



Vaults of Memory



The Boston Public Library at Copley Square is host for the next several weeks to an unusual exhibition derived from the Roman catacombs and burials and other burial sites. Entitled, "Vaults of Memory: Jewish and Christian Imagery in the Catacombs of Rome," the exhibits will be on view from September 15 to October 11.

Sponsored by the International Catacomb Society, headquartered in Boston, the collection of photographs and casts provides a rare transport back to late Imperial Rome. Faithful replicas of epitaphs, fragments of sarcophagi, Roman lamps and photographs of frescoes and ritual objects reveal symbolism shared by early Jews, Christians and pagans.

The exhibition is the culmination of many years of research and exploration by Estelle Brettman, executive director of the society. With the cooperation of the Vatican and the regional superintendencies of Italy,

Mrs. Brettman compiled a photographic record, using only a gas lamp for illumination.

In this small sampling, top photo depicts the crossing of the Red Sea. Under a symbolic star, Moses performs his miracle while the Egyptians flee in disorder. The original painting is under an arch in a chamber of the recently discovered pagan-Christian catacomb of Via Latina.

The middle photograph shows Estelle Brettman photographing by gas lamp in the Jewish catacomb of Vigna Randanini.

The central motif in bottom photo is the crowning of a youth. Painted on the vault of a chamber in the Jewish catacomb of Vigna Randanini, it is surrounded by flora and fauna.

Augmenting the library exhibition will be pertinent artifacts from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Harvard Semitic Museum.

