

San Clemente al Laterano



The **Basilica of San Clemente** is an early 12th century minor basilica, a titular and conventual church built on top of the ruins of a late 4th century church, itself on top of important ancient Roman remains. The church is in rione Monte, between the Coliseum and San Giovanni in Laterano. The dedication is to Pope [St Clement I](#). [1]

History

The present church was built around 1100. Below it is a 4th century church, and below that are two ancient Roman edifices. One of these is a Roman building in which it is traditionally believed that Christians worshipped until the 4th century church was built. [1]

The 19th century excavations under the church uncovered a pagan temple, a Mithraeum or Temple of [Mithras](#) which belonged to one of many 1st century mystery religions in competition with Christianity in Rome. Next to this were the remains of a very solid structure, which they identified as the palazzo of Titus Flavius Clemens. Modern archaeologists now suspect this edifice was not a private dwelling, but might have been the Moneta (or Imperial mint for coinage). There is evidence of substantial alteration to this in the 3rd century, which modern publications suggest might have been as a result of conversion to Christian use. [1]

4th Century Lower Basilica

The first possible documentary evidence of the basilica comes from the pontificate of Pope Siricius (384–399), when a church dedicated to St Clement is mentioned. This accords with the epigraphical evidence discovered in the ruined basilica, although some scholars would prefer a slightly later date in the early 5th century. The Mithraeum probably continued to exist until 395, when all pagan cults were outlawed by the emperor Theodosius I. Hence, a date after 395 is very likely for the beginning of construction. The two Roman buildings were filled with rubble to provide a foundation for the apse of the church. [1]

The church immediately obtained a high profile among the city's churches. A papal council was held here in 417 under Pope Zosimus (giving the latest possible date for the church's completion), when a Pelagian heretic called Caelestius was condemned. There was another one in 499, under Pope Symmachus. Leo I numbered it among the parish churches of Rome in 454. [1] [6] [b] [n]

In the sixth century a second pavement was laid 27cm on top of the original one, and the choir screens, also known as the *schola cantorum*, were added by Pope John II (533–535) who was a great benefactor of the church - he had been cardinal priest of San Clemente from c. 532 until his election as pope in 533. His monogram can be seen inscribed on several slabs of the schola cantorum, and also a fragment of a ciborium was excavated with the inscription presbyter Mercurius (his name before becoming pope). [1] [j] [k]

Pope St Gregory the Great is on record as having preached two extant homilies here at the end of the 6th century. He also left a record of St Servulus who was a paralyzed beggar who used to beg in the atrium at the door of the church and then share his alms with other poor people. Pope Gregory met him here, and preached a sermon about him. He is enshrined beneath the altar of the Blessed Sacrament (in the chapel of the Rosary), to the left of the high altar. [1]

In 637, the relics believed to be of Ignatius of Antioch were brought to Rome by Syrian refugees from Islam, and enshrined here. In 867 the relics believed to be of St Clement were enshrined with them after being brought to Rome by SS Cyril and Methodius. [1]

In 867 the body of St. Clement was transported to the church from what is now the peninsula of Gallipoli by the Slav apostles, St. Cyril and his brother St. Methodius. In 885 St. Cyril himself was buried there. [n]

The basilica was renovated in the late 8th and mid 9th centuries, as can be deduced from the surviving remains. The roof was restored by Pope Hadrian I (772-795). The 9th century repairs were undertaken by Pope Leo IV (847-855), probably as the result of a series of strong earthquakes, which are thought to have been the major cause of the ruination of the city's ancient monuments. The walls of the basilica were decorated at this time. [1] [c] [g] [k]

The historically obscure depopulation of the church's neighbourhood probably occurred about this time, and the ruination raised the ground level. The Caelian Hill was destined to be covered by vineyards for the next thousand years or so. [1]

(Information on excavations [here](#))

12th Century Upper Basilica

The church was damaged during the sack of Rome by the Normans under Robert Guiscard in 1084. Also, a severe earthquake occurred in 1091 which damaged many churches in Rome. However, it was used as the venue for the conclave to elect Pope Paschal II in 1099 and so must have been restored by then. He had been the titular priest here, and immediately on election he arranged with the new titular, Cardinal Anastasius, to have the church rebuilt. This was done by demolishing the structure above a level of about five meters from the floor, filling it in and building a new church on the platform thus created. The rebuilt basilica was built in an Early Christian style of architecture, mostly modelled after the old basilica, including its atrium, which was probably a copy of its predecessor. The raising of the level by five meters is an indication of how much the ground level had risen since the 5th century. The schola cantorum from the old church was dismantled and re-erected in it. Finally, the new Upper Church was consecrated on the 26th of May 1128 by Pope Honorius II. [1] [2] [c] [g] [j] [k]

