

ICS Newsletter

INTERNATIONAL CATACOMB SOCIETY

An Occasional Publication of the Society

Autumn 1986

OUR RAISON D'ÊTRE

The International Catacomb Society is dedicated to the preservation and documentation of the rare vestiges of history illustrating the common influences on Jewish, Christian and pagan funerary practices at the time of the Roman Empire. By circulating exhibitions, sponsoring lectures, and disseminating publications, the Society strives to create awareness of the significant ecumenical implications suggested by the imagery of the catacombs, in order to increase understanding among faiths.

ACTIVITIES

The Society cooperates with educational and cultural institutions to sponsor and host public exhibitions and lectures in the United States and abroad. The operating expenses of the Society are financed through private donations and project grants. Contributions are tax deductible, and donors receive privileges of attendance at special events, all mailings, and newsletters.



THE VAULTS OF MEMORY EXHIBIT IN ROME—UNO SPETTACOLO MEMORABILE

From November 6 to December 5, 1985, the fruits of arduous preparations were realized in the stunning exhibit, *Volte Della Memoria: Immagini Da Roma Sotterranea*, presented by the International Catacomb Society in collaboration with the National Museum of the Castel S. Angelo.

The exhibition included maps, plans, replicas of historically important inscriptions and objects from the catacombs and relevant sites so expertly made that they are almost indistinguishable from the originals. Also shown were reproductions of archival handwritten, painted and engraved impressions of sixteenth century pioneering explorers of the catacombs and of archaeological discoveries from a lost Jewish catacomb. The photographs, many taken by Estelle Brettman, document frescoes, still extant but perishable, which eloquently illustrate the symbols associated with the religious beliefs of the period. Often accompanying the familiar Jewish cult symbols in the Jewish catacombs are such traditionally Graeco-Roman themes as grapevines, doves, peacocks, dolphins, Fortuna, and Victory, amidst various other flora and fauna. Like Old Testament scenes, which were adopted as themes of salvation by early Christians, many of these motifs, along with such mythological figures as Helios, Heracles, Orpheus, Demeter, and Zeus (in the form of an eagle) with Ganymede, neighbor on traditional Christian and New Testament figurations in the Christian catacombs. Also contributing to our knowledge of life at this time, were cherished objects imbedded in plaster near burials, such as fragments of glass, coins, toys and small sculptures.

Our Rome exhibit extended awareness of the Society's activities to many countries and drew a warm response from a wide range of viewers: William A. Wilson, former U.S. Ambassador to

above

The Castel and the *giretto* or upper terrace outside of the vaulted *cubicula*-like exhibit rooms from which there is a panoramic view of the Tiber, the famed monuments of Rome, and the Alban hills. Originally Emperor Hadrian's mausoleum, this late imperial and mediaeval fortress, looming over the banks of the Tiber, provided a spectacular setting.

right

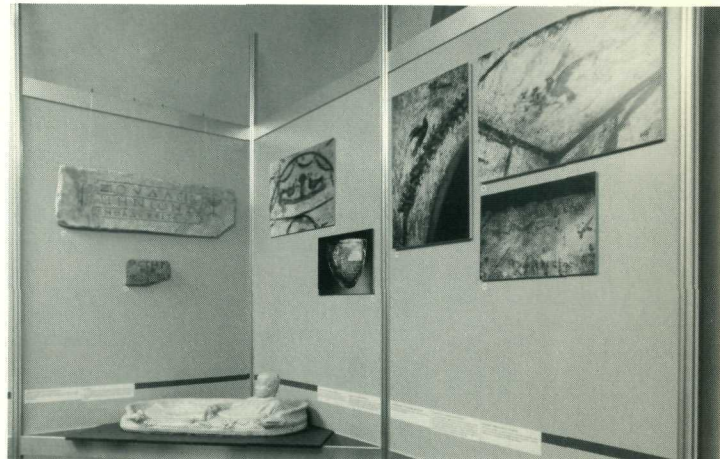
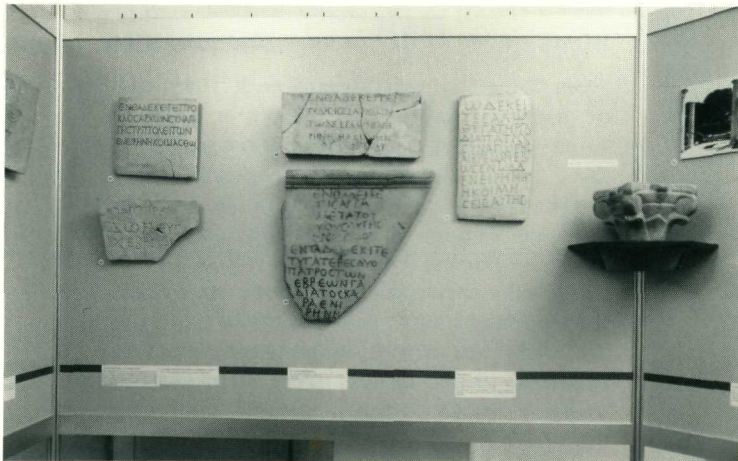
The International Catacomb Society's banner entitled IMMAGINI DA ROMA SOTTERRANEA (Imagery from Subterranean Rome) hangs high on the ramparts of the Castel.



