

# ICS Newsletter

INTERNATIONAL CATACOMB SOCIETY

An Occasional Publication of the Society

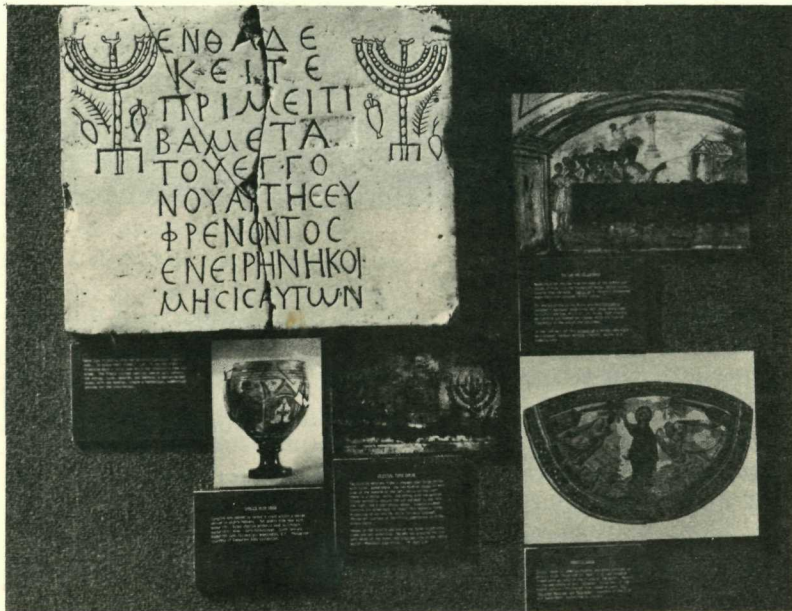
Autumn 1984

## A Few Words about ICS

The International Catacomb Society was organized to assist in preserving and documenting the rare vestiges of history shared by the Jewish and early Christian religions at the time of the Roman Empire. It will be recalled that the earliest Christians were Jews; only later—owing largely to the influence of Paul—did pagans become Christians without first having adhered to the Jewish faith.

The pictorial symbols of the prevailing

Hellenistic culture and the Greek language are frequently found in the catacombs. Less frequently, Latin epigraphy and, very rarely, Aramaic and Hebrew are in evidence. Accordingly, the religious history of the first centuries of the present era is crucial to the understanding of developments in the Christian and Jewish faith. Thus the Society is dedicated to the enhancement of knowledge about this period as it relates to both faiths and to pagan beliefs.



Prominent on this exhibition panel is the cast of a touching inscription. The original marble, incised in Greek about seventeen hundred years ago, was retrieved from the now lost Roman Jewish catacomb of Monteverde and is presently in the Vatican Museums. It translates as: "Here lies Primitiva with her grandson Euphrenon. In peace their sleep." Primitiva bore a Latin name while her grandson's name was Greek. The finely carved familiar Jewish cult symbols, the ethrog, lulav, menorah and amphora, a narrow-necked vessel with two handles, create a harmonious, symmetrical setting for the epitaph.

### THE LECTURE AND EXHIBITION AT THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

April 12 was a most important day for the International Catacomb Society. Weeks of preparation and finely-focused coordination by talented and dedicated members and friends of ICS, and above all—the maintenance of persistent optimism—culminated in an evening at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. with the opening of the exhibition, *The Vaults of Memory: Jewish and Christian Imagery in the Catacombs of Rome*, followed by Estelle Brettman's illustrated lecture.

The exhibition included photographs of catacomb frescoes and other pertinent subject matter as well as maps, polymer reproductions of Jewish epitaphs and explanatory texts. Graeco-Roman lamps and other artefacts loaned by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, further emphasized the imagery of the catacombs in third-dimensional form. Most of the material was new to our exhibition as, for example, the twelve unique impressions of historically significant Jewish inscriptions in the Vatican Museums, created through the dedicated efforts and expertise of Allen and Emma Swartz. We have been offered the opportunity to augment these as soon as our budget allows.



(Detail of photo to right of Primitiva's epitaph.) A photograph of a fresco with ecumenical overtones; from a funerary chamber *Cubiculum O* in the recently discovered pagan-Christian catacomb of Via Latina.

