

MAIRIE DE PARIS



# Archaeological Crypt in Notre-Dame parvis

Visitors' Guide



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## Museum tour

# 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 mediaeval 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



© D. Messina

## Museum tour

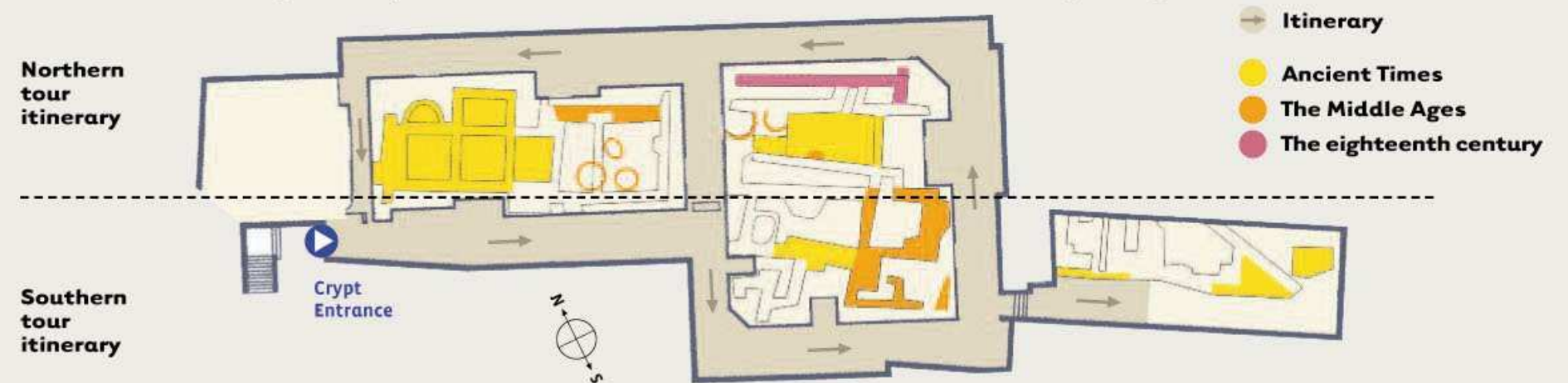
This site was occupied by the Gaulish tribe, the *Parisii*, whose name features on coins recovered from the river Seine. In the first quarter of the first century AD, several small islands were joined together to form the current Île de la Cité.

- **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

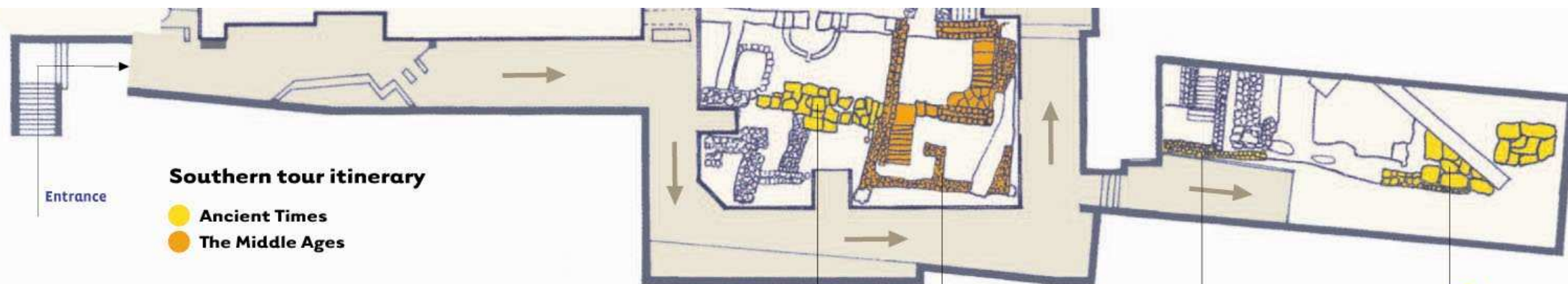
## Museum tour

of the Hôtel-Dieu hospital to the South of the cathedral square and the construction of buildings and churches.

- **In the eighteenth century**, many mediaeval 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* founding 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.



© M. Lelièvre

**Blocks of rampart stone**



© J.L. Godard

**House at the sign of Saint Victor**

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

In 1163, 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 facade 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.