the Holy See, who said that he "was proud that Americans had done this"; the large numbers of school children as well as university archaeological students instructed by their professors in the exhibit; the Archaeological Superintendency of Rome who invited us to assist in setting up such an exhibit; the exhibit-weary Castel custodians who chose to spend their days of *riposo* studying the exhibit, impressed with the effectiveness of the exhibit as an educational tool. The newspaper notices were most gratifying, particularly a lengthy, in-depth review in *Il Tempo* entitled "At Rome the True Face of the Catacombs." The article commended the International Catacomb Society for organizing this documentation aimed at "reflecting the interweaving of religions thought that was characteristic of Rome in the first centuries of Christianity, interweaving that also influenced the funerary iconography in which Greek and

Roman myths, and particular themes of the Old Testament, lend form to the new content of the Proto-Christian religion, rendering the invisible visible."

Thanks to the generosity of friends and patrons, the nucleus shown in our earlier exhibits at the Boston Public Library, the Kelsey Museum of Ancient and Mediaeval Archaeology at the University of Michigan, and the National Academy of Sciences in Washington has been greatly expanded. The Rome exhibit stimulated the interest of scholars, amateurs, and clergy and laity of different religious persuasions. *Vaults of Memory* was described by scholars as a unique exhibit which presents in an organized form a concept emphasizing the intersections of the major religions which shaped western civilization, at this critical and influential moment in the history of their iconography. These developments are based on the imagery of the catacombs.



top right

(Left to right) Archbishop Lino Zanini, Delegate to the Fabbrica of Saint Peter's, Giuseppe Cardinal Caprio, President of the Economic Prefecture of the Holy See, and Msgr. Prof. Michele Basso, Pontifical University of St. Thomas in Rome, make their way through the portals of the Castel for the opening.

left center

Replicas of inscriptions (the majority in Greek) informing of the names of synagogues and Jewish officials in ancient Rome. The capital (also a cast) with menorah graffiti offers supportive evidence with other recent finds for the existence of a Jewish colony in or near the ancient imperial port of Rome, at Ostia.

right center

Replica of the unique lid of a stone coffin bearing the figure of a young boy with such Graeco-Roman attributes as doves and grapes. From the now lost Jewish catacomb of Monteverde. Photos and casts bearing doves, a Torah ark, and other objects related to exhibit sections *Manna from Heaven* and *The Dove* are exhibited on the panels.

bottom left

(Left to right) Emma Swartz, ICS Member; Dr. Baldassare Conticello, Archaeological Superintendent of Pompeii; Allen Swartz, ICS Director; Lee Nilson, ICS Director; Archbishop Zanini; Cardinal Caprio; E. Brettman; Dr. Antonio Carbone; Dr. Carney Gavin, Curator of the Semitic Museum, Harvard University; and Raoul Abujaber, Honorary Consul General of the Netherlands in Jordan.

**top left**

(Left to right) Ferdinando di Porto, Ambassador Wilson, Roger M. Mahoney, Archbishop of Los Angeles, Cardinal Caprio, Mrs. Elizabeth Wilson, E. Brettman.

center left

(Left to right) Dr. Conticello; Prof. Pasquale Testini, University of Rome; Dr. Sante Serangeli, Vice-Director General of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage; Prof. Danilo Mazzoleni, Pontifical Institute of Christian Archaeology at Rome; a group of university students; E. Brettman, and Dr. Glauco Angeletti, Castel Archaeologist, in front of the Map of Rome.

bottom left

(Left to right) Archbishop Zanini, Cardinal Caprio, and Msgr. Basso study the Map of Rome, illustrating geographically the major points of the exhibit.