There were also some differences, however. The new church was narrower, the radius of the apse was smaller, the colonnades were now interrupted by brick piers and a bell tower had been added to the church – all of these distinctively medieval features. The plan of the new church might be simple, but the furnishings and interior decorations are lavish, and some medieval elements were added. The pavement created a new and distinctive layout. The mosaic of the apse was the perfect example of the reintroduction of mural mosaics. The apse mosaic was enriched by images that were unfamiliar in the Early Christian tradition. The image of a cross with an explicit crucifixion scene,

for example, is mixed into the mosaic that is modelled on either or both a fifth-century mosaic at the Lateran and the original apse mosaic of S. Clemente. [j] [k]

In Rome, the period of the Avignon papacy was horrific. The great earthquake of 1347 followed in 1348 by the plague, and urban violence left the city and its churches in terrible condition. San Clemente was no exception, and in 1395 a request for funds granted by Pope Boniface IX refers to the church as being in such a poor condition that its collapse threatened to block the street. Just a few years after these repairs the church passed to the Order of Friars of St Ambrose ad Nemus. [4]

In 1403 Pope Boniface IX gave the church to the newly founded Augustinian Congregation of St Ambrose, also known as Ambrosians. This was the beginning of the church's conventual status. They continued to serve the church until the congregation was suppressed by Pope Urban VIII in 1643. [1] [2]

Pope Sixtus V (1585-1590), as part of his campaign to provide the city with a decent road system, had a new road built from the Colosseum to the Lateran along the side of the church at the end of the 16th century. In response, urban development sprang up along the new road as far as the church, although not any further until the 19th century. This Via di San Giovanni in Laterano took over from the old Via Labicana as the main traffic artery in the area until modern times. [1]

After the Ambrosians had been shut down in 1643, Dominicans from San Sisto Vecchio took over in 1645. However, this community was replaced in 1667 by expatriate Irish Dominicans. The Catholic Church had been viciously persecuted in Ireland by the British especially under Oliver Cromwell, and many of the clergy had been expelled including the Dominicans here. The church was granted to them in perpetuity on the intervention of Cardinal Francesco Maidalchini (who was not the titular priest here), and they remain in charge. [1]

18th Century Restoration

By the 18th century, the church was in a very poor state of repair. Pope Clement XI (1702–1715) ordered a restoration, with **Carlo Stefano Fontana**, the nephew of the famous architect Carlo Fontana, as architect. **Fontana** made few external alterations, but he built a new side entrance to the basilica and a new facade. Within the Basilica three carved and gilded wood ceilings ornamented with three oil paintings, were installed in the nave and aisles. The side and end walls of the nave were adorned with ten frescoes enclosed in rococo stucco frames; the interior was otherwise left with its medieval fabric intact. The present appearance of the church is as a result of this restoration, as there has been no re-ordering since except for the high altar. [1] [e]

The first systematic excavation of the lower church was carried out by Fr Joseph Mullooly O.P. He had been made superior of the convent in 1850, and in 1857 began work to clear the rubble out of the voids under the upper church. This was not done with the care that modern archaeologists would expect, but then the discipline was in its infancy at the time. However, Giovanni Battista de Rossi provided valuable professional help. [1] [2]

Later excavations, notably those conducted in 1912-1914 by Fr Louis Nolan, showed that underneath this third layer of buildings there was still a fourth stratum, that containing buildings destroyed in the fire of Nero in 64 A.D. The level, therefore, of the valley in which San Clemente lies was about sixty feet lower in the first century than the present level. After the fire of 64 the gutted buildings were filled in and used as foundations for further houses, at a level that is roughly that of the floor of the Colosseum today. [2]

