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# Exploring Estelle

AIA ADVOCATE, JEWISH SITE PRESERVATION PIONEER

JESSICA DELLO RUSSO  
INTERNATIONAL CATACOMB SOCIETY

[WWW.CATACOMBSOCIETY.ORG](http://WWW.CATACOMBSOCIETY.ORG)

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## AIA Presentation Summary

- Overview: Linking the origins of ICS to the AIA Centennial (December, 1979) uncovers a chain of events & personal relationships that impact larger issues of heritage preservation & platforms for public scholarship
- Estelle Shohet Brettman (1925-1991): Education & Career
- Volunteer with Boston-area cultural institutions (1968-1980)
- Program Director of the AIA Boston Society (1976)
- Missions to Rome: 1976-1980
- “Our” foundation: The International Catacomb Society (1980)

# Estelle Shohet: “A Jewess from Boston”



Girls Latin School  
Assembly Hall, with Parthenon  
frieze. “Latin was inescapable.”



61 Beacon Street,  
Boston

*The*  
**Dr. Gabriel H. Shohet**  
Judaica Book Fund  
*in the*  
Harvard College Library



*Established in loving memory*  
*of her father by*  
Estelle Shohet Brettman  
*A.B. 1945*

*For the purchase of books*  
*in the area of Biblical Studies*

כִּי מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ דַּעַה אֶת ה' *ה'*  
For the earth shall be full  
of the knowledge of the Lord  
*Isaiah 11:9*



Florence with  
Baldassare Conticello



Florence  
Wolsky,  
Department  
of Greek &  
Roman Art,  
MFA Boston

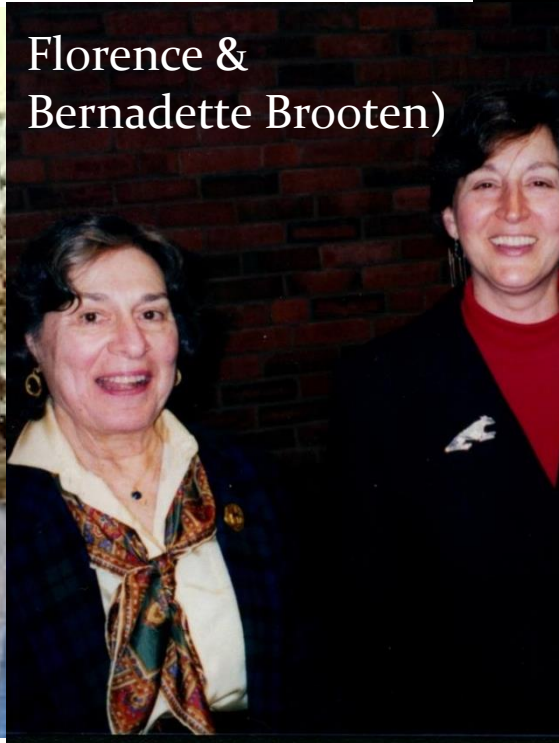
Florence at work for the ICS  
(Founding Member & Secretary, 1980-)



Florence (l.) with Richard Brettman &  
Cardinal Giuseppe Caprio  
at 61 Beacon Street, Boston



Florence &  
Bernadette Brooten)



# Mediterranean Travels in the 1950s, '60s & '70s



## New Archaeological Research in the Vesuvian Area

Lecture by **Dr. Maria Giuseppina Cerulli**,  
Directress of Excavations at Pompeii

Lecture will include color slides  
of recently discovered Roman villas  
at Pompeii, Torre Annunziata,  
and Herculaneum.

Wednesday, March 26 at 8:00 p.m.  
The Lecture Hall  
Central Library  
Boston Public Library

Admission Free

Presented in cooperation with the  
Boston Society,  
Archaeological Institute of America,  
and the Trustees of the  
Boston Public Library.

Brettman served as Program  
Director for the Boston  
Society of the AIA in 1976.  
She organized one major  
fund raiser and a seasonal  
lecture program.

### OFFICERS OF THE BOSTON SOCIETY

ARTHUR STEINBERG MIT	PRESIDENT (ON LEAVE)
JANE AYER SCOTT HARVARD	ACTING PRESIDENT
CHARLOTTE B. MOORE HARVARD-MIT JOINT CENTER FOR URBAN STUDIES	FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT
MRS. STANFORD CALDERWOOD MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS	CORRESPONDING SECRETARY
JOHN G. MCKERNAN THE SHADY HILL SCHOOL	RECORDING SECRETARY
IAN TODD BRANDEIS	TREASURER

### COMMITTEE

CO-CHAIRPERSONS: ESTELLE BRETTMAN  
FLORENCE WOLSKY

MRS. STANFORD CALDERWOOD  
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MRS. SUZANNAH DOERINGER  
PROFESSOR LILY MACRAKIS  
MRS. ROBERT SALTONSTALL  
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MRS. MORGAN SMITH

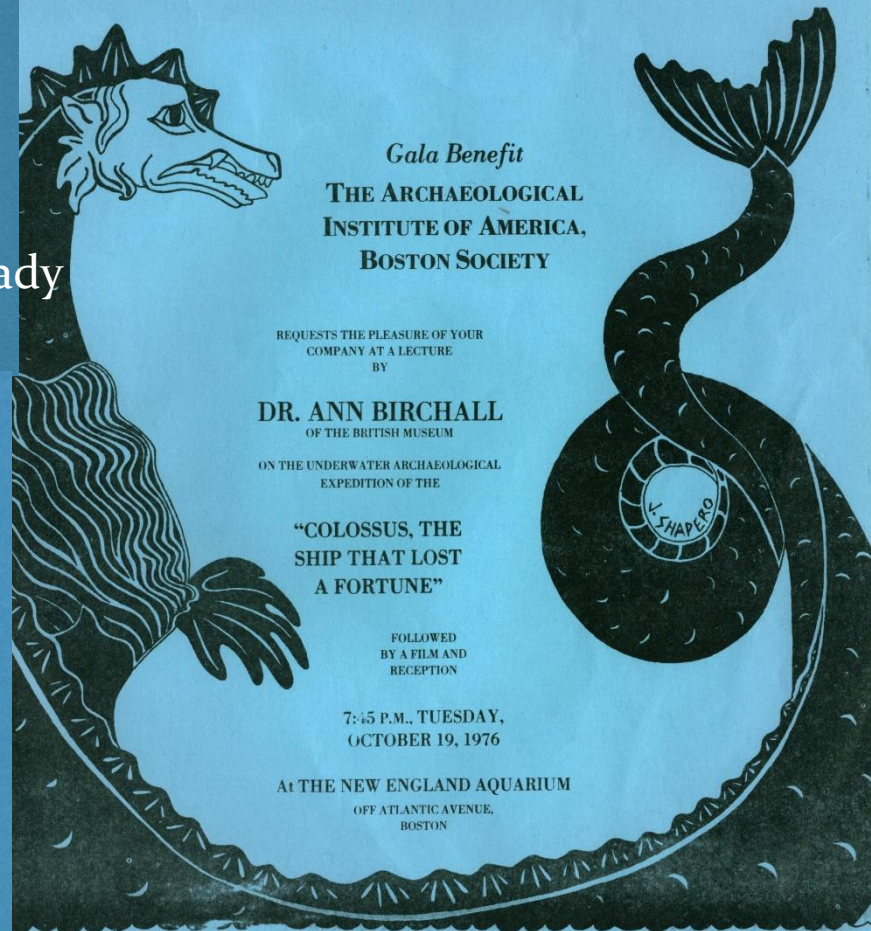
THE COMMITTEE IS GRATEFUL FOR THE INDISPEN-  
SABLE ASSISTANCE AND COOPERATION OF KRISTIN  
ANDERSON, THE NEW ENGLAND AQUARIUM, THE BRITISH  
MUSEUM, STUART CODY, COPY-QUIK, STEPHEN CRANE,  
GEORGE FARDY DESIGN SHOP, CONSTANCE HAMMOND,  
CAROL AND JUD HARWARD, JO ANN JORDAN, MARY ALICE  
PIERCE, ESTHER ROME, FLORIAN WEISSENBORN, WGBH,  
CORNELIUS VERMEULE, AND JANET SHAPERO FOR GRA-  
PHIC DESIGN.