**MILLE GRAZIE!**

The assorted, nine boxes, trunks and suitcases of exhibit accompanying the executive director on her frenetic dash to the airport could never have confronted the dismayed customs authorities at Fiumicino airport on schedule without the last minute efforts of loyal staff members: Jane Manthorne, Assistant Director; Richard Zonghi, Graphic Designer; Roberta Zonghi, Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts—all associated with the Boston Public Library—Florence Wolsky, Department Assistant, Department of Classical Art, Museum of Fine Arts Boston; and George Matias. Thanks for eleventh hour assistance go as well to Alitalia in Boston and Duncan Todd, Vice-President, Thomas Todd Printing Company. As usual, Allen and Emma Swartz worked diligently to faithfully reproduce vital epigraphy in time for the major event. The total endeavor was, of course, made possible only by lengthy and exacting labors which involved many hardworking friends, board members and officers of the Society.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Italian experience will long be remembered for the exceptional quality of cooperation, enthusiasm, and interest manifested by all who became partners in the effort. Unfortunately, the limitations of space do not permit mention of all the Italian friends who gave of their time and expertise so willingly. Among those not pictured in the accompanying photographs taken by Claudio Mandolini and his staff who documented the event splendidly were: Prof. Carlo Pietrangeli, Director General of the Vatican Museums, and ever helpful, encouraging Dr. Walter Persegati, Secretary and Treasurer of the Vatican Museums, who were both responsible for





the generous loan of original artifacts and the arrangements for replicating unique objects from the Vatican Museums; Prof. Adriano La Regina, Archaeological Superintendent of Rome and the Direction of the National Museum of Rome, and Dr. Eugenio La Rocca, Director of the Capitoline Museums, who obligingly permitted reproductions of pertinent rare material; Dr. Nora Lombroso Rossi, who assisted in the translation of the English catalog into *Volte della Memoria*, the Italian catalog, with her usual proficiency and who has long served the Society as liaison in international planning; Mauro Montenovi and his crating staff, the packers for the Vatican Museums, who ably performed their functions. Our deep gratitude goes to all who have contributed at this time and over the years to the efforts which culminated in such a successful exhibit. We look forward to returning to Italy and the continent in response to other invitations.

Included in the distinguished honorary committee for the event were: members of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Dr. Antonino Gullotti, Minister, and Sen. Prof. Giuseppe Galasso, Undersecretary of State for the Ministry; the Direction of the National Museum of Castel S. Angelo, Prof. Sabino Iusco, Ten. Col. Mario Savatteri, Dr. Maurizio Lini, and Dr. Glauco Angeletti; the U.S. Embassy represented by Maxwell Rabb, Ambassador to the Republic of Italy, and William A. Wilson; figures from the Italian archaeological world, Dr. Baldassare Conticello, Prof. Richard Krautheimer of the Hertziana Library, Prof. Adriano La Regina, Dr. Eugenio La Rocca, and Prof. Pasquale Testini; ICS Director, Comm. Salvatore Fornari, former Director of the Museum of the Jewish Community of Rome. Special guests at the opening of the exhibit were the participants in the Vaults of Memory tour, a number of whom are officers, directors and members of ICS.

top left

(Left to right) The late, mourned Ulderico Grispigni, former head of the Stone Restoration Laboratory of the Vatican Museums, and assistant putting finishing touches on casts for the exhibit. On far right David Renka. Sig. Grispigni offered his skills with intense dedication in order to enrich our exhibit with additional replicas of major interest in record time for the opening. Photos from exhibit sections *Rites and Rituals*, *Manna from Heaven*, and *The Dove* are visible.

top right

(Right to left) Dr. Egisto Ercadi, Vatican architect, indefatigably supervised every aspect of the Rome exhibit with the conscientious assistance of American medalist David Renka. Part of exhibit section *Celestial Transports* appears in the background.