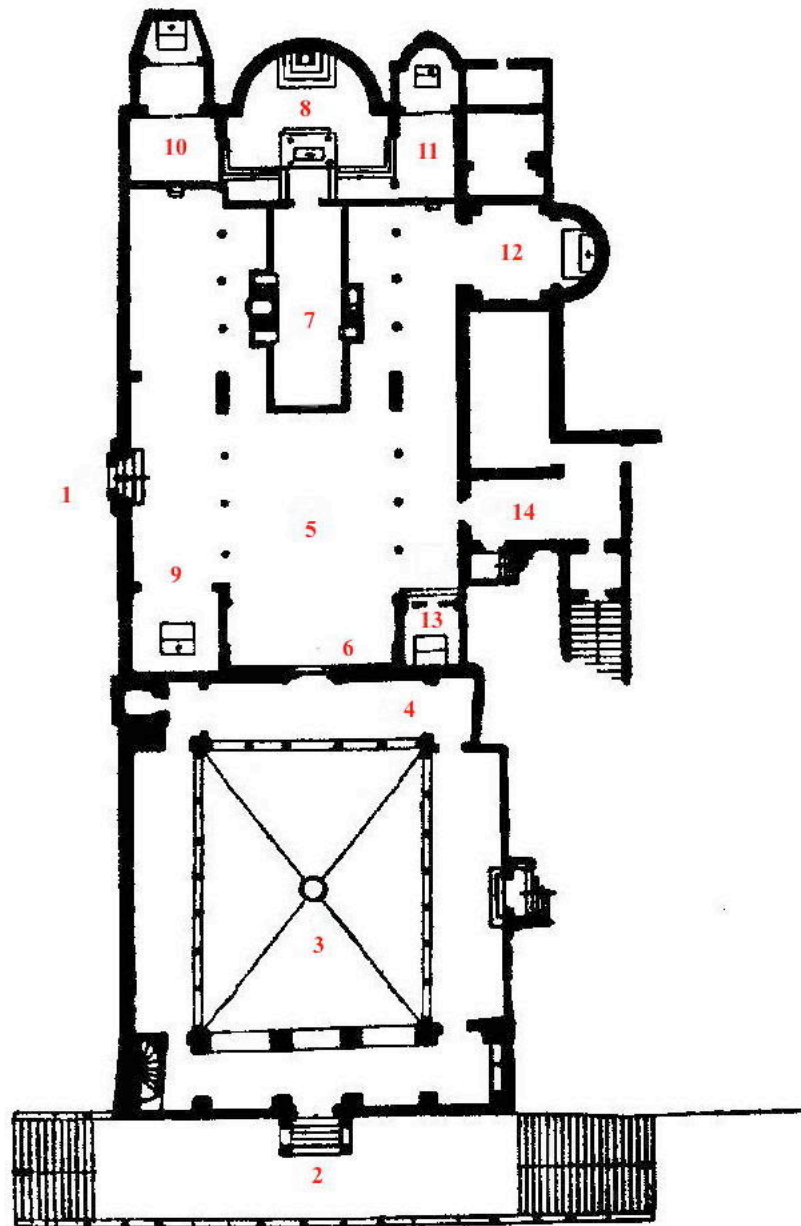
In 1861, it was realized that a full-sized lower church existed. In 1863, the shrine of SS Cyril and Methodius was uncovered, and then the work proceeded in the lowest, ancient Roman levels up to 1870. Fr Louis Nolan O.P. carried out further excavations 1912–1914, and in 1936 a small set of catacombs was discovered. Since then, work has been going on more or less continuously and results of excavations are still being published. [1]

The high altar with its confessio or shrine-crypt was altered in 1868. There was also a restoration between 1963 and 1971. [1] [7]

Various legends cling to the church. One is that after Saint Clement, third successor to Saint Peter as

bishop of Rome, was flung into the Black Sea in 98 CE by the impious Romans with an anchor tied to his neck, his body was recovered by two Slavic saints, Cyril (826-869) and Methodius (815-885), brought to Rome, and buried in the church that bears his name. Another is recorded in a fresco in the nave. It tells how a Roman husband, peeved at his wife's constant attendance at Mass, referred to the clergy of San Clemente's as *fili dele pute*, "sons of whores." Not only is this a surprising inscription to be found anywhere in a church; it is said to be the earliest known writing in vernacular Italian. [h]

Plan and Layout



PIAZZA S. CLEMENTE

The layout is classically basilical. There is a central nave with side aisles, no transept and a large apse with a conch containing the famous mosaic. The side aisles have chapels at each end. The left hand aisle has the chapel of St Catherine of Siena at the bottom and that of Our Lady of the Rosary at the top, while the right hand aisle has those of St Dominic and St John the Baptist in the same locations. The external chapel of SS Cyril and Methodius is through a doorway off the right hand aisle. [1]

The excavations below the church are accessed through a door at the bottom of the right hand aisle, where you'll find a shop and the ticket booths. This area is outside the church itself. [1]

Exterior

Convent

This has a simple L-shaped layout around a garden in the corner of the Via Labicana and the Piazza di San Clemente. There is no cloister, and no features of interest in the fabric itself except for a striking chimney that you can see from the Via Labicana. This has a pyramidal cowl and a corbelled cornice, and looks rather like a minaret. [1]

However, if your visit involves getting off a bus or tram at the Via Labicana, take a moment to have a look at the convent gateway. This is on the other side of the convent's street frontage, to the west of the garden. It is naïve Baroque, with a large archway of massive rusticated blocks with a recessed tablet showing the convent's heraldic shield above. Two pairs of gigantic double curlicues flank the composition. [1]

Campanile

The mediaeval church had a standard Romanesque brick campanile at the bottom of the right hand aisle, with two storeys above the entrance and a tiled pyramidal cap. This was demolished in the 1628 and replaced by one over the near end of the left hand aisle. This has two storeys above the central nave roofline, the lower one almost cubical and the upper one forming a tall aedicule with a single large arched soundhole on each face. The lead cupola is complex in form, and has a cushion base of two steps on which an overhanging ogee curved form is placed. There is a ball finial. [1] [c]