One of my Shady  
Hill 4<sup>th</sup> grade  
teachers!

Brettman & Wolsky  
co-chair the event



# ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA



Gala Benefit  
THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
INSTITUTE OF AMERICA,  
BOSTON SOCIETY

REQUESTS THE PLEASURE OF YOUR  
COMPANY AT A LECTURE  
BY

**DR. ANN BIRCHALL**  
OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

ON THE UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
EXPEDITION OF THE

"COLOSSUS, THE  
SHIP THAT LOST  
A FORTUNE"

FOLLOWED  
BY A FILM AND  
RECEPTION

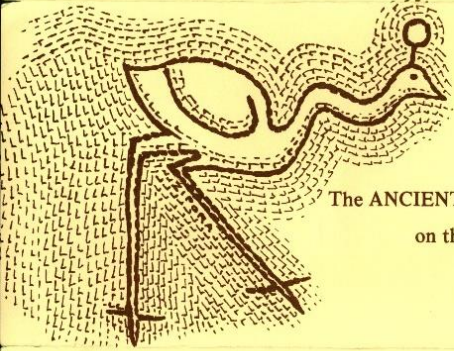
7:45 P.M., TUESDAY,  
OCTOBER 19, 1976

At THE NEW ENGLAND AQUARIUM  
OFF ATLANTIC AVENUE,  
BOSTON

TICKETS AT THE DOOR ... \$12.50  
STUDENTS ... \$5.00 WITH I.D.

ALL  
BUT  
\$2.50  
TAX  
DEDUCTIBLE

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA, Boston Society  
AND HEBREW COLLEGE INVITE YOU TO AN  
ILLUSTRATED LECTURE



The ANCIENT SYNAGOGUE of EIN GEDI  
on the SHORES of the DEAD SEA

by DAN BARAG

Senior Lecturer: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, Israel  
Visiting Member: Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton University, N.J.

Admission Free — Hebrew College  
43 Hawes Street — Brookline, Ma.  
Tuesday — April 27, 1976 — 8 p.m.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
INSTITUTE  
OF AMERICA

260 WEST BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y. 10013 / PHONE: (212) 925-7333

August 18, 1976



The Archaeological Institute of America, Boston Society  
and the  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
are pleased to present  
an illustrated lecture by  
PROFESSOR GERALD CADOGAN  
Director of Excavations and Study at Pyrgos, Crete  
"A NEW MINOAN VILLAGE AND COUNTRY HOUSE AT PYRGOS"

MRS. WELLINGTON FRIEND SCOTT, III  
4 WINTHROP STREET, WEST NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02165



Mrs. Estelle Brethman  
61 Beacon St.  
Boston  
Mass.

AIA

*Lias!!*

## The Discovery of a Long Sought Temple of Akhenaten, The Monotheistic Pharaoh

An illustrated lecture presented by the  
Boston Public Library and the Archaeo-  
logical Institute of America, Boston Society

Guest Speaker: Professor Donald Bruce  
Redford, Director of the Akhenaten Temple  
Project of the University Museum, Uni-  
versity of Pennsylvania in Cairo, and  
Professor, Department of Near Eastern  
Studies, University College, University of  
Toronto

The Lecture Hall  
Boston Public Library  
General Library

Monday  
January 24, 1977  
7:30 p.m.