center left

Showcase with casts of ancient Roman lamps many probably from the catacombs. They bear such pertinent motifs as menorahs, a dolphin, a peacock, the Good Shepherd, and the biblical two spies with a cluster of grapes among others. Recently the Prefect of the Apostolic Library, Father Leonard E. Boyle enthusiastically granted ICS the unique privilege of reproducing three superb lamps from the Library's collections. Original objects, loaned by the Vatican Museums, are also displayed in the case. Photos from exhibit sections *Rites and Rituals*, *Manna from Heaven*, and *The Dove* are exhibited on the panels.



top left

(Left to right) Dr. Conticello; Dr. Maurizio Lini, Castel Secretary; Herman Brettman, ICS Member (behind Dr. Lini); Dr. Marisa de' Spagnolis Conticello, Archaeologist/Topographer; Beatrice Brettman, ICS Member; Estelle Brettman; Ten. Col. Mario Savatteri, Castel Vice-Director who like Dr. Lini, Dr. Angeletti and the Castel staff and personnel was always helpful, in the temporary absence due to illness, of Castel Director, Prof. Sabino Iusso, our resourceful Vice-President of European Affairs, Dr. Conticello and his wife, Marisa, guided the total Roman endeavor from its beginning.

bottom left

Enjoying the buffet on the *giretto* at the opening: (foreground, left to right) Franco Marchesi and Rosanna Scrichia of Centenari Typography who with their personnel worked around the clock to ready all printing matter for the exhibit; Dr. Liliana Barbacini, Head Secretary of the Undersecretariat of the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage (back to camera); (background, left to right) other dependable friends of ICS, Monica Cola, Cartographer; Roberto Bonavenia, Instructor of audiovisual studies; (guest); Prof. Anna Maria Bisi, University of Urbino; (other guests). Behind the buffet table (right to left), caterer for the elegant reception, Gino Boccherini, nephew of Alfredo, the fettucine king of Pickford-Fairbanks golden-fork-and-spoon fame and his assistant offer *squisite* delicacies and champagne.



THE VAULTS OF MEMORY TOUR

The tour was organized by Estelle Brettman with the assistance of our stalwart tour staff, Beatrice Brettman, Richard Brettman, and Louise Hickey. Air travel arrangements were efficiently handled by the always flexible Frank and Phyllis Gaeta, cousins of Cardinal Caprio.

The tour was primarily designed to visit sites pertinent to our project, however, the offbeat gastronomic and other attractions of the picturesque, historic "centro," our base of operations for the eleven-night stay, near the Roman quarters of the ancient Jews and early Christians, were hardly overlooked.

E. Brettman gave frequent briefings and background information. In addition, there were on the site expert guides in most instances except for the catacombs. Highlights, thanks to the cooperation of many authorities who permitted visits to several normally inaccessible sites, were: the Etruscan Tomb of Reliefs at Cerveteri, decorated with skillfully carved objects of daily life and favored animals to guarantee accustomed comforts eternally; the extensive Christian catacomb of SS. Pietro e Marcellino, painted with pagan, and Old and New Testament themes, the site of the find of a fragment of Jewish gold glass which may bear a depiction of the Temple at Jerusalem. In previous studies of the catacomb, E. Brettman had found graffiti which resemble menorahs there. A Jewish catacomb was also visited as well as Ostia, the site of the most ancient synagogue in Europe, and a habitation presenting possible evidences of early Christianity.

Special patrons of the exhibit were treated to a private, guided tour of the Vatican Museums after closing time, visiting selected collections not always open to the public, with emphasis on the dramatic restoration of the frescoed ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Seats were reserved for our group at the papal audience in which Pope John Paul II welcomed the International Catacomb Society.

An unexpected bonus was the visit to the Vatican Secret Archives and the "Tower of the Winds" arranged by Prof. Don Aldo Martini, an official of the Archives who had voiced much enthusiasm for our exhibit. The introductory talk given by the Prefect, Father Josef Metzler preceded a guided tour by Prof. Martini who informed us about the notable history of the ambiance, and pointed out such rarities as a letter written by Michaelangelo, Henry VIII's request for a divorce from his first wife, and his love letters to Anne Boleyn as well as magnificent twelfth to nineteenth century royal seals of rulers and churchmen in finely engraved, precious gold cases.



top

A briefing on the history of the Pantheon as we set out on a walking tour of Rome. (Left to right) Elizabeth Kramer, Allen Swartz, E. Brettman, Thomas Hickey, Emma Swartz (behind Mr. Hickey), Deborah Todd, and Michael Steeves.