Side frontage

Carlo Stefano Fontana took a little trouble with the left hand side frontage on the Via di San Giovanni in Laterano, because this was the main public interface of the church. Here, the street is at an angle to the wall of the church and atrium and so there is an attractive, narrow piazza which now has mature trees. [1]

The church's side wall has five large rectangular windows, and an ornate side entrance (1) which is the usual one for visitors. If you are waiting for the church to open, it is worthwhile having a look at the latter. This has a molded doorcase, flanked by a pair of little Ionic pilasters with humorous capitals. The volutes are carved to look like horns springing from a putto's head, and are embellished with a garland. Note the brackets for oil lamps on either side of these capitals. Above, there is a triangular pediment broken at the top and set directly onto the lintel (no cornice); inside this is a pair of cardinal's heraldic shields acting as posts for a smaller, raised segmental pediment broken at the cornice. There is an empty plinth between the shields, and something (a statue?) has obviously gone missing. Instead of over the lintel, as was traditional, Fontana placed the dedicatory inscription over the pediments and gave it a floating gable. The inscription is on an ornate Baroque tablet, and reads:

Clemens XI Pont[ifex] Max[imus] restauravit
et ornavit, anno MDCCXIX, pont[ificii] sui IX.

The sides of the setting of the tablet sweep down to a pair of tondi either side of the lintel, which look as if they had something to do with the oil lamps just mentioned. [1]

Ceremonial frontage

The main entrance (2) of the church is not here, but on the Piazza di San Clemente round the corner. This is not a real piazza, but a short wide street from the Via Labicana. When the latter street was raised here and leveled out at the start of the 20th century to turn it into a main road and a tramway, the Piazza was ramped to maintain a steady gradient. This put the church's entrance below the street level. [1]

The frontage is not a rather grim blank wall with four little square windows near the roofline. It belongs to the original mediaeval priest's house, and in the wall you can see signs of blocked windows. [1]

The single entrance is protected by a prothyrium or porch, which stands on four ancient columns with different ancient capitals; the front two are Ionic, and the back two Corinthian. The large entrance arch has a gable with corbels over it, and this is duplicated on both sides. Above, there is a tiny chamber (the old English word is parvis), with a single window on the left hand side. This would have been for the doorkeeper in the old days. A similar arrangement exists at San Cosimato in

Trastevere. [1]

Around the main door leading into the atrium mediaeval carving in three different interlace designs decorated the jambs and lintel. [c]

Atrium (3)

The entrance through this prothyrium is not always open. If it is, you can enter the atrium and see the façade of the church. If not, you have to go through the church's side entrance and hopefully out again through the main door; this is usually open, except sometimes when the weather is bad. [1]

An atrium may look like a monastic cloister, but has a different function. Many old Roman churches had one, although most have been lost. It is a courtyard outside the main entrance of the church, usually with covered walkways on three sides and sometimes a loggia on the fourth side which is the church façade. The function was as a public ancillary area, for such things as organizing processions, selling food or devotional objects, having meetings and socializing. None of these, especially the last, was done in the church itself. [1]

The twelfth century atrium here consists of a courtyard paved with random fragments of stonework, obviously some of the rubble dug out of the lower church. There is a small modern fountain in the middle, and two palm trees in front of the façade. Down the sides are colonnaded walkways which are not arcaded, but trabeated (post-and-rail design). The entrance walkway has an arcade under the mediaeval house, with three arches on massive unadorned pillars. [1] [c] [n]

If you look at the right hand corner of the atrium when facing the church, you will see that the atrium is actually slightly wider than the church itself. In the middle of the right side colonnade is the entrance into the monastery up a flight of stairs. [1]

The atrium has six ancient columns on each side, with assorted ancient capitals and bases. A few are Doric, but most are Ionic. These columns, together with those in the loggia, were all originally looted from a very high-status ancient Roman building, and were almost certainly first used in the lower church. Most are grey granite. This is not impressive to modern eyes, but to ancient Romans the stone counted as semi-precious. This was because of the hardness and exotic source of the stone. The quarry was at [Mons Claudianus](#), in the Eastern Desert of Egypt. A pair of the side columns in the atrium are of pink granite, and this was sourced from Aswan in Egypt. [1]

One of the walks has a wall tablet with an inscription composed by Pope Clement XI in praise of the church. In the corner to the right of the church entrance is a monument in the form of a chest with a convex lid, which celebrates the invention of the [Glagolitic alphabet](#) by St Cyril. The epigraph on it is in this script (despite popular belief, St Cyril did not invent the modern Cyrillic alphabet which came later). [1]

When you enter the atrium you step down to the level of Rome after the 1084 sacking. The atrium is a pleasant place to chill out in fine weather. [1]