**1 Ramparts from the late Roman Empire**

**2 House at the sign of Saint-Victor**

**3 Quay dating from ancient times**

**3 Quay dating from ancient times**

**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.

**Wall of the quay on the Seine**



© D. Messina

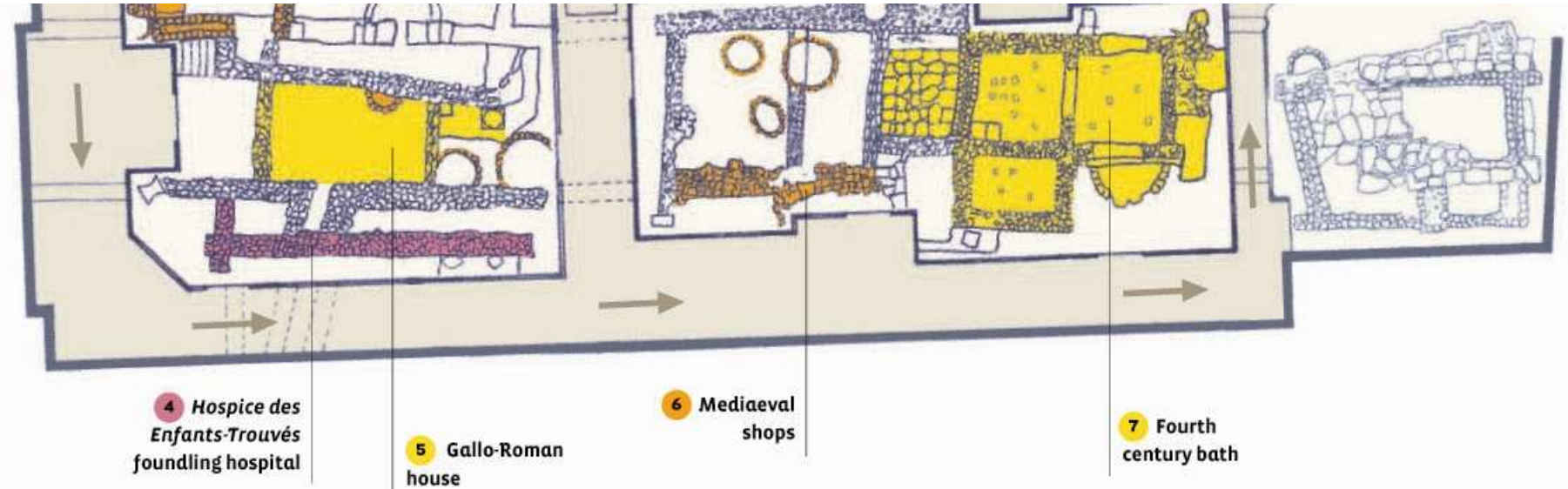


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### Northern tour itinerary

- Ancient Times
- The Middle Ages
- The eighteenth-century era



#### 4 The eighteenth century: the *Hospice des Enfants-Trouvés* foundling hospital



Wall of the *Hospice des Enfants-Trouvés*

© P. Saussereau

In the eighteenth century, many mediaeval buildings were destroyed to improve sanitation and ease traffic. In 1750, the architect Boffrand 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 1745), Saint-Christophe and Saint-Jean le Rond to make way for his building.

#### 5 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.

Walls of a third-century house



© D. Messina

Base of a third-century column



© M. Lelièvre

#### 6 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 facade. During its construction houses were demolished and their wells covered over. Some of these have been preserved underground. From 1163 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.



Mediaeval well

© P. Saussereau



## 7 Ancient Times: a late bath house

The warm room of the baths with a hypocaust



© P. Saussereau

This small bath house (approximately 175 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.



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Small pillars in the hypocaust room

## Archaeological Crypt in Notre-Dame parvis

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Tel: +33 (0)1 55 42 50 10 – [www.crypte.paris.fr](http://www.crypte.paris.fr) and [www.carnavalet.paris.fr](http://www.carnavalet.paris.fr)

The Archaeological Crypt in Notre-Dame parvis and the Paris Catacombs are sites dedicated to the history and heritage of the French capital and form part of the Carnavalet - History of Paris Museum.

### 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

Vélib' cycle hire: 10 rue d'Arcole; 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.

### Lecture tours and group visits

#### Individual visitors:

Details available at the information desk.

**Groups** (minimum 10 people, maximum 25 people): booking is required for group visits (with or without a lecture guide) at the Cultural Activities Office of the Carnavalet Museum, open continuously Monday to Friday 9am-5pm on +33 (0)1 44 59 58 31 or 58 32. Fax: +33 (0)1 44 59 58 07.