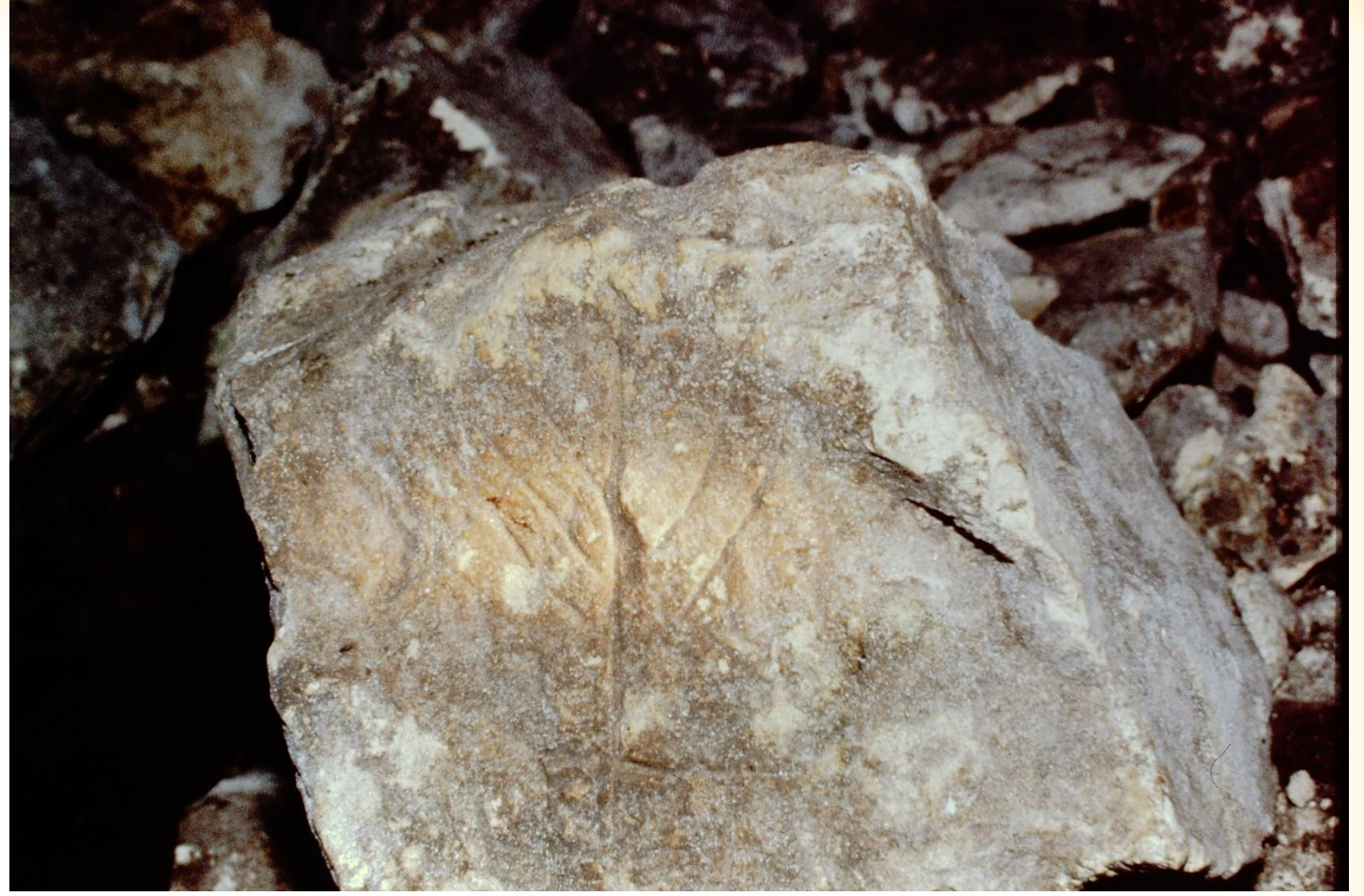
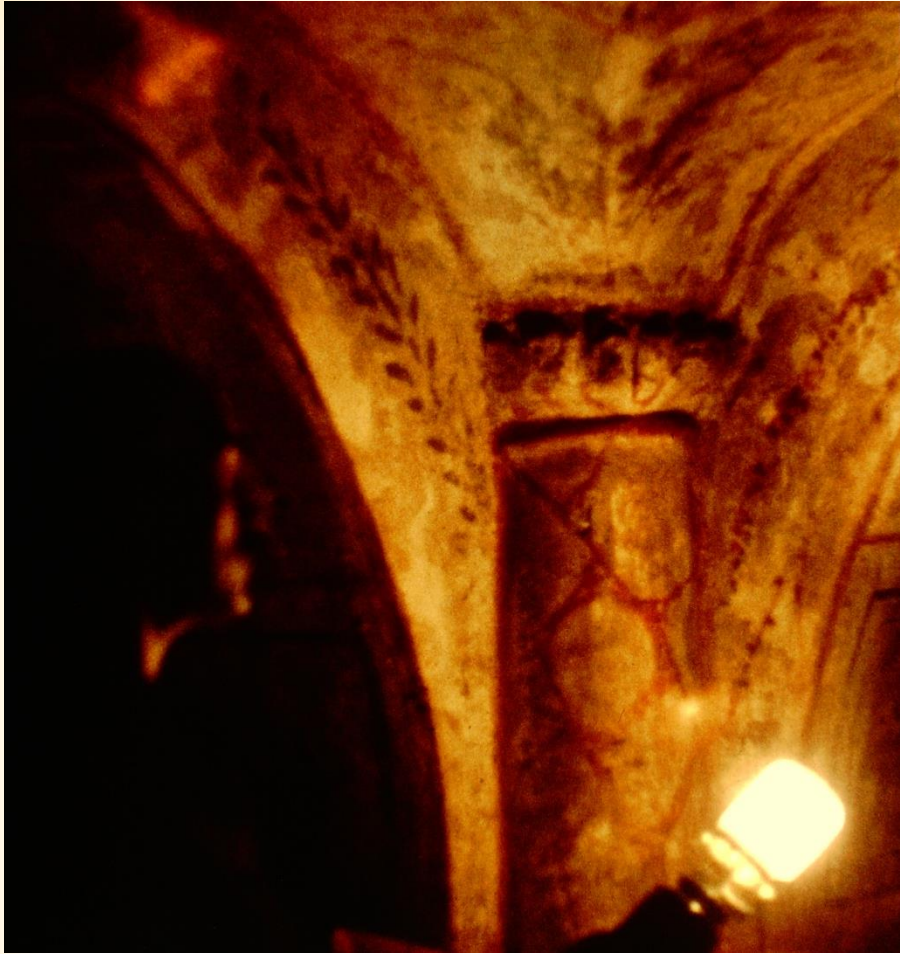
Admission Free



ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE OF AMERICA

"Phoenicians in the Western  
Mediterranean"

AIA Boston Society and the Museum  
of Fine Arts, Boston present an  
illustrated lecture by ~~Prof.~~ <sup>Dr.</sup> ~~Anno Maria~~  
Bisi, professor of Near Eastern ~~Studies~~  
Archaeology at the University of  
Urbino, <sup>Italy</sup> and ~~director~~ past director  
of excavations at the ~~Prime~~ sites in  
Western Sicily - Sunday afternoon April 7  
at 7:30 p.m. in the <sup>lecture hall</sup> ~~lecture hall~~ of the ~~Mass.~~ <sup>Mass.</sup> ~~Public Library~~ <sup>Public Library</sup>



"Exploring a remote Hellenistic to Byzantine cemetery in Sicily (at Palazzuolo Acreide), I stumbled over, and dislodged, a large rock. On the underside of the rock, I saw a crude graffito of a menorah, the quintessential symbol of Judaism. I had explored catacombs in Rome and Israel but this was the first time I had ever seen a Jewish symbol in such an unlikely place... I wondered how many other artifacts bearing such symbols might remain undiscovered in unexpected places..."