Moses receives the Law from the hand of God before the column of fire. In the foreground below, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

For the Early Church the Bible provided *testimonia* (prophetic passages) predicting that Jesus would come to fulfill the Law, thus offering deliverance and redemption—themes which are figured often in the art of the catacombs.

Among other items included for the first time were two maps, one illustrating the places of origin of the Jews of Rome and the other, a map of ancient Rome depicting in graphic form the thrust of the exhibition, and artistically realized by the staff of the *Scientific American*.

Hundreds of people viewed the exhibition. The number of early visitors was gratifyingly larger than expected (the exhibition had been given little public notice in Washington). Several other meetings were being held at the Academy on the day that our exhibition opened. At the conclusion of their meetings, the members prepared to hurry away but were brought up in sharp and apparently delighted surprise by our exhibit. Unfortunately, the exhibition remained in place for only a few days because of the scheduling of the Academy. We have since heard from a number of people who expressed great disappointment at having heard about the exhibition too late to attend. A positive result of this effort was the demonstration that the manner in which the exhibit was set up was, indeed, optimal; this format

will be used regularly in the future.

Mrs. Brettman's lecture was most cordially received. Centered upon her unique slides, it was polished, learned, on occasion provocative and at all times interesting. There was a spirited exchange of questions and comments afterwards. David Patterson's attention to the audio-visual details, and his unflinching cooperation in arranging lighting effects for the exhibit smoothed the course for the whole event.

Following the lecture, the guests moved to the main hall to enjoy a superb array of Italian wines and cheeses provided through the courtesy of the Embassy of Italy and its Cultural Attaché, Professore Piergiuseppe Bozzetti. This was augmented by a variety of exceptionally delectable edibles, the generous gift of Mrs. Joseph Charyk.

The setting for the reception was arranged by Robert Smith and his Meetings Office staff, who elegantly adapted the Dionysiac vine motif reflecting one of the major themes of regeneration in the catacombs.

Among the notable guests lending an air of distinction were Dr. Mark D. Altschule, Second Vice-President of the International Catacomb Society, who introduced the speaker with his customary literate wit and puckish charm; Dr. Frank Press, the President of the National Academy of Sciences; the Scientific Attaché of the Embassy of Italy, Dottore Giorgio Rinelli and Mrs. Rinelli; Minister of the Embassy of Greece, Mr. George Sioris and Mrs. Sioris; the Minister-Counselor of Cultural Affairs of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Wang Zicheng and Mrs. Zicheng; the Scientific Minister of the Embassy of Israel, Mr. Naaman Belkind; and Dottore Giorgio Salvatori, Director of International Relations, Telespazio.

Special thanks to Mrs. Joseph Charyk and Mrs. Frank Press who

arranged for the lecture and reception to be held at the Academy. Mrs. Charyk was Chairwoman of the Washington event and Co-hostess of the reception with Mrs. Press. Much gratitude goes also to Jacqueline Wakeling, who was invaluable in so many ways, and to William Megna, whose splendid photography recorded the occasion. The cooperation of the Archaeological Institute of America is greatly appreciated.

The enormous amount of staff work necessary in preparation for this happening was accomplished by our Boston committee chaired by the indomitable Louise LaGorce Hickey and including Esther Kugell, Esther Rome and Nicholas Hermes Boyatis. The text material was designed and printed by Jane Manthorne, and was edited by Miss Manthorne, Florence Wolsky and Richard Brettman. Richard Zonghi, the exhibition designer, installed the exhibition with the assistance of Roberta Zonghi.