bottom

Reliefs of *bucrania* (bull's heads), shields, and graves carved on the interior side of the entrance to the Tomb of Reliefs. These symbols are explained in terms of the imagery of the catacombs in the forthcoming book. Included are (left to right) Mrs. Kramer, Mr. Steeves and Renée Glass.



top left

Finding our way through the labyrinthine galleries of the SS. Pietro and Marcellino catacomb. Carolyn Anderson and Milton Glass, ICS Treasurer, bring up the rear.

top right

Visit to the synagogue at Ostia, the most ancient to date found in Europe. (Left to right) Renée Glass, Louise Hickey, E. Brettman, (behind Mrs. Brettman) Emma Swartz and Milton Glass, Thomas Hickey, Duncan Todd, Elizabeth Kramer, Shirley Steeves, Herman Brettman, and Michael Steeves.

bottom left

Cardinal Caprio expertly explaining the Vatican Gardens. His Eminence has always been generous with time, energy, and suggestions in assisting our project.

AFTER ROME

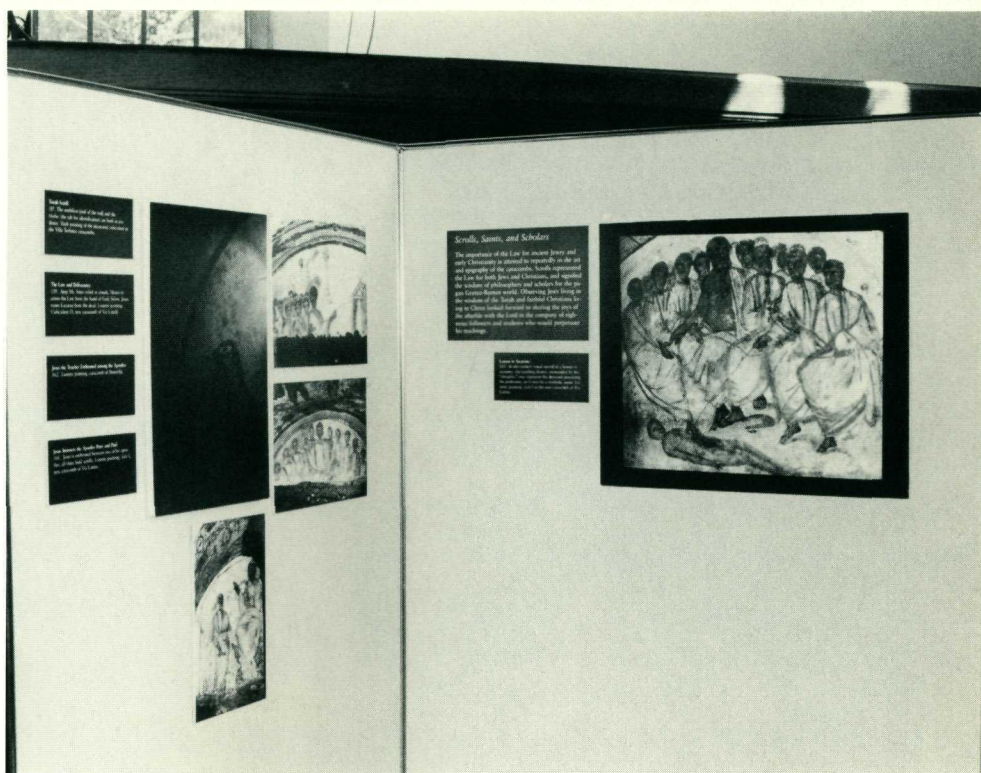
From Rome *Vaults of Memory*, complete with new texts and acquisitions, travelled immediately to the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley where it was shown at the Badé Institute of Biblical Archaeology, "a research center for Near Eastern archaeology and its relationship to biblical studies . . ." The Institute houses a notable collection of early bibles, dating back to the fifteenth century, as well as artifacts from Prof. William F. Badé's excavations at Tell en-Nasbeh (Mizpah) near Jerusalem—one of the earliest (1926–1935) important scientific projects in Palestine. The Pacific School of Religion was a most appropriate setting in that much of the material included in our forthcoming publication contains biblical references as well as photographs and descriptions of artifacts from ancient Israel. *Vaults of Memory* was viewed from January to mid-March in 1986 in this center which attracts scholars pursuing interdenominational studies not only at the School itself but at many surrounding institutions such as the University of California at Berkeley. Again, the exhibit was visited by several thousand individuals including academics and schoolchildren as well as the general public.

