

# The Archaeological Excavations

## WELCOME

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, it was generally believed that the present Basilica of St Clement was the one to which St Jerome referred in 392 AD when he wrote that a church in Rome preserves the memory of St Clement. In 1857, however, Fr Joseph Mullooly, O.P., began excavations under the present basilica, uncovering in the process the original fourth-century basilica directly underneath.

At an even lower level, the remains of a late first-century structure were discovered. This structure underwent significant modification toward the end of the second century to facilitate its use as a Mithraeum by the members of the cult of Mithras.

Another structure from the first century was also subsequently excavated, a large commercial or industrial structure, separated from the Mithraic area by a narrow passageway or alley.

In the course of the third century, this large first-century structure was abandoned and filled in to provide a foundation for a new structure. This later became the first Basilica of St Clement whose nave rests upon the first-century courtyard, while the rooms that once overlooked the courtyard on either side were converted into the south and north aisles of the basilica.

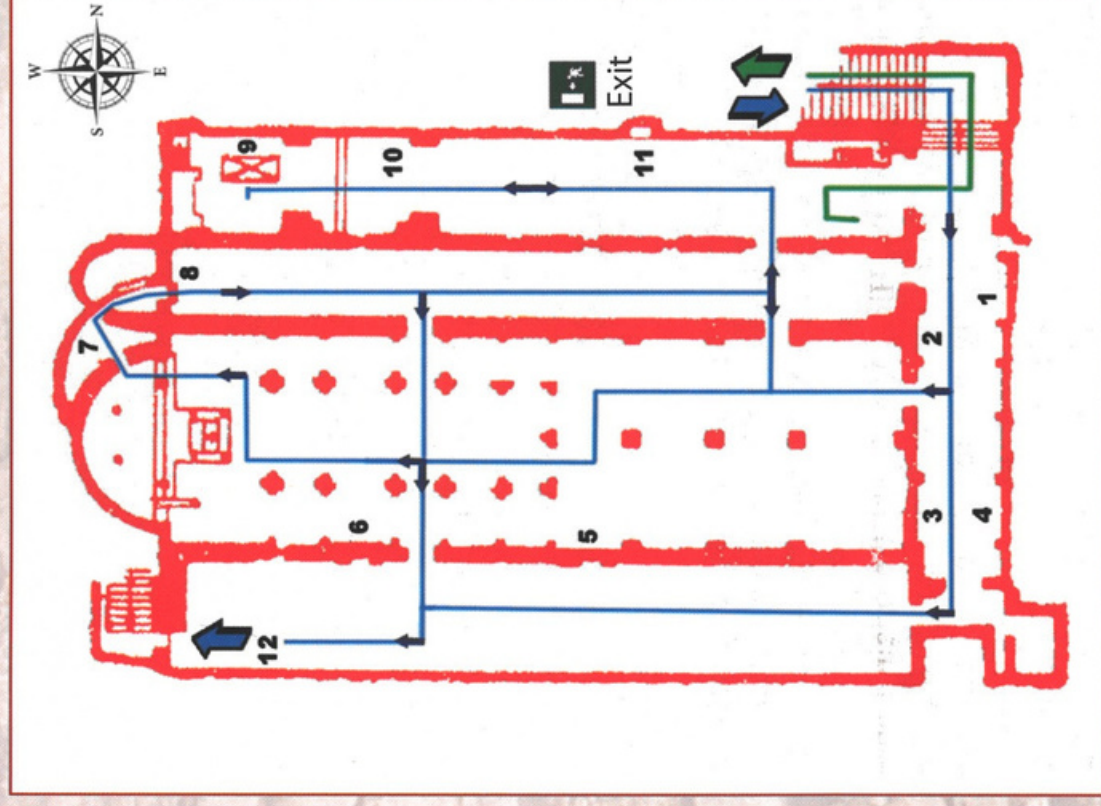
Towards the end of the fourth century, the Christian faith became the official religion of the Roman Empire and pagan sects, including the cult of Mithras, were declared illegal. The area of the Mithraeum was subsequently acquired by the clergy of San Clemente, who then proceeded to add an apse to the basilica, projecting the apse out over part of the area of the former Mithraeum.