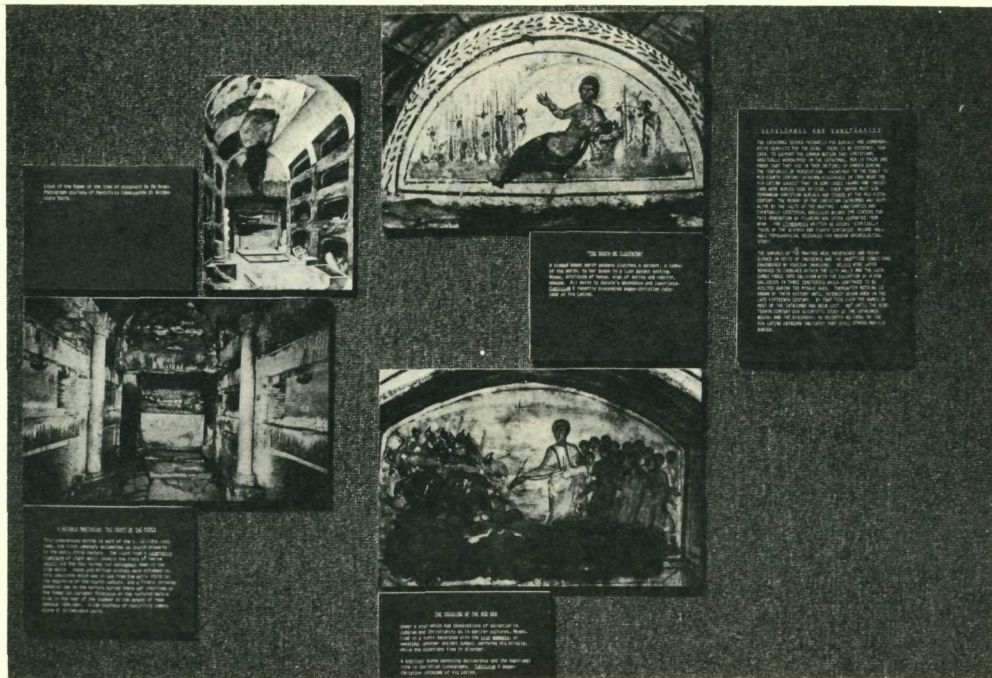
Estelle Brettman presenting the lecture *Scholars, Saints, Scrolls and the Hereafter: Images and Imagery in the Catacombs of Rome*.



Mr. Allen Swartz, Mrs. Joseph Charyk, Mrs. Estelle Brettman, Mrs. Louise LaGorce Hickey, the Minister-Counselor of Cultural Affairs of the Embassy of the People's Republic of China, Mr. Wang Zicheng, Mrs. Zicheng and Mrs. Frances Humphrey Howard.

#### THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING INVITATIONS

We have been deeply distressed to learn that a number of our friends who had expressed interest in attending the lecture and reception at the National Academy of Sciences did not receive their invitations. It is not clear to us why there should have been a slip up in issuing invitations to the event at the Academy in accordance with the guest lists submitted by the ICS. Many of those who returned the response cards sent out by our diligent committee did not receive replies because of some administrative misadventure at the Academy and we deeply regret that these people could not share the evening with us.



## EXHIBITION PANELS

The installation at the National Academy of Sciences and forthcoming traveling exhibits mandated the acquisition of durable, moveable panels especially designed to permit rapid setting-up and dismantling. The freestanding mounts can be transported in their own specially designed containers to be assembled at exhibit sites and serve as handsome backgrounds for the exhibit material. The design and assembly of these panels were executed by Gil Murray and Richard Zonghi.

Two photographs of frescoes from the fourth century private catacomb of Via Latina (discovered in 1956) where pagans and Christians are buried in close proximity.

"The Death of Cleopatra." A pagan earth goddess, crowned with a nimbus, in a lush garden setting clutches to her bosom a serpent, a symbol of the earth. Roses, attribute of Venus, sign of spring and rebirth, abound. All allude to nature's abundance. *Cubiculum E.*

The Crossing of the Red Sea. Under a star which had connotations of salvation in Judaism, Christianity and earlier cultures, Moses, clad in a tunic decorated with the *crux gammata* or swastika, another ancient symbol, performs his miracle, while the Egyptians flee in disorder.

A biblical scene connoting deliverance and the baptismal rite in Christian iconography. *Cubiculum O.*

## PUBLICATION NEWS

The Society recently received another kind of recognition in the form of a request for an article on the Jewish and Christian catacombs of Rome from the *Scientific American*, a magazine with worldwide distribution. A most respected scientific periodical designed for knowledgeable laymen, the *Scientific American* has asked

Mrs. Brettman for a personal account based on the voluminous material that she has assembled for our exhibits and for her forthcoming book.