Brettman, on recommendation of Cardinal Caprio, received PCAS permission to photograph in the Catacombs of Rome (1976-1983)

Sister Maria Francesca  
Antongiovanni,  
Archivist for the PCAS



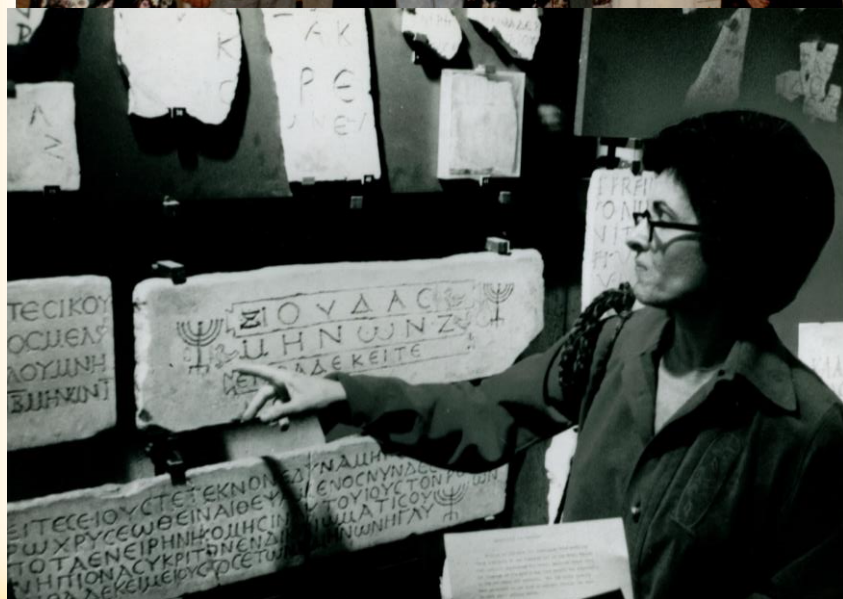
Salvatore Fornari, Director,  
Jewish Museum of Rome



Walter Persegati, Secretary  
General, Vatican Museums

*To Mr. and Mrs. Richard Brettman  
with a special blessing.  
Vatican, July 2, 1979  
Giuseppe Luigi Caprio*

Brettman's  
"Guardian Angels"



In early July of 1979, Brettman met Pope John Paul II in an intimate audience for members of Cardinal Caprio's "family". She also illustrated the Vatican Jewish Lapidary to a Peace Mission of the American Jewish Congress.



A typical display of grave goods and miscellaneous artifacts in a fenced-off grave in a catacomb (Vigna Chiaraviglio, Rome).

The Jewish Catacombs of Rome were under Vatican jurisdiction from 1929 to 1984. While this concession in theory could have extended to other subterranean cemeteries of Jews in Italy, in practice it was only applied to those in the capital. The Vatican office which granted access to the Jewish Catacombs was the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology.



EMBASSY OF THE  
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

International Communication Agency

Rome, September 6, 1978

Ms. Estelle Brettman  
61 Beacon St.  
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

Dear Ms. Brettman:

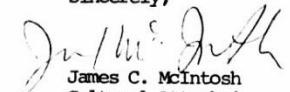
A careful check with municipal and Vatican authorities indicates that the person with specific responsibility for administering the Jewish catacombs at Villa Torlonia is Padre (Father) Umberto Fasola (Pontificia Commissione per l'Archeologia Sacra, Via Napoleone III, 1, 00185 Rome; tel: 735-824).

These catacombs are now completely closed to visitors, however, and indeed physically inaccessible pending completion of restoration work which is likely to last two years.

Other Jewish catacombs, on the Via Appia Pignatelli, remain open and could be visited with the permission of Padre Fasola.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

  
James C. McIntosh  
Cultural Attache'



# Archaeological Institute of America

## Eighty-First General Meeting

SECTION IC (COLLOQUIUM ON DIASPORA JUDAISM UNDER THE ROMAN EMPIRE: RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE)

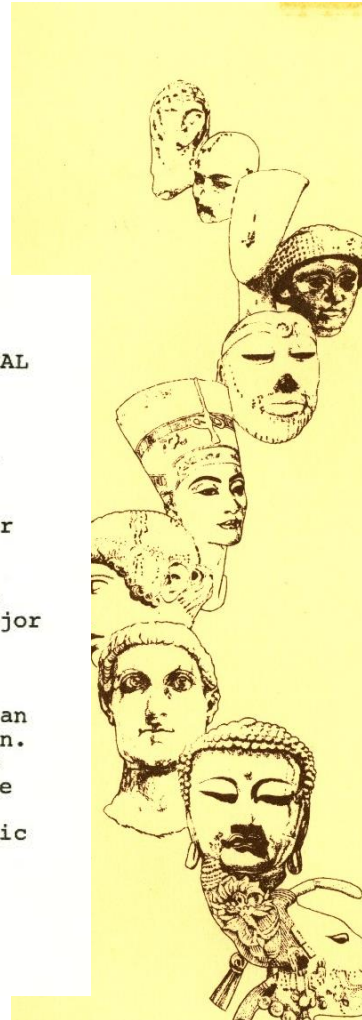
A.T. Kraabel, University of Minnesota

The study of Diaspora Judaism, the Jews under Rome but outside ancient Palestine, has long been only a "related field" for classical archaeology -- which stresses "classical" sites and problems -- and for Biblical studies and Jewish studies, which tend to focus on other geographical areas or time periods. The latter also favor other kinds of evidence, chiefly religious texts, while the data for Diaspora Judaism are chiefly archaeological.

In the last quarter-century several major new sites have been discovered, and the reexamination of previously known evidence has progressed substantially. Presently major initiatives are under way to preserve and record endangered sites and other evidence from the Diaspora, chiefly in Italy and Egypt. Beginning with the new data, this colloquium attempts to view Diaspora Judaism in its own right, in order more fully to understand it as at the same time an important phenomenon of the society of the Roman Empire, and an authentic and creative expression of ancient Jewish culture and religion.

The newest evidence is coming from Italy, where some of the most ancient Diaspora communities were located; the major presentation, by Prof. Colafemmina, deals with some of this material, nearly all not yet published. The next three speakers summarize the results of their own excavations and related sites. Prof. Neusner, dean of academic Jewish studies in North America, assesses the new archaeological evidence against the background of the larger context of the Judaism of late antiquity, known previously chief from rabbinic writings.

The concluding discussion permits responses from the previous speakers and from the floor.



### THE ROMAN JEWISH CATACOMBS

ADDITION TO COLLOQUIUM ON DIASPORA JUDAISM:

At 4:30 PM Friday December 28, Section IC, Independence East and Center, there will be a slide lecture on the Roman Jewish Catacombs by Letizia Pitigliani. Ms. Pitigliani and Alexander Benenson photographed the Randanini and Torlonia Catacombs, the latter now sealed, in early 1978. Nine catacomb paintings by Ms. Pitigliani will also be exhibited. Ms. Pitigliani, a painter, is a member of the Accademia Tiberina.