Façade (4)

The mediaeval façade had an external narthex or loggia, with the arcade of the same design as the one there now. The narthex was demolished and rebuilt in the early 18th century by **Carlo Stefano Fontana**, who saved the ancient columns and replaced them exactly as found. In doing so, he converted the external narthex into an internal loggia by adding an ancillary room over it, and so created the present façade. This is in a very sober Baroque style, in two storeys with an unusual paucity of decoration. [1]

The mediaeval narthex had a second story so Fontana may have just incorporated the fabric of the old narthex into the new façade. [a]

The first storey comprises the loggia, with an arcade having four ancient Ionic columns of the same sort as in the atrium. Rather odd arrow-shaped devices are inserted into the spandrels between the archivolt. Over the arcade is an entablature with posts (short pilasters) in shallow relief above the column capitals, and a molded and tiled cornice and a blank frieze. [1]

The second storey starts with an attic, also with posts. This stretches for the width of the first storey, which covers the ends of the aisles as well as the central nave. The rest of the storey fronts the latter only, and has four Corinthian pilasters on plinths, supporting an entablature with posts and a blank frieze. Above this is a pediment with a blank tympanum. There is a very large round-headed central window. The sides of this storey are embellished with a pair of sweeps ending in gigantic volutes, and over the ends of the attic is a pair of ball finials matching that on the campanile. [1]

Interior

Nave (5)

The nave has two arcades on each side, separated by a wide pillar. Each arcade has four ancient Ionic columns, making a total of sixteen in all; the far pair are in the sanctuary, and the near pair are incorporated into the two side chapels flanking the entrance. These columns are a mixed lot from different ancient buildings. Some are ribbed, and overall are of slightly different lengths. You can see how the church builders had to insert packing slabs under the bases of some of them to maintain the right height. The veined marble ones are cipollino, from Euboea in Greece. [1] [c]

In the nave there are eight frescoes, four on the right wall and four on the left between the windows, as follows: [e]

- *St. Clemente bestowing the veil upon St Flavia Domitilla* by **Pietro da Pietri** (1714),
- *St Clement Bringing Water From a Rock in Crimea* by **Sebastiano Conca**,
- *Martyrdom of St. Clement* by **Giovanni Antonio Grecolin**,
- *Translation of the Relics of St Clement* by **Giovanni Odazzi**,
- *The Death of St Servulus* by **Tommaso Chiari**,
- *St. Ignatius Condemned to Death* by **Giovanni Domenico Piastrini**,
- *Martyrdom of St. Ignatius in the Colosseum* by **Pierleone Ghezzi** (1715) and
- *Meeting of St. Ignatius and St. Policarp in Izmir* by **Giacomo Triga**

The frames of these pictures, as well as the windows and the intradoses of the arches of the arcades, are embellished with stucco decorations. These are in an overall white color scheme, a very neat way of emphasizing the gilded splendor of the ceiling and the apse mosaic. [1]

The impressive ceiling is of the same restoration (1715), with complex coffering in blue and gold and featuring the heraldry of Pope Clement XI. The single star on his coat-of-arms occurs in the décor. The central fresco panel in the nave features *The Apotheosis of St Clement*, and is by **Giuseppe Chiari** from 1715. He also supervised the other artists in the nave painting project. [1] [3] [c]

Both aisles have coffered ceilings of carved and gilded wood which bear as center pieces oil paintings on canvas by **Pietro Rasini**. That of the left aisle depicts *The Coronation of the Virgin Mary*. That of the right aisle, *The Apotheosis of St Servulus*. [e]

The counterfaçade (6), features *St Cyril* and *St Methodius* by **Pietro Rasini**. Above the entrance is an inscription commemorating the restoration by Pope Clement XI, dated 1715. [1]

Floor

The floor of the church is one of its glories. It consists of a variety of ancient polychrome stones, mostly marbles, cut in geometric shapes and tessellated. This style can be found on many church floors in Rome (although much has been lost), and is usually known as Cosmatesque after a famous artisan family of the 12th century. The technique of fitting different shapes of colored stone together to make a patterned floor is better known as opus sectile. The style is also known as opus alexandrinum. The name of the original craftsman has been recorded as **Magister Paulus**. [1] [3]

The display here of different stones amounts to a geological sample kit. The bright yellow stone is giallo antico, which the ancients called marmor numidicum. It came from a quarry in what is now Chemtou in Tunisia, and supplies were already running out in the 3rd century. Most yellow marble in Rome is from Siena, and giallo antico can usually be distinguished from this by its apricot tint with a hint of orange. This marble can have deep red veins, and you can find some little bits of this in the floor if you look. [1]

