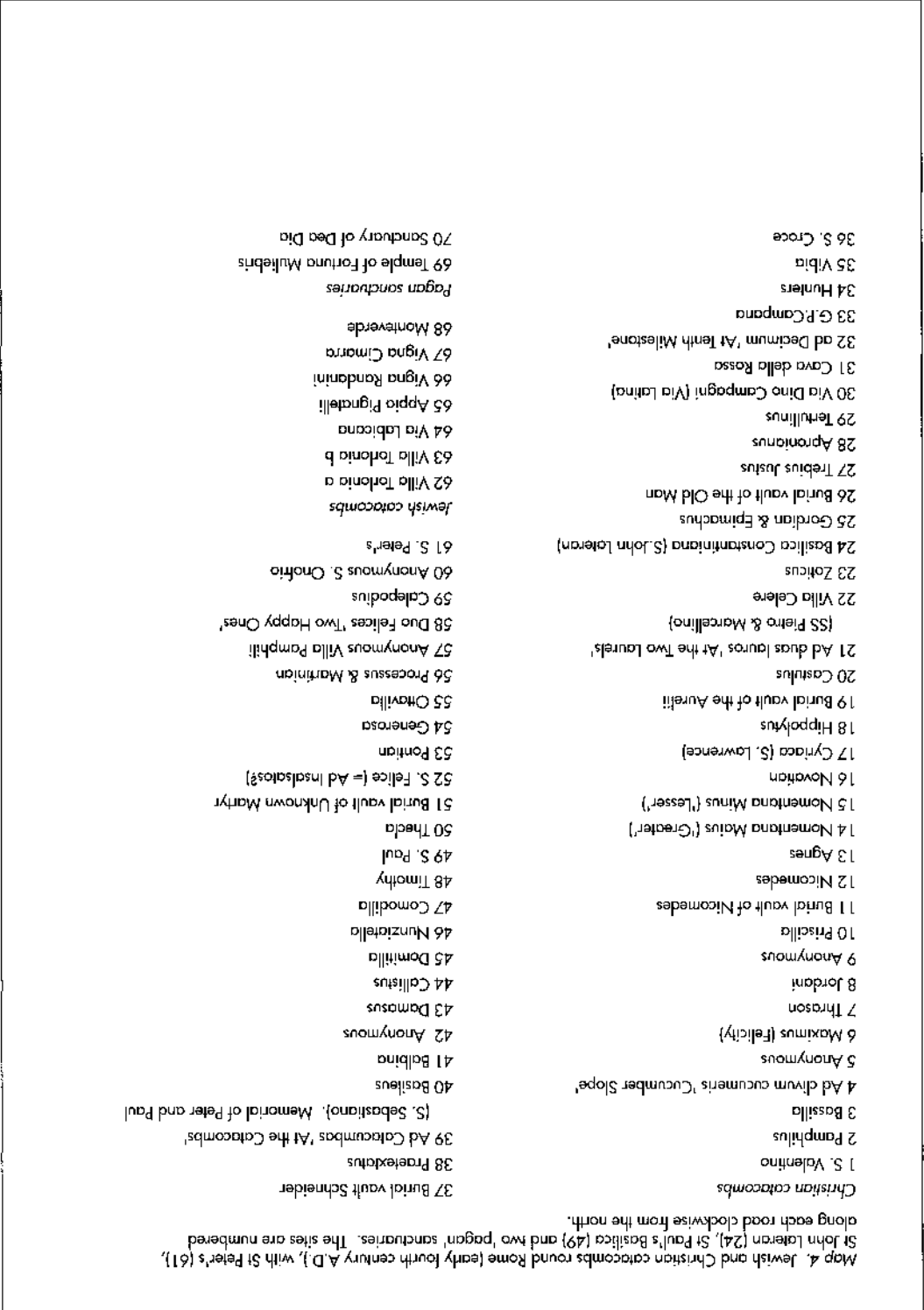
Map 3



Map 3



Map 4



Map 4