## ABSTRACTS

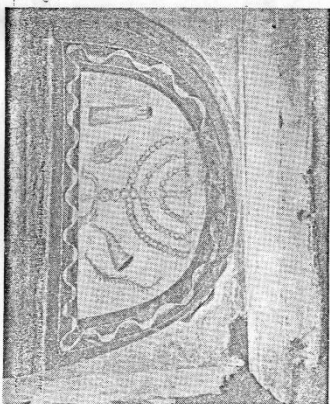
VOLUME 4 — 1979  
81st GENERAL MEETING  
SHERATON BOSTON  
BOSTON, MASS.

**Nuove importanti scoperte nella catacomba ebraica di Venosa**

OR 5-6 marzo 1979, p. 3

Una splendida affresca in ottimo stato di conservazione è venuta recentemente alla luce in una nuova regione della catacomba ebraica di Venosa. Questa scoperta rappresenta per noi il frutto di una felice sintonia tra le nostre conoscenze sulla catacomba venosa e, soprattutto, lo stato di avanzamento dei lavori di scavo. Una nuova e importante documentazione epigrafica è stata così scoperta, quasi spontaneamente — una documentazione preziosa e che, insieme con quella della primitiva comunità ebraica di Venosa, rivela il grande dinamismo culturale di questa comunità nel IV secolo d.C.

La parte già nota di questa catacomba venne alla luce nel 1883 sulla collina della Maddalena, situata nel complesso funerario, costituito da una lunga galleria principale con profondi nicchioni, per separare i diversi gruppi di tumuli. Nella parte superiore di questa galleria, al di sopra di una serie di nicchioni, si trova il soffitto dipinto con scene di vita ebraica. La parte già nota di questa catacomba venne alla luce nel 1883 sulla collina della Maddalena, situata nel complesso funerario, costituito da una lunga galleria principale con profondi nicchioni, per separare i diversi gruppi di tumuli. Nella parte superiore di questa galleria, al di sopra di una serie di nicchioni, si trova il soffitto dipinto con scene di vita ebraica.



Catacomba ebraica di Venosa: arcosolio con affreschi.

La parte già nota di questa catacomba venne alla luce nel 1883 sulla collina della Maddalena, situata nel complesso funerario, costituito da una lunga galleria principale con profondi nicchioni, per separare i diversi gruppi di tumuli. Nella parte superiore di questa galleria, al di sopra di una serie di nicchioni, si trova il soffitto dipinto con scene di vita ebraica.

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TAV. VI



Ipogeo ebraico di Venosa; veduta d'insieme dell'arcosolio affrescato e del settore centrale del sottarco.

*alla prima prof. Estella  
Brettman  
6 - nuovo ritrovamento  
Con Colafemmina  
13-2-75*

**CESARE COLAFEMMINA**  
**GLI EBREI A TARANTO**  
**LA DOCUMENTAZIONE EPIGRAFICA**  
(sec. IV-X)

a di un'antica presenza ebraica a Taranto si rispecchia contenuta in alcuni codici del *Sefer Yosefon* (sec. X), prigionieri ebrei sarebbero stati deportati nella città nel secondo Tempio (70 d.C.)<sup>1</sup>. Non si hanno altre notizie di tale presenza, così come accade per il resto della città nel IV secolo le colonie ebraiche si rivelano così tante che la loro diserzione dagli oneri curiali mette in crisi l'attività della regione, costringendo Onorio a intervenire (158).

interessate dalla costituzione di Onorio dobbiamo cercare Venosa, Otranto, Taranto. Con le invasioni barbare ebraiche della Calabria crebbero d'importanza, essendo di approdo o di transito obbligato della via che dal Nord menava a Roma passando per Venosa, Benevento, e la via proseguiva per Lucca, raggiungeva Pavia, oltre per irradiarsi nella valle del Reno. Proprio perché colle-

1 UER, *The Early Settlement of the Jews in Southern Italy*, in « The view », 4 (1892), pp. 623-624. Il Neubauer era dell'opinione che la a in appendice al *Sefer Yosefon* dalla cronaca di Jerachmae'el. Cfr. *ronicles and Chronological Notes*, Oxford 1887, I, p. 190. Come *sefon*, anche Jerachmae'el ben Shelomoh visse nell'Italia meridionale, I secolo. Cfr. U. Cassuto, *Storia della letteratura ebraica postbiblica*,

Vetera Christianorum 15, 1978

Cesare COLAFEMMINA

**Nuove scoperte nella catacomba ebraica di Venosa**

The lecture on The Jews in Southern Italy is part of the ongoing cultural programs offered by Hebrew College.

Programs being offered include adult education courses, lectures, symposia, art and film festivals among others.

The Ulpan of Hebrew College offers vital and dynamic Hebrew language instruction in the context of the exciting culture of Israel.

The Prozdor Hebrew High School serves boys and girls of high school age with a comprehensive program of studies of the Jewish heritage.

The Jacob and Rose Grossman Library of Hebrew College, which houses 75,000 volumes of Judaica in all languages, represents one of the outstanding collections of its kind in the country. The library is open to the public for a \$5 annual membership.

To be placed on the mailing list, or for further information, please contact:

Hebrew College  
43 Hawes Street  
Brookline, Massachusetts 02146

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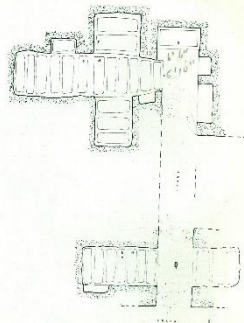


Fig. 1 - Venosa. Piano del nuovo edificio venoso alla luce dell'ipotesi attuale.



DON CESARE COLAFEMMINA of the Institute of Ancient Christian Letters, University of Bari, is a native of Venice, Italy.

He earned degrees in Philosophy (University of Bari), Theology (Pontifical University) and Bible (Pontifical Institute for Bible Studies and the Institute of Christian Ancient Literature at the University of Bari).

Don Colafemmina has made significant discoveries at the ancient Jewish catacombs at Venosa. He has published extensively on the history of Jews in Southern Italy.

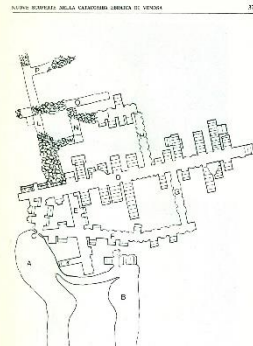


Fig. 2 - Venosa. Piano dell'ipotesi restituita nel 1971.



The Department of Cultural Activities of Hebrew College

Cordially invites you to an illustrated lecture on

THE JEWS IN SOUTHERN ITALY

by Father Cesare Colafemmina  
Internationally acclaimed  
archaeologist

Wednesday, January 2, 1980  
at 8:30 P.M.