The dark green stone is the ancient lapis Lacedaemonicus, which is a serpentine from Sparta in Greece. It is often mistakenly called a basalt, or "green porphyry" , and is common in Roman churches. The pink bits look like marmor Chium, from the Greek island of Chios, or rosso antico from Cape Matapan on the Peloponnesus. You can tell the difference because the former is a breccia, looking as if it is made up of fragments combined. The dark red stone is the famous imperial porphyry, from Mons Porphyrites in the Eastern Desert of Egypt. Porphyry as a stone occurs worldwide, but this variety came from the one place and has been unobtainable since the 4th century. It is distinguished by its deep crimson color with whitish speckles, which are phenocrysts. The color mimics the Tyrian purple dye obtained from sea-snails in the eastern Mediterranean. [1]

In the center of the floor is the memorial slab for Vincenzo Cardinal Lauro (1523-1592). The floor has been carefully restored, and also had a tomb-slab inserted into its middle in 1592. This commemorates Vincenzo Lauro, who was cardinal here. [1]

Schola cantorum (7)

The schola cantorum (choir enclosure) and associated sanctuary screen dates to the 6th century, and originally belonged to the old church below. It was salvaged and re-assembled in the new church at the start of the 12th century, and embellished with Cosmatesque inlay work. [1]

The structure is made up of marble slabs set on end, called transennae, with some of them bearing the monogram of Pope John II who ordered the original work. In the old church it had two sets of benches facing each other, flanked by a pair of elevated lecterns facing the high altar. In the re-assembling the left hand one of these was converted into an ambo or pulpit, and next to this was placed a superb spirally twisted Paschal candlestick. [1]

The enclosure was used for singers accompanying the liturgy. In the 16th century changing liturgical norms required that no structures be allowed to intervene between the high altar and the congregation, and hence most of the scholae cantorum in Roman churches were destroyed. This one survived because by the 18th century its antiquarian value was appreciated. In Baroque churches, the schola is often replaced by cantoria which are opera-boxes raised above floor level for singers and musicians. [1]

Sanctuary (8)

The apse is richly decorated with frescoes and mosaics. In the conch and on the triumphal arch are 12th century mosaics which are described below. In the center of the apse is a 12th century marble episcopal throne on top of three marble steps. An inscription on the back of the throne states: [1] [g]

**ANASTASIUS PRESBYTER CARDINALIS HUIUS TITULI
HOC OPUS CEPIT ET PERFECIT**
(Anastasius cardinal presbyter began and finished this work)

The triumphal arch is supported by a pair of pilasters in shallow relief with un-classical capitals deriving from the Corinthian (with swags instead of acanthus leaves). These are obviously 18th century. [1]

The high altar has a 12th century ciborium, similar in style to that of San Giorgio in Velabro. It has four Corinthian columns in pavonazzetto marble supporting a rectangular cornice, on which are six little columns at front and back and five on each side. These in turn support a pitched roof with pediments at front and back; on the tympanum of the front pediment is St Clement's anchor. [1]

Beneath the high altar is the confessio or crypt installed by Aristide Leonori in 1868. The tombs are here of St Clement (enshrined in 868) and St [Ignatius of Antioch](#) (believed to have been thrown to the beasts in the Colosseum, although no record survives of his death). The inscription on the front of the altar mentions Saint Clement: [1] [3]

SANCTUS CLEMENS MARTYR HIC FELICITER EST TUMULATUS
(Saint Clement, martyr, is happily buried here)

Below the altar is the inscription:

HIC REQUIESCUNT CORPORA SS CLEMENTIS PAPÆ ET IGNATII
(Here lie the bodies of Saints Clement and Ignatius).

Behind the altar is an ancient bishop's throne, saved from the old basilica. The back was once part of the shrine of a martyr - the word MARTYR is inscribed on it. [1]

Caetani tabernacle

To the right hand side of the apse is an early 14th century tabernacle, executed in French Gothic style with Cosmatesque decoration. It is placed rather high on the wall, so that it can be seen by all; in addition, it is "out of reach of profane hands", as the Lateran Council in 1215 had decreed. [2]

This tabernacle was commissioned by Cardinal Giacomo Tomasi Caetani, titular priest of the church, in 1299. The artist was **Arnolfo di Cambio**. Above the tabernacle door, Cardinal Caetani is depicted in a relief kneeling before the Blessed Virgin and the Child Jesus, with his patron St James the Apostle (Giacomo is the Italian form of James) directing him toward the divine presence. At the top of the canopy is a medallion with the Lamb of God in relief. [1]

Triumphal arch mosaic

The mosaics are among the finest in Rome. They are from the 12th century, but look earlier since they are in the Byzantine style, obviously still influential in Rome at the time. The appearance is dominated by the golden glow of the background, which was achieved by applying gold leaf to the backs of the clear glass tesserae used for it. [1]

