

Health and Disease

The radiological and anthropological analysis of 43 non-adults revealed few visible pathologies. Scoliosis, periosteal reaction of bone, and foot deformities were observed in three non-adults. The latter two conditions are likely to have impacted quality of life.

Harris Lines were recorded on the long bones of six non-adults. These can be caused by temporary growth arrest due to physiological and/or emotional stress.

The absence of radiological pathologies suggests that short-term or acute diseases (e.g. TB, cholera, or smallpox) were the primary causes of death in the individuals examined.



Above: Individual B035 was between 2½-4½ years old at the time of death. This person had pes cavus (foot) deformities and Harris Lines, indicating they experienced at least one stressful episode (e.g. illness, malnutrition) during life. Anthropogenic mummification was used to preserve this non-adult.

The Capuchin Catacombs

The Capuchin Catacombs were founded in C.E. 1599 by the Capuchin Friars. Spontaneous (natural) and anthropogenic (embalming) mummification were practiced at this site. Initially the rite was reserved for the Capuchin Order, but in the 17th century, it became increasingly popular with the middle classes and nobility as it was viewed as a sign of wealth and sophistication, while simultaneously maintaining their social identity after death.

The catacombs have always been open to the public. In the early days, family members of the dead made up the largest number of visitors while the number of tourists was small; this is in sharp contrast to the present day.



THE CAPUCHIN CATACOMBS

THE NON-ADULT MUMMIES OF THE CAPUCHIN CATACOMBS

Feedback

To better understand visitor experience of the Capuchin Catacombs, we kindly ask you answer a few questions about your visit and the use of this leaflet. These questions can be accessed via the top QR code or this [link](#).



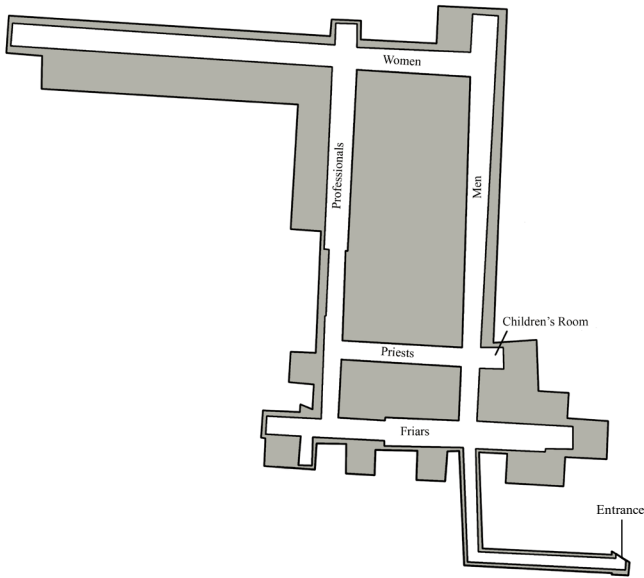
Find Out More

For more details about the non-adults of the Capuchin Catacombs, please visit our website via the bottom QR code.



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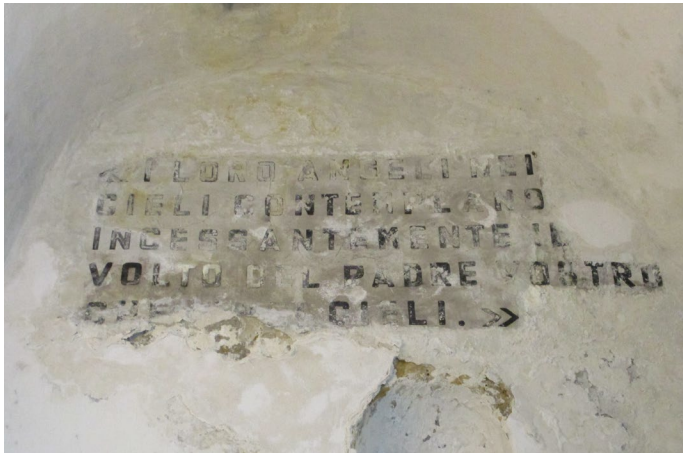
Above: Layout of the Capuchin Catacombs.



The Non-Adult Mummies

There are at least 163 ‘non-adult’ mummies in the Capuchin Catacombs. These individuals were accepted for mummification and display from C.E. 1787, though the majority date to the 19th century.

A sample of these non-adults (n=43) has revealed that all demographic age groups, including newborn babies, were granted mummification and display in the catacombs.



Above: Text above the highest central niche in the Children's Room.



A Question of Consent

Society in Late Modern Palermo (C.E. 1787-1880) was patriarchal in nature. Therefore, when a non-adult died it was the responsibility of the father to arrange and pay for the funeral, and consent to the display of their offspring in the catacombs.

Due to decomposition, it was only possible to identify biological sex in three instances, all of whom were males. Clothing could not be used to accurately determine sex or gender, as non-adults wore gender neutral clothing until the age of five years old. The majority of individuals in this research fell into this category.

“Their angels in heaven constantly gaze in God’s face”



Above: Individual B032 was aged between 7-9 years old at the time of death and is one of the older non-adults in the Children's Room. Spontaneous mummification was granted to this individual.



The Children's Room

The highest concentration of non-adults in the catacombs can be found in the Children's Room. These individuals are displayed in niches, cribs, and open coffins, while others rest in closed coffins.

The text above the highest central niche in the Children's Room reads: “Their angels in heaven constantly gaze at God’s face”. The angels in this passage refer to children who passed away prematurely. It is thought the text was applied to this wall in the late 1970s during restoration works.