## CHANGE OF NAME

You may have noticed our new name. Our original name, longer and highly specific, proved also to be misleadingly restrictive. Hence the change.

## LECTURE FOR THE COUNTWAY ASSOCIATES

The Countway Associates, a group of physicians and others interested in the humanistic aspects of medicine, met on December 7, 1983 at the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. Estelle Brettman, Executive Director of ICS, was the speaker of the evening. In her lecture, she discussed topics of medical importance in addition to subjects of general cultural interest. A surprisingly large amount of the visual material which Mrs. Brettman has collected from the catacombs and related sources deals with aspects of medicine. One of the most interesting items in this category is a fresco which may be one of the earliest representations of an anatomy lesson.



Dr. Mark Altschule in front of representations of and allusions to earlier medical practicers. Among them: a fresco of a teacher of anatomy, surrounded by his students; an epitaph incised with the tools of the Roman midwife, Marciana; a tombstone carved with surgical instruments; and a scene in a dentist's office depicted on stone. (Photographs from the catacombs of Rome.)

FUNDING NEWS

The recently established Eleanor Naylor Dana Charitable Trust, founded under the terms of Mrs. Dana's will, made one of its first grants to the International Catacomb Society. The sum of \$50,000 was awarded to assist in meeting the cost of preparation and publication of the book *Vaults of Memory: Jewish and Christian Imagery in the Catacombs of Rome*, based on the materials and research of Estelle Brettman. We were pleased that Mr. David L. Davies, Executive Director of the Trust, attended the opening of the exhibit at the Academy. The sum granted will probably cover close to 40% of the total cost of the project. Many of the illustrations will be in color and therefore the cost of the book will be high. Although a considerable amount of work on putting the book into its final form remains to be done, news of the book has already aroused interest among scholars, publishers and interested members of the general public.

The Lucius N. Littauer Foundation which funded the purchase of our original plaster casts from the Vatican Museums has awarded us an additional grant of \$5000 which partially defrayed the costs of the exhibition panels.

A \$1000 grant has been awarded to ICS by the Boston Arts Lottery Council for an exhibit to take place

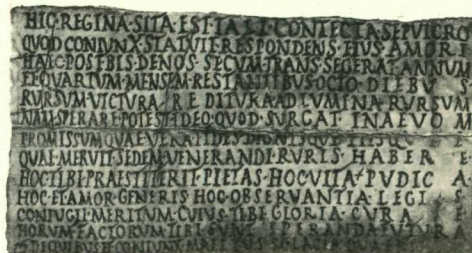
in Boston. The money will become available in autumn 1984. In order to meet this commitment and to respond to requests for the exhibit from institutions here and abroad, additional financial assistance will be needed so that we can augment and enhance our exhibition with important photographs, texts and other vital historical material such as rare casts of inscriptions which are available to us.

Other generous gifts from Mr. and Mrs. Herman Brettman, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Lipson, Mr. Bruce G. Sundlun and Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Teplow were applied to photographic processing, printing of texts, and the mounting and laminating of photos and all textual material for this exhibit.

The continuing support of devoted members and friends of the Society has been of great benefit in assisting in the maintainance of our day to day operations and enabling us to survive. Rising costs, need for additional correspondence and mailing due to increased interest in our work, and the large deficit resulting from the creation of our fundamental exhibition make us aware that we must seek to expand our funding base. We are appealing for support from all those who share our interest and concern for preserving and learning about our common past. From our awareness of our basic kinships and shared roots

comes hope for renewed understanding.

Contributors of \$25.00 or more will become Friends and receive all mailings and information about Society activities. Larger gifts will assist us in our efforts to expand our educational programs in the most effective way. For your convenience there is a form below.