At the top of the composition on the triumphal arch is the figure of *Christ Pantokrator*, flanked by symbols of the four Evangelists (lion, ox, man, eagle). Christ is in a circular tondo. Directly below Christ, on the intrados of the arch, is the Chi-Rho symbol with Alpha and Omega. The rest of the intrados is mosaicked with flowers and fruit, depicted as coming from a pair of vases at the lower ends. [1]

On the spandrels, a bit lower than Christ, are four persons. On the left, *St Lawrence receiving instruction from St Paul*. St Lawrence is sitting with his feet on an iron grille, the instrument of his martyrdom. St Paul is identified with an inscription, AGIOS PAULUS. This curious blend of Greek (Agios = saint) and Latin (Paulus rather than Greek Paulos) possibly refers to his Eastern origins. The inscription below them says: [1]

DE CRUCE LAURENTI(us) PAULO FAMULARE DOCENTI
(The servant Lawrence is taught about the cross by Paul)

On the right are *SS Peter and Clement*. This figure refers to the succession of Bishops of Rome; Peter declares Christ's presence to his later successor. The inscription says:

RESPICE P(ro)MISSU(m) CLEMENS A ME TIBI CH(rist)UM
(Behold, Clement, Christ as he was promised to you by me)

Clement holds the anchor which is his symbol (this is partly obscured by a Baroque cornice), and below the pair is an oared galley with two fish. [1]

Below these four figures are two prophets. On the left, *Isaiah* holds a scroll saying

VIDI DOMINUM SEDENTEM SUP(er) SOLIUM
(I saw the Lord seated on a throne)

On the right, *Jeremiah* is also holding a scroll, saying:

HIC EST D(eu)S N(oste)R ET N(on) ESTIMABIT(ur) ALIUS ABSQ(ue) ILLO
(This is our God, there is none to compare with him) [1]

Below the prophets, at the bottoms of the composition, are two cities; Bethlehem on the left with the angel Gabriel, and Jerusalem on the right with St Peter's cock (male chicken that crowed). [1]

Along the edge of the archivolt is another inscription, saying:

**GLORIA IN EXCELSIS DEO SEDENTI SUP(er) THRONUM ET IN TERRA PAX HOMINIBUS
BONAE VOLUNTATIS, "**

(Glory to God in the highest, seated on the throne, and on earth peace to men of good will)
Taken together with the scroll held by Isaiah, two elements of the Mass are referred to. The verse held by Isaiah is connected to the preface given before the Sanctus, and the other text of course refers to the Gloria. [1]

Apse mosaic and frescoes

The vine with curlicued foliage that dominates the apse mosaic is a symbol of the living Church, with its roots in the Garden of Paradise and its fruit, the Cross of Christ. [1]

The composition is described from the bottom to the top: At the bottom, Christ and the Apostles are depicted in mosaic in the form of the Lamb of God flanked by a flock of twelve lambs. Actually, they are all depicted as full-grown sheep (as was the iconographic tradition), standing on a flowery meadow. Spot the snail. [1]

An inscription follows, explaining the meaning of the main mosaic at the top:

ECCLESIAM CRISTI VITI SIMILABIMUS ISTI
DE LIGNO CRUCIS JACOBI DENS IGNATIIQ(ue)
IN SUPRASCRIPTI REQUIESCUNT CORPORE CRISTI
QUAM LEX ARENTEM SET CRUS FACIT E(ss)E VIRENTE(m).

The line divisions here are marked by crosses placed between verses in the inscription. It is not easy to penetrate the inscription at first glance; one must take the first and last lines together as one part of it, and then the second and third line. The first and last line read: "We represent the Church of Christ as this vine, which the Law dries up but the Cross makes to be green." The second and third lines say: "[Part] of the wood of the Cross and a tooth of James, as well as of Ignatius, rest in the above-delineated body of Christ". It might seem like a mystic code, but it simply refers to a splinter of the True Cross and relics of St James the Apostle and St Ignatius of Antioch, which were placed behind the body of Christ in the mosaic itself when it was made. [1]

Directly above the inscription, in the center, are two deer and six birds at a fountain which is branching into four streams; this is an allusion to the description of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2, 9-10. The deer are a reference to the first verse of Psalm 43: "Like the deer that yearns for running streams". The birds are very well depicted; two egrets, a wild duck and a gallinule are represented, as well as a pair of peacocks. Nobody would have seen a peacock in Rome in the 12th century (they come from India), so the drawer of the original cartoon either saw one elsewhere or was familiar with a very accurate Classical depiction. [1]

In the lower corners are several charming scenes of farming life, which repay close examination. These include chickens being fed; as chickens must be fed by humans to survive, we must be tended by the Church to reach Heaven. Sheep are shepherded, referring to the Church tending its flock. [1]

Above the fountain is an acanthus plant, a Classical motif, on which stands a crucifix. The Blessed Virgin and St John the Evangelist are depicted at the foot of the cross, on which are twelve pigeons. These are almost certainly the Apostles, since pigeons can carry messages (here, the Gospel) long distances. [1]