In response to many requests, a much-expanded *Vaults of Memory* will return to its birthplace, the Boston Public Library in mid-September 1987 where it will be shown until the end of October.

We are planning to schedule festive events in association with the grand homecoming of our exhibit. Friends of the International Catacomb Society will be kept informed of these doings.

top right

Vaults of Memory at the Pacific School of Religion with newly acquired English texts and captions, describing a partial section of *Scrolls, Saints and Scholars*.



PUBLICATIONS

Requests for the catalog and inquiries about the exhibition and book in progress have come from such diverse countries as England, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Malta, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, and the West Indies, and from such institutions as the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford University, the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Dumbarton Oaks, Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, as well as many other institutions in this country and abroad.

The forthcoming book, for which the catalog may be taken as a preview, is heavily illustrated with rare photographs many of which are the results of E. Brettman's repeated explorations with gas lamp and camera of the catacombs of Rome and other related sites. Her ten-year research into the origins of the imagery of the catacombs will be documented in this manuscript which is nearing completion.

The English exhibition catalog, like its Italian translation, answers questions about ancient beliefs, art, and customs of the period when early Christianity was emerging from Judaism. It includes some twenty photos either in color or duotone.

Handsome exhibit posters designed

originally to announce our exhibit on the famed Roman billboards, are available in two sizes. To order posters, the English catalog or the Italian catalog, also published with full text but without illustrations in order to save costs, use the form below. Please check desired item in blank provided, and make checks (on U.S. banks or U.S. postal money orders only) payable to I.C.S., and mail with form to: The International Catacomb Society, attn. Estelle Brettman, 61 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108, U.S.A.

Please send me ___ copy(ies) of *Vaults of Memory: Jewish and Christian Imagery in the Catacombs of Rome* or ___ copy(ies) of *Volte della Memoria*.

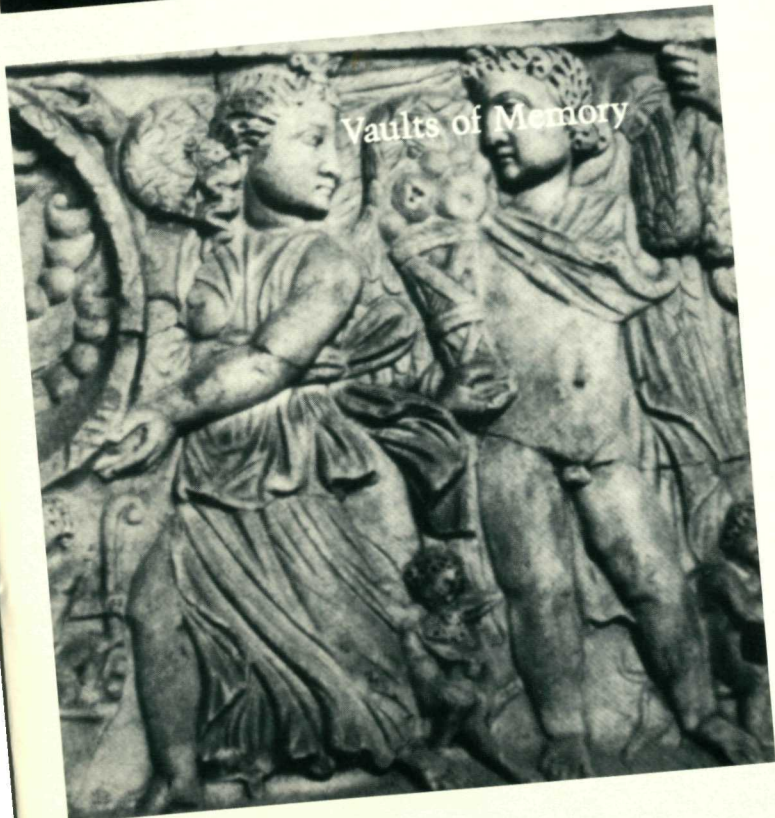
Prices: English catalog is \$15.00; Italian catalog is \$7.50. Add \$2.50 for first class domestic mailing and handling or \$4.50 for international airmail.