A Latin epitaph on marble from the collapsed Jewish catacomb of Monteverde, now in the Vatican Museums, bears the poignant tribute of a mourning husband to his young wife and reveals insights into concepts of immortality during this period: "Here lies Regina, covered by such a tomb which her husband set up as fitting to his love. After twice ten years she spent with him one year, four months and eight days more. She will live again, return to the light again, for she can hope that she will rise to the eternal life promised, as is assured to the worthy and the pious, in that she has deserved to possess an abode in the hallowed land. This your piety has assured you, this your chaste life, this your love for your people, this your observance of the Law, your devotion to your wedlock, the glory of which was dear to you. For all these deeds your hope of the future is assured. In this your sorrowing husband seeks his comfort."

FRIENDS OF THE INTERNATIONAL CATACOMB SOCIETY

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

STREET \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Categories of Membership

- \_\_\_\_\_ Friend \$25
- \_\_\_\_\_ Contributor \$50
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sponsor \$100
- \_\_\_\_\_ Benefactor \$1000 or more

Contributions made to the International Catacomb Society, Inc. are tax deductible. Please mail to: The International Catacomb Society, Inc., P.O. Box 325, Charles Street Station, Boston, MA 02114-0325.

**INTERNATIONAL  
CATACOMB  
SOCIETY**

61 Beacon Street,  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108



**Officers and Directors**

**President**

Cornelius C. Vermeule III  
*Curator, Department of  
Classical Art, Boston  
Museum of Fine Arts*

**First Vice-President**

James M. Gavin  
*Lt. General, USA (Ret.),  
Consultant Arthur D.  
Little, Inc.*

**Second Vice-President**

Mark D. Altschule, M.D.  
*Honorary Curator of  
Prints and Photographic  
Material, Countway  
Library of Medicine,  
Harvard Medical School*

**Executive Director**

Estelle S. Brettman  
*Department of Education,  
Boston Museum of Fine  
Arts*

**Associate Executive Director**

Louise LaGorce Hickey  
*Extensive service in  
various capacities,  
National Geographic  
Society*

**Treasurer**

Melvin I. Shapiro  
*Certified Public  
Accountant Partner,  
Tofias, Fleishman, Shapiro  
& Co., P.C.*

**Assistant Treasurer**

Richard Brettman  
*Formerly, Personnel  
Administration,  
Commonwealth of  
Massachusetts*

**Acting Secretary**

Florence Z. Wolsky  
*Assistant, Department of  
Classical Art, Boston  
Museum of Fine Arts*

Edwina R. Charyk  
*Resource Member, The  
Women's Committee of  
the Smithsonian  
Associates*

Baldassare Conticello  
*Formerly, Soprintendente  
Archeologico Vicario di  
Roma*

Salvatore Fornari  
*Direttore del Museo della  
Comunità Israelitica di  
Roma*

Jean E. Gavin  
*Gallery Instructor, Boston  
Museum of Fine Arts*

Sheldon L. Glashow  
*Nobel Laureate in Physics*

Robert M. Goldwyn, M.D.  
*Clinical Professor of  
Surgery, Harvard Medical  
School*

George E. McCully  
*Executive Director, The  
Coolidge Center for  
Environmental Leadership*

Henry Millon  
*Dean, Center for  
Advanced Study in the  
Visual Arts, National  
Gallery of Art*

David Gordon Mitten  
*Curator of Ancient Art,  
Fogg Museum, Harvard  
University*

Robert M. Morrison  
*Consultant, President,  
Affiliated Business  
Consultants, Inc.*

Lee M. Nilson  
*Public Relations Director  
Marine Environmental  
Research, Inc.*

Leon Pomerance  
*Fellow of the Royal  
Society of Antiquarians  
of London*

Esther E. Rome  
*Gallery Instructor, Boston  
Museum of Fine Arts*

Nitza Rosovsky  
*Exhibit Coordinator,  
Harvard Semitic Museum*

Nora Rossi  
*Professor of Italian  
Literature*

Harry Starr  
*President, The Lucius N.  
Littauer Foundation, Inc.*

Allen Swartz  
*Vice-President, Tra-Con,  
Inc.*

Theodore H. Teplow  
*Vice-Chairman and  
Trustee, Hebrew College,  
Boston*

Sidney Udenfriend  
*Member, Roche Institute of  
Molecular Biology*

**INTERNATIONAL  
CATACOMB  
SOCIETY**

61 Beacon Street,  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Non-profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Boston, MA  
Permit 55505