Admission is free

Hebrew College  
43 Hawes Street  
Brookline, Massachusetts 02146  
232-8710



AGAPE!

Come and meet Father Cesare Colafemmina at the Brettmans'  
Tuesday, January 8, at 6 p.m.  
61 Beacon Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02108

R.S.V.P. Regrets only 742-1285

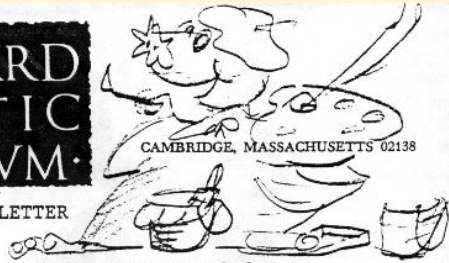
Promotional material for Fr. Cesare Colafemmina's talks in Boston on Jews in Southern Italy in from the Late Roman era to the Middle Ages (December 1979-January 1980).

6 DIVINITY AVENUE

# THE HARVARD SEMITIC MUSEUM

MEMBERS NEWSLETTER

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138



Another academic year commences and a new wave of faces greets us in the MUSEUM, happy anxious scholars for whom life is more earnest and simple than their predecessors who left in June. We welcome them all to the new MUSEUM, still growing, along with new Members and friends of the HARVARD SEMITIC MUSEUM.

DID YOU KNOW-- that our Photographer, Elizabeth Carella spent four months in the Middle East this last Spring and Summer? She was following up our photo-archive project with Ministries of Culture and Information. She will give a slide show later this winter.

\*\*\*

Our membership committee has put together a fine series of 3:00 pm Sunday Sherries, each of which will feature a distinguished scholar speaking on some aspect of Semitic culture. The first 3...

Oct. 14th -- GERNOT WILHELM and CARNEY GAVIN: "Explorations of Nuzi, in the HSM"

Nov. 4th -- ESTELLE BRETTMAN: "Judeo-Christian Symbols In the Catacombs of Italy"

Dec. 2nd -- JOHN SLOCUM: "History Through Coins--Puzzles and Clues"

Our new second and third floor gallery will have among its first displays a showing of Isaiah Wyner's excellent photography of Egypt and the Sudan. The dates are Oct.28 to Nov.9.

\*\*\*

DID YOU KNOW--that for a mere eight hundred dollars, we can purchase protective plexi-glass for our display cases in the MUSEUM entrance and foyers? Our benefactors have already helped us quite a bit with our furnishings. Ask us to point them out (e.g., Charlotte Cabot's two couches).

\*\*\*

And speaking of photography, Jose Luis Sedano, who has produced some of our video-tapes will have a display of his own photography of Mexico at the Natick Mall, October 15th through 20th.

## Judaism and Christianity in the Catacombs of Rome

An exhibit of rare photographs of Judeo-Christian symbols, obtained with special permission of the Vatican, by Estelle Brettman

Organized by: Estelle Brettman, Boston Museum of Fine Arts  
Florence Wolsky, Boston Museum of Fine Arts  
Cornelius C. Vermeule III, Boston Museum of Fine Arts and Boston College

Designed by: Richard Zonghi, Boston Public Library

December 10, 1979 through January 31, 1980

Boston Room  
General Library  
Boston Public Library

Lecture, illustrated with multi-slide images, by Estelle Brettman

Sunday afternoon, January 6, 1980, at 3 o'clock

Rabb Lecture Hall  
Boston Public Library  
Copley Square



Brettman organized a photo display of her catacomb slides at the BPL in December of 1979.







Vaults of Memory on Display at the Boston Public Library (1979-1980; 1987)

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE PRESERVATION  
OF CATACOMBS IN ITALY  
(In Formation)

Officers and Directors

Cornelius C. Vermeule III <i>President</i>	Curator, Department of Classical Art, Boston Museum of Fine Arts
James M. Gavin <i>Executive Vice President</i>	Lt. General, USA (Ret.) Consultant, Arthur D. Little, Inc.
Estelle S. Brettman <i>Executive Director</i>	Department of Education, Boston Museum of Fine Arts
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Richard Brettman	Consultant
Dott. Baldassare Conticello	Suprintendente Archeologico Vicario di Roma
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Carl Rieser	Business Writer and Consultant
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Nora Rossi	Professor of Literature
Harry Starr	President, The Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, Inc.
Florence Z. Wolsky	Assistant, Department of Classical Art, Boston Museum of Fine Arts

## The International Committee for the Preservation of Catacombs in Italy

The International Committee for the Preservation of Catacombs in Italy, Inc. (ICCI, Inc.) is dedicated to the preservation, documentation and further exploration of the Jewish catacombs in Italy which are important archives of Judaism and early Christianity.

We welcome your donations in one of the following categories:

- Benefactor \$1000 or more
- Patron \$500 or more
- Sponsor \$100 or more
- Member \$25 or more
- Student member \$10

I am enclosing \$\_\_\_\_\_ as a co.

Contributions made to ICCI, Inc. are deductible.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

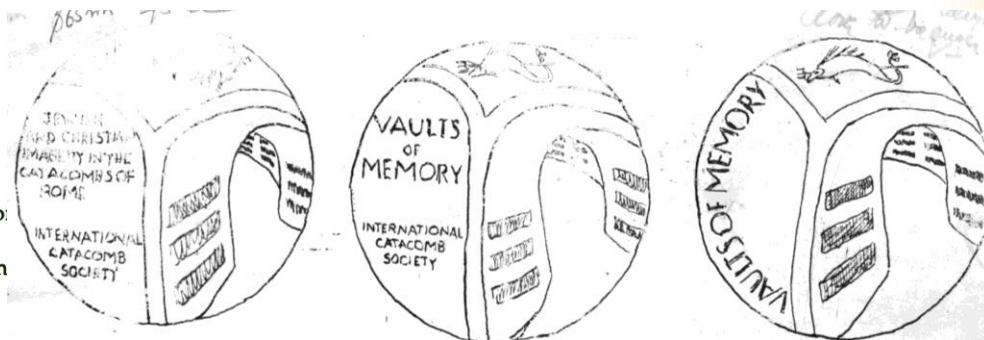
Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to:

The International Committee for Preservation of Catacombs in Italy  
P.O. Box 923  
Back Bay Annex  
Boston, Massachusetts 02117

# The ICCI was incorporated as a 501(c)3 non profit in 1980. In 1983 it became the ICS.



# Jewish Art Historian Traces Shared Christian Symbols

By Helen H. Sevagian

**FROM HER FOREBEARS.** Estelle Shohet Brettman inherited an ecumenical spirit. Her grandfather, a rabbi known as the "Wise Man of Arbel" in Lithuania, exerted a wise, compassionate influence in his country.