In the course of time, the fourth-century Basilica of St Clement was enhanced by the addition of the *schola cantorum*, a marble structure donated by Pope John II (533-535) and which now stands in the present basilica, and by a number of beautiful frescoes.

The original Basilica of St Clement survived until the beginning of the twelfth century when it was found that the structure of the building was in poor condition and unsafe. The basilica was abandoned filled in with rubble to the top of the pillars that separated the central nave from the side aisles, and on this new foundation the twelfth-century Basilica of St Clement was constructed.

Over the centuries while the fourth-century basilica was still in use, columns were embedded in masonry to consolidate the structure of the basilica, and subsequently these walls were decorated with frescoes.

THE ORIGINAL BASILICA OF ST CLEMENT  
REFERRED TO BY ST JEROME IN 392 AD



At the bottom of the stairs that lead to the excavations, a ninth-century fresco of the Particular Judgment [1] depicts the Lord Jesus Christ imparting a blessing to two kneeling figures, St Cyril and St Methodius.

On the opposite wall is another fresco and it represents the Miracle of the Sea of Azov [2]. It depicts the miraculous survival of a child caught by the tide in the Sea of Azov: once a year the tide was said to recede to reveal the tomb of St Clement. On one occasion, a child was caught by the tide but was recovered safe and sound the following year.

Further along there is an eleventh-century impression [3] of the transfer to the Basilica of St Clement in 869 of the relics of St Clement which St Cyril and St Methodius had brought to Rome.

Various fragments of sculpture and inscriptions occupy the walls [4] opposite the entrance to the central nave.

In the central nave of the fourth-century basilica, a fresco depicting important scenes from the life and the death of St Alexis [5] occupies a wall built to buttress columns that had been damaged in the ninth or tenth century.

Discovered in 1861, another fresco [6] represents St Clement celebrating Mass and, in the bottom panel, depicts the earliest known example in writing of the transition from Latin to Italian.

The apse behind the High Altar is not the original apse of the fourth-century basilica but was in fact constructed at the beginning of the twelfth century as a foundation for the apse that was to be built as part of the new basilica. It is necessary to pass through the apse behind the High Altar to gain access to the original apse of the fourth-century basilica [7], constructed in the fifth or sixth century over part of the Mithraic Area.

Near the apse, there is a ninth-century fresco of the Descent into Limbo [8]. The fresco depicts the Lord Jesus Christ descending into Hell to rescue the souls of those who had died before his coming, treading on a demon who has taken hold of Adam's foot.

At the end of the next aisle [9] there is a large but badly damaged fresco of Christ, his right hand raised in blessing and a jewelled book in his left.

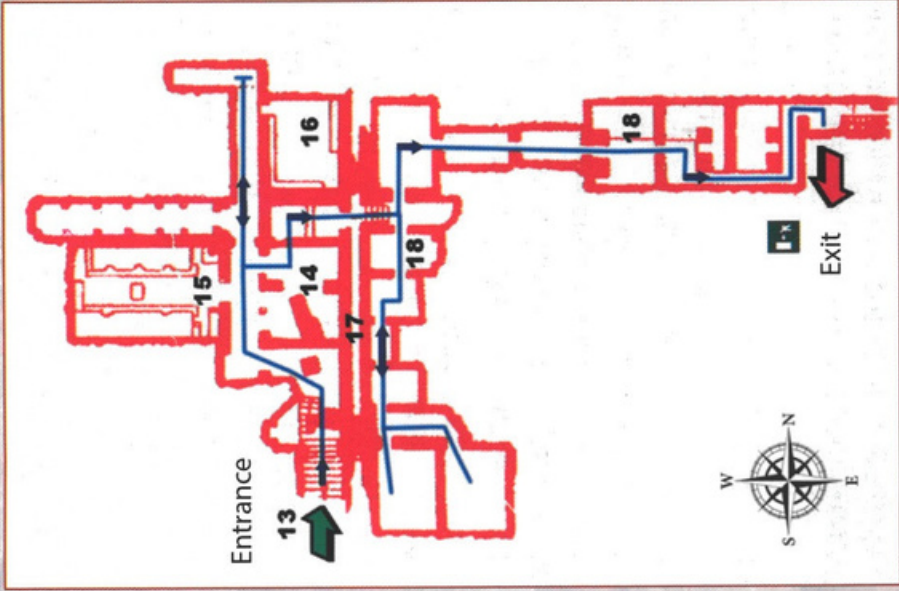
Nearby, there is a fine marble sarcophagus [10] depicting the legend of Phaedra and Hippolytus.