Please send me ___ poster(s): —26''x37'' (@ \$7.00 each) or —13''x18'' (@ \$4.50 each) plus \$2.50 shipping for first class domestic mailing and handling or \$4.50 for international mail.



top
ICS poster announcing *VOLTE DELLA MEMORIA* on the billboards of Rome.

bottom left
Cover of the catalog for the exhibition
Vaults of Memory.



SUPPORT, 1986 AND BEYOND

In 1986 ICS received a \$2000 grant from the Samuel H. Kress Foundation toward the costly photographic processing expenses associated with the publication of the exhibition catalog *Vaults of Memory*. The Society was also awarded a \$1000 grant from the Boston Arts Lottery Council to assist in readying *Vaults of Memory* for the exhibition at the Boston Public Library. This payment should arrive by late autumn.

We may anticipate that our exhibition will continue to be invited to visit cities in America and elsewhere. Procedures are being set up to make these visits self-supporting for our Society. However, large financial problems still exist. These involve: 1) the creation of special exhibits to tour as complete, self-contained educational units—one, designed to serve young schoolchildren, and the other, to serve handicapped individuals; 2) the acquisition of additional material as well as backup material to compensate for damages to the exhibit, and the realization of the plan to have one or several permanent installations in addition to at least one touring exhibit; 3) the cost of preparation of the planned scholarly book including the securing of additional photographs, research and editorial assistance, conservation of photographic material, and the expense of producing a publication containing at least 500 photos (four-color separations and duotones) which will reinforce and aesthetically illustrate a text which is crammed with information—as the manuscript of the

book nears completion the financial problem becomes more urgent; 4) support for the general basic operations of the Society.

Future plans include furthering research, and assisting in the conservation of significant sites and artifacts as well as explorations to unearth new discoveries in relatively unknown catacombs of this crucial period. We anticipate that our enhanced exhibit and publications will be most helpful in creating interest and concern for this next phase of our work.

In just five years time from its inception, the International Catacomb Society has presented its exhibit five times at major institutions from Italy to California. Our rapid growth from modest beginnings was achieved with only a small band of loyal supporters and volunteers, and demonstrates our potential for achieving our aims in a brief period. Our next objectives can only be realized with your help. We hope that you will participate in our activities, and we invite you to mail in the form below with your gift. Your prompt support will enable ICS to meet its obligations and accomplish its goals.

Post Script

As this Newsletter was going to press, ICS and the Biblical Arts Center, a non-profit, non-denominational center for the visual and performing arts, in Dallas, Texas finalized plans for exhibiting *Vaults of Memory* in Dallas from late March until the end of May, 1987. These dates coincide with the celebration of Passover and Easter.

A reminder—leave calendar space open during early September, 1987 for the gala events being planned in connection with the opening of *Vaults of Memory* at the Boston Public Library!

Photographic Credits

- page 1
Lee Nilson
Estelle Brettman
- page 2
Claudio Mandolini
- page 3
Claudio Mandolini
- page 4
Dr. Egisto Ercadi
Estelle Brettman
Claudio Mandolini
- page 5
Claudio Mandolini
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Duncan Todd
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Duncan Todd
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ROBERT MORRISON 1905–1986

The death of our Bob Morrison was not unexpected, for he had been ill for some time. Nevertheless, he courageously exhibited so much apparent energy and constant interest in working for the International Catacomb Society that he created an illusion of relative good health that, alas, proved only an illusion.

Long widely recognized here and abroad as a leading teacher and authority chiefly on insurance law, he placed his practical knowledge of the laws of organizations, broad legal expertise, and judicious insight at the service of our Society. He was almost solely responsible for its simple but precisely formulated administrative policies.

To describe the wide range of his activities is not our intent here. They are implicit in the instructive credo of his life which was expressed in an invitational

sermon that he delivered to his synagogal congregation on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday: "God does not exist only apart from me. His breath is in my nostrils, a spark of the divine spirit is in my heart. Nor do I exist outside of God in the universe. I am a part, a distinct and especially different part, of that universe. The me that I am, the me with its good qualities, its flaws and its limitations, has a unique role to play in the pattern of existence. A unique contribution to make, which only the me that I am can make to the ongoing work of creation in which God and I are partners."

Bob Morrison's enthusiasm for the aims of the Society involved every aspect of its functions. We shall all miss him deeply, but are grateful for the privilege of having had him as guide and counsellor. As the catacomb epigraphy reads (alluding to Proverbs 10:7), "The memory of the just is for a blessing."

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