Her father, Dr. G. H. Shohet, was a physician who worked with many types of people and wrote a book entitled *Kinships* about the fundamental bonds uniting all men. His daughter, Estelle's search for interpretations and uses of symbols shared by Christians and Jews — such symbols as the dolphin, peacock, dove, sheep, winged victory, pomegranate, and peacock — seems to have been predestined.

The current exhibition at the Boston Public Library is the culmination of her years of research at a number of archaeological sites and museums throughout the Mediterranean including trips to Sicily, Italy, Turkey, Morocco, Israel, Spain and Greece. Her archaeological scholarship and commitment gained her the cooperation of eminent Vatican churchmen in obtaining access to Roman catacombs seldom viewed.

The exhibit, "Judaism and Christianity in the Catacombs of Rome," opened on December 10th and continues through January 31st, in the Boston Room of the Central Library in Copley Square. Some eighty color photographs will highlight funerary artifacts bearing Jewish, Christian, and pagan symbols. Most of these photographs were taken in the catacombs, by special permission, by Mrs. Brettman, often lying flat on her back at least thirty feet underground, with no electricity or light other than a gas lantern. Supplementary pictorial material has been provided from the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology and the Museum of Fine Arts Slide Library.

**THE PHOTOGRAPHS** capture the artistry, beauty, and poignancy of the funerary symbols, showing, for example, the dolphin in its universal role as savior of man, helping the disabled and escorting the dead across the ocean into the after life. Similarly, the peacock's tail, "circular like the vault of heaven, when spread and jeweled as with stars," made that bird a natural symbol of the sky to which the dead ascend and, hence, of immortality. Floor plans acquaint the viewer with the shape of the catacombs.

Drawings of interiors of two burial chambers of more affluent Roman families reveal how the catacombs reflected the social status of those buried there. On loan from



**A SCHOLARLY GREETING...** Pope John Paul II gave a warm welcome to art historian Mrs. Estelle Brettman when he received her at a private audience in the Vatican. She was accompanied by Mrs. Eleanor Bourgeois, a cousin of Cardinal Caprio, and Mrs. Frank Gaels of Saugus.

the Museum of Fine Arts are plaster casts of Roman pottery embossed with many of the symbols found in the funerary art and impressions of coins, gems, and seals which illustrate some of the ancient origins of these symbols. The mythological, religious and ritual meanings of the symbols give the exhibit an appeal for a wide variety of viewers.

The support and encouragement of the Vatican and well-known Italian archaeologists have enabled Mrs. Brettman to produce this photographic record of the catacombs. Impressed with her archaeological knowledge, Giuseppe Cardinal Caprio, President of the Administration of the Patrimony of the Holy See, asked Mrs. Brettman in company with a Vatican representative, to guide his family through the catacombs, an ancient city of the dead, under St. Peter's. Mrs. Brettman was also "adopted" into the Cardinal's family at a special dinner and participated in a private papal audience granted by Pope John Paul II to thirty members of the Cardinal's family.

Cardinal Caprio and Father Umberto M. Fasola, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission of Sacred Archaeology, arranged extended visits for Mrs. Brettman to twelve catacombs over a four-year period, beginning in 1976 with the catacombs under the Villa Torlonia, a Jewish cemetery dating back to the first century, and to the Christian cemetery Domitilla. In November 1978 and again in April 1979 Mrs. Brettman spent weeks in various catacombs, among them, Vigna Randanini, Saint Sebastian, Saint Callisto, Pretestato and Via Dino Compagni.

**THE JEWISH CATACOMBS** are of particular interest. Father Fasola has been making every effort to conserve the two Jewish catacombs that remain under the Villa Torlonia and Vigna Randanini. Because of the threat of vandalism, the former has been closed totally to visitors.

Realizing their importance to historians and archaeologists, Mrs. Brettman is forming an international committee to initiate a fund drive to preserve the priceless artifacts which

# BPL's 'Vaults of Memory' Reveals Ecumenism in Rome's Catacombs

By Jules Becker  
Special to the Advocate

Jewish biblical tradition casts the burial of the patriarchs and matriarchs (with the exception of Rachel, buried at Bethlehem) in the cave of Machpelah at Hebron. Dating most probably from the second to the fourth centuries, the catacombs of Rome served as corresponding resting places for Jewish Christians who died during those times. People knew the Christian catacombs in the Middle Ages only recently have archaeologists uncovered the Jewish ones.

Estelle S. Brettman, one of the people who have studied the Roman catacombs as sitting places and historical treasure troves, has made research and research a labor of love, particularly since 1978. Especially after she uncovered shared symbols in the catacombs of the Jewish and Christian catacombs, Mrs. Brettman felt that "this is a way of achieving some sort of ecumenism in the Middle Ages." The current executive director of the International Catacomb Society (61 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108; telephone 782-0283), Brettman helped to found that organization (now counting over two hundred members, mostly from the United States and Italy) in order to preserve and document the common influences on Jew-

ish, Christian and pagan burial practices during the latter half of the Roman Empire. She had put together 87 photographs by 1979.

Repeatedly exploring what now add up to seven Jewish catacombs as well as their pagan and Christian counterparts, she set up an exhibit, which visited Rome during the winter of 1985, under the title "Immagine da Roma Sotterranea."

In its present form, in the Great Hall and Boston Room of the Boston Public Library, "Vaults of Memory: Jewish and Christian Imagery in the Catacombs of Rome," running through October 11, displays about 180 rare photographs of frescoes, epigraphs of vineyards (pagan Dionysos, house of Israel, Christian church), dolphins (fish association with salvation for all three faiths), peacocks, pomegranates, doves and roses. The story of Jonah finds Christian interpretation as a resurrection narrative; the rise of Jonah from the "big fish" takes on ascension implications for Christians burying their dead during the catacomb centuries.

Eager to stress the cooperation she received from the Vatican Museum and Art Galleries in developing the content of this exhibit and to focus on the value of the catacomb findings to human understanding, Mrs. Brettman and the International Catacomb Society held a banquet at the Copley Plaza and invited Dr. Walter Persegati as guest of honor. Jean Gavin and Marsha Slotnick were the co-chairmen of the event, and Dr. Mark D. Altschule introduced Dr. Persegati.

Reasoning shrewdly that visitors to the exhibit will absorb the history and research data long as the visuals are compelling, Mrs. Brettman has carefully interwoven these two components. Most fascinating of all, the Catacomb art demonstrates through shared symbols that the Jews, Christians and pagans recognized common themes and images even as they interpreted them very differently. There are parallels between the Roman catacomb paintings and symbolic representations at Beth Shearim.