In 1859, a fresco of the Madonna and Child was discovered in a niche [11] further along the aisle. After a few days the fresco fell off the wall only to reveal the present Madonna in an almost perfect state of preservation.

For those who owe their Christian faith and culture to the Apostles of the Slavs, Saint Cyril and St Methodius, the Tomb of St Cyril is of great spiritual and cultural importance. It is here [12] that pilgrims gather to pray on the Feast of St Cyril.



BUILDINGS OF THE FIRST CENTURY AD



A first-century staircase [13] leads to a building from the same period but adapted toward the end of the second century for use by members of the cult of Mithras.

At the bottom of the staircase, around the corner to the right, there is the vestibule [14] with its decorated ceiling. In the room opposite the vestibule, stands the Mithraic altar [15] while at the end of the corridor is the Mithraic School [16].

Separated from the Mithraic Area by a narrow alley [17] is another building from the first century. This building of large tufa blocks is a more magnificent, rectangular structure consisting of a series of rooms [18] constructed around a central courtyard. Built during the reign of Vespasian (67-79 AD), there is a strong suggestion that the building was associated with the mint of ancient Rome.

This building is the cornerstone of the entire complex at San Clemente and provides the foundation for the fourth-century and the twelfth-century basilicas.



Fr Joseph Mullooly, O.P.  
1812 - 1880

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

ADMISSION

Adult – €10

Student under 26 years of age with Student I.D. – €5

Child under 16 years of age NOT accompanied by parent(s) – €5

Child under 16 years of age accompanied by parent(s) – **FREE**



Reservation on line : [www.basilicasanclemente.com](http://www.basilicasanclemente.com)



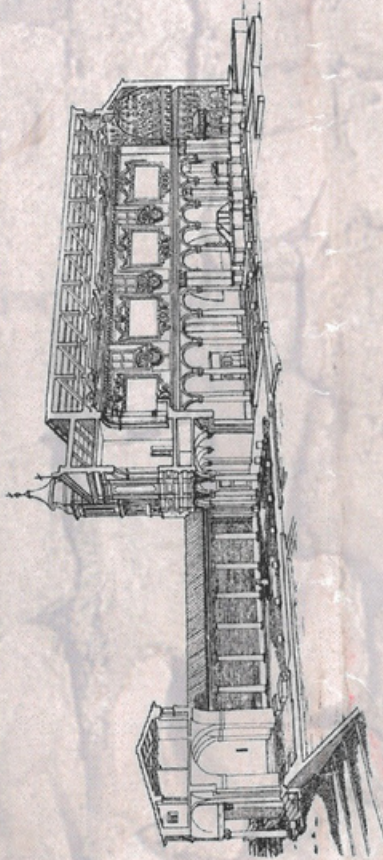
Dominican Fathers

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The Archaeological Excavations  
A Complimentary Guide

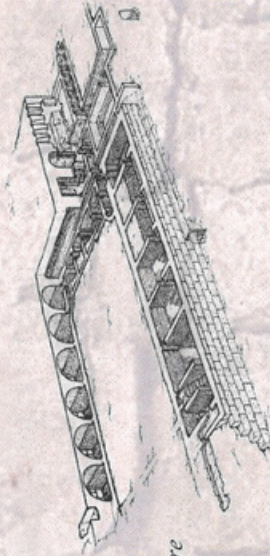
Basilica of St Clement  
constructed in the twelfth century



The original Basilica of St Clement  
referred to by St Jerome in 392AD



The first-century building  
adapted toward the end of the second century  
for use by members of the cult of Mithras



The vast first-century structure  
associated with the mint of  
ancient Rome