Archaeological Crypt in Notre-Dame parvis

Visitors’ Guide
History of the archaeological crypt and excavations

Converted in 1980 under the square in front of Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral to display archaeological remains discovered during excavations from 1965 to 1972, the crypt provides a unique overview of urban and architectural development of the Île de la Cité, the historical heart of Paris. Visitors can travel back in time by discovering successive buildings erected on the site from Ancient Times to the twentieth century and walk through ancient ruins on which medieval and classical remains are superimposed. The aim of the tour is to provide a better understanding of how the city has been in a continuous state of reconstruction for over 2,000 years by revealing its various archaeological layers.

- The Gallo-Roman town of Lutetia began to develop on the left bank of the Seine in the reign of Augustus (27 BC to 14 AD).

![The entrance to the crypt under the square of Notre-Dame cathedral](image)

This site was occupied by the Gaulish tribe, the Parisii, whose name features on coins recovered from the river Seine. In the first quarter of the first century AD, several small islands were joined together to form the current Île de la Cité.
- From the middle of the third century right up until the fifth century AD, Lutetia which was threatened by the first Germanic invasions, was a strategic site for the defence of the Roman Empire against the barbarians. The Île de la Cité was fortified in 308, becoming the active centre of the city and the settlement on the left bank was partially abandoned.
- The Middle Ages saw the rise of development focused around the cathedral, whose construction began in 1163. This included the creation of a new street, the rue Neuve Notre-Dame, in line with the central great door of the cathedral, the reconstruction of the Hôtel-Dieu hospital to the South of the cathedral square and the construction of buildings and churches.
- In the eighteenth century, many medieval buildings were destroyed to ease traffic and improve sanitation in the Île de la Cité. The square was extended, the rue Neuve Notre-Dame was widened and the Hospice des Enfants-Trouvés foundling hospital was built.
- In the nineteenth century, the city prefect, Haussmann, carried out a radical programme of urban restructuring, destroying many old buildings and lanes. Barracks (which are now the police headquarters) were erected at the back of the square, in addition to the current Hôtel-Dieu on the side of the square. The current layout of the square is the result of these major changes.
1. **Ancient Times: the fourth-century fortified wall (or ramparts)**

The Gallo-Roman town of Lutetia grew up on the left bank of the Seine under the reign of the Emperor Augustus (27 BC to 14 AD). In the fourth century, the Île de la Cité became the heart of the town because it was easier to defend against barbarian invasions. It was protected by a fortified wall, elements of which have survived, including large blocks of stone taken from monuments on the left bank and used as backfill for the foundations of the wall, which was probably then built of smaller stones.

2. **The Middle Ages: the house at the sign of Saint-Victor**

In 1363, the bishop of Paris, Maurice de Sully, began building work on the cathedral and on a new development designed to enhance it—the creation of the rue Neuve Notre-Dame. This 6m-wide road, which was unusually broad for the period, was laid out in line with the centre of the façade of Notre-Dame. Houses were built on both sides of the street, including the house at the sign of Saint Victor, two levels of the basement of which have been preserved in the crypt. In the middle of one of the cellars is a large pillar which formed part of the gateway to the former Hôtel-Dieu hospital.

3. **Ancient Times: the old quay**

The section of quay preserved in the crypt is all that remains of the ancient port. Its location indicates that the island used to be smaller, with more extensive banks. It is made of small stones bound with limestone mortar and is one metre wide and two metres high. Its original size is not known. The port was built on the small branch of the Seine to the South side of the island. Traces of a storage depot containing grains of wheat indicate that significant trade took place on the river.
In the eighth century, many medieval buildings were destroyed to improve sanitation and ease traffic. In 1750, the architect Caffrard was given the task of creating a new Hospice des Enfants-Trouvés foundling hospital on the North side of the rue Neuve Notre-Dame. He extended the cathedral square slightly and demolished the churches of Sainte Geneviève des Ardents (in 1748), Saint Christophe and Saint Jean le Rond, to make way for his building.

**Ancient Times: Gallo-Roman houses**

In the third century, the island was completely built up, as is evident from the remains of huge and luxurious dwellings, including the base of a column which is still in situ. By preserving these remains in the crypt, it is possible to ascertain the street level in Ancient Times and see the rise in surface level which has taken place over 2,000 years.

**The Middle Ages: shops**

In the second half of the twelfth century, a new street, the rue Neuve Notre-Dame, was created leading up to the centre of the cathedral façade. During its construction houses were demolished and their wells covered over. Some of these have been preserved underground. From 1368 onwards, the rue Neuve Notre-Dame was lined with new houses which survived until 1750. Some of them had cellars opening onto the street which were used as shops.
Ancient Times: a late bath house

This small bath house (approximately 375 sq. m) dates from the fourth century. The entrance to the building was through a little courtyard which has now disappeared, and then through the cold room which was also a changing room (apodyterium). There were then a warm room (tepidarium) and a hot room (laconicum) heated by an underfloor heating system (hypocaust). The main room (caldarium) probably had two pools, only one of which being still visible. A boiler room whose dimensions are not known completes the building.

Getting there
Metro and RER: Cité or Saint-Michel stations
(Line 4, RER B and C)
Bus: 21, 24, 27, 38, 47, 85 and 96
Velib’ cycle hire: 10 rue d’Arcore; place Louis Lépine, 1 quai aux fleurs

Opening Hours
Daily from 10am to 6pm, except Mondays and public holidays.
Last admissions 5.30pm.

Facilities and access
There are no toilets or cloakrooms.
The Archaeological Crypt has no disabled access.

Filming and photography
Non-flash photography without a tripod is permitted on the site for private use only.