Mrs. Brettman has juxtaposed items sharing such images as vineyards (pagan Dionysos, house of Israel, Christian church), dolphins (fish association with salvation for all three faiths), peacocks, pomegranates, doves and roses. The story of Jonah finds Christian interpretation as a resurrection narrative; the rise of Jonah from the "big fish" takes on ascension implications for Christians burying their dead during the catacomb centuries.

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On Sunday, January 6th, Mrs. Brettman describes her experience in the catacombs and showed the funerary art in multi-screen images cast by rare color slides. The lecture was given in the Rabl Lecture Hall of Boston's Central Library in Copley Square. The lecture and exhibit are part of a salute to the centennial observance of the Archaeological Institute of America which is holding its annual conference in Boston.

Mrs. Brettman has served as Program Director of the Boston Society of the Archaeological Institute of America and is associated with the Museum of Fine Arts. Working with her on organizing the Library exhibit have been Mrs. Florence Wolaky, Museum of Fine Arts and Professor Cornelius C. Vermeule III, Museum of Fine Arts and Boston College.

(Ms. Sevagian is Chief of Public Relations for the Boston Public Library).



ORIGINAL "SUPERMAN" (Sassano) is depicted in stone of catacomb from Via Latina.

## LIVES IN THE ARTS

### Learning about faith and life in the catacombs of Rome

By Robert Taylor  
Globe Staff

Estelle Shohet Brettman, executive director of the Boston-based International Catacomb Society, has spent the past decade bringing the underground art of Rome to light.

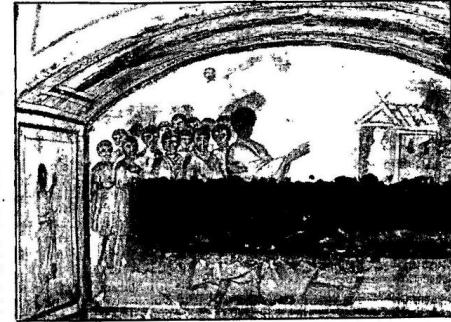
"Vaults of Memory: Jewish and Christian Imagery in the Catacombs of Rome," which opens a month-long stay at the Boston Public Library Sept. 15 (preceded by a fund-raising banquet on the 14th, at which the guest of honor will be Dr. Walter Persegati, secretary general of the Vatican Museums) is an extraordinary documentation of the subterranean treasures of the ancient world. Photographing for weeks at a time in the tortuous passageways of Christian and Jewish catacombs, Brettman endured taxing conditions. The humidity and condensation in the catacombs often seemed a perpetual drizzle, and again and again she had to wipe her camera lenses. She worked by flashlight in slippery galleries. She squeezed into niches and, to get a particularly striking fresco or ceiling inscription, lay on her back 30 feet underground. It was a long way from the Society's headquarters on Beacon Hill.

"I've always been interested in archeology," she said last week. "In the early '70s I did volunteer work at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. I was fascinated with the collections from ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome and the Near East, and in 1976 I served as program director for the Boston Society of the Archeological Institute of America." That year, exploring a Christian-Byzantine cemetery in Sicily, she stumbled and dislodged a large rock. "On the underside I saw a crude graffiti

of a menorah. This marked the first time I had perceived a Jewish symbol in such an unlikely place, and the possibilities it suggested, either of neighboring Jewish and Christian burials or the continued use of Jewish symbols by Christians, were intriguing."

Later, in Rome, Brettman, with the permission of Vatican officials, visited the Jewish catacombs of Torlonia, northeast of the ancient walls of Rome. The catacombs were discovered accidentally in 1919 by laborers pairing the foundations of stables beneath the Villa Torlonia. Mussolini lived in the villa from 1925 to 1944, and among his pronouncements there he dubbed the Jews "strangers in Italy." At that moment, he was above some of the oldest Romans of them all, five acres of Jewish burials.

What Brettman found in the Jewish catacombs, as well as in Christian and pagan cemeteries, resembled her encounters with



A catacomb's depiction of Lazarus being raised from the dead.

the Beth Shearim catacombs in Israel and the floor mosaics of ancient synagogues in the Yezreel Valley. Symbols such as the dolphin in the former and the signs of the zodiac and the seasons were especially provocative in view of the Second Commandment's admonition against graven images. During subsequent research trips Brettman found on vaulted ceilings and frescoed walls the visual record of the religions of the Roman Empire. The parallelism, the links, the interacting influences among these religions were dramatically revealed by the dim flicker of her lamp. The dove of Aphrodite reappeared as the messenger of hope to Noah, the grapevine of Dionysos evoked the vineyard representing the "house of Israel" and the Christian church.

Like the visionary psychologist C.G. Jung, she concluded that a common source of Judeo-Christian consciousness existed; and indeed, her own descent into the catacombs had about it a mythic quality.

"The catacombs of Rome are unique archives, and they are exceedingly fragile. Ancient Rome was surrounded by a belt of more than 80 catacombs, the equivalent of 350 miles of burial galleries. They were situated beyond the city walls along main thoroughfares; since law proscribed interment within the city. At this time, only seven Christian catacombs are open. Yet if the sites were to

become more accessible, their disintegration would take place. Seven Jewish catacombs have been discovered; of the seven, only three remain."

In 1980, Brettman helped found The International Catacomb Society here, dedicated to the preservation and documentation of history shared by the Jewish and early Christian religions during the heyday of ancient Rome. A first modest core exhibit of "Vaults of Memory" was sponsored by the Boston Public Library that year; since then, knowledge of the project and its objectives has expanded. "The inscriptions alone offer intimate views of family life, the professions, the role of women," Brettman said. "Here lies Eudoxus, a



Estelle Shohet Brettman photographed in the tortuous passageways of Christian and Jewish catacombs.

painter of living things; 'Here lies Fortunatus and Eutropius, children who loved each other'; 'Here lies Crispina, diligent lover of the Commandments' ... 'Here lies' — behind those words are people, their culture, their roles, their human relationships, their faiths."

## Local press on Brettman's Vaults of Memory exhibit on Art and Symbolism in the Catacombs of Rome.

INTERNATIONAL CATACOMB  
SOCIETY  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

MUSEO NAZIONALE  
DI  
CASTEL S. ANGELO

La S. V. è invitata alla inaugurazione della mostra  
VOLTE DELLA MEMORIA:  
IMMAGINI DA ROMA SOTTERRANEA

MARTEDI' 5 NOVEMBRE 1985, alle ore 17

ROMA, Castel S. Angelo  
Salette di Pio IV

IL DIRETTORE  
Prof. Sabino Iusco

Brettman's show did  
make it to Rome in  
1985 (Castel  
Sant'Angelo).



Thank you! Grazie!  
Please stay in touch  
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