Within the acanthus plant are a stag and a serpent; these refer to the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden. The serpent is obviously the serpent that tempted Eve and the stag was, in ancient stories, referred to as the serpent's natural enemy, drawing out snakes from the ground and stamping them to death. [1]

Two pairs of tendrils shoot up from the acanthus. One pair curves behind the Cross and is withered, and may be a symbol of Judaism after Christ (the Synagogue), or of the state of humanity before Christ. The other pair forms twenty-five spiral tendrils on each side, a total of fifty which is the number of days in the Easter season. Each tendril ends in a stylized flower, except for two with bowls of fruit and two with lidded bowls, and in between them are little figures of saints, angels and birds. Note the bird in a cage on the right hand side. [1]

Above the cross is the hand of God the Father in heaven with clouds, holding a thunderbolt. This is another Classical idiom, formerly a symbol of Jupiter. The rest of the mosaic up to the apex of the conch is taken up with stylistic designs, except for two representations of the Lamb of God on a plinth. [1]

The curved wall of the apse itself below the mosaics is a fresco cycle. The painting representing *Christ, the Virgin, and eleven Apostles*, is dated by general consent in the twelfth century. The figures, separated by palm trees, are standing on a flowered ground, edged with a border of fishes in water.

On the open pages of the book held by Christ in his left hand appears the inscription: *Pacem meam dabo vobis/Pacem eam relinquo vobis*. A nimbus larger than the others encircles Christ's head. The Apostles are not distinguished by any individual attributes. Below this there is a frescoed zone with purely decorative motifs in panels, followed by a border with floral decoration. The painting has been retouched several times, but most drastically, in the 18th century. [d]

Chapel of St Catherine of Alexandria (9)

The chapel is at the rear of the left hand aisle, immediately to your right as you enter through the church's side door. The chapel was commissioned by Cardinal Branda da Castiglione, an important contemporary patron of the arts. Work on the chapel is estimated to have taken place between 1428 and 1431. [4]

It is in the Gothic style, rather unusual in Rome, and is entirely covered in beautiful early Renaissance (Quattrocento) frescoes which are among the most important of the period in Rome. These paintings are attributed to **Masolino da Panicale di Valdelsa**. Older guidebooks will tell you that they are by Masaccio, but this theory is now discounted. There is still debate as to whether the two artists collaborated in the work to any extent, as they had done at the Brancacci Chapel in Florence. [1] [4]

The chapel is on a square plan, with a simple Gothic cross-vault springing from the corners. Above the entrance to the chapel is an *Annunciation*, shown taking place in an open loggia. The artist is demonstrating his grasp of the newly rediscovered laws of perspective, and not getting them quite right. *God the Father* appears in a tondo at top center. Unusually, the model used for the figure of Our Lady was a very attractive bionda who also seems to have posed for the figures of St Catherine within. [1]

On the left hand entrance pier is *St Christopher*, having the Christ-Child on his shoulder who in turn is holding the world. [1]

In the archivolt of the Gothic entrance arch are the *Twelve Apostles*, and in the vault itself are *Evangelists* and *Doctors of the Church*. [1]

On the altar wall is a *Crucifixion*, which is the centerpiece of the artistic composition. The fresco is not in very good condition, and has been mutilated in two places. The left hand blank patch marks the location of a tabernacle, while at the bottom right is a long and rather tedious epigraph in honor of Cardinal Benedetto Naro. Amazingly, this latter piece of vandalism was executed in 1832. [1]

The left wall shows scenes from the life of *St Catherine*, and repays close examination. [1]

- At the top left the saint is discussing Christianity with the emperor Maxentius in a pagan temple, wearing a blue dress while gesturing towards an idol on a column.
- The next scene shows her converting the emperor's wife while in prison (a wholly fictitious occurrence), and the subsequent beheading of the latter.
- Below on the left, the saint converts a group of Roman philosophers while the emperor presides; they are then burnt by the emperor. (The saint is wearing a black dress here, as it is the following day and she has changed her clothes.)
- In the middle the saint is being tortured on a pair of wheels (the famous Catherine wheels), which are destroyed by an angel while the emperor looks on.
- Finally, the beheading of the saint is shown. The large mountain on the right in this scene is Mount Sinai, since the legend has it that her body was miraculously transported to that location and is now to be found enshrined in the monastery dedicated to her there.

The right hand wall has scenes from the life of *St Ambrose of Milan*. These used to be thought to refer to St Clement, until their latest restoration. A re-setting of the central window as well as rising damp has seriously damaged this cycle. [1]

- At the top left, St Ambrose as a baby is visited by a swarm of bees while his nurse tries to wave them away. This legend was an allusion to the honeyed sweetness of his future discourse.
- At the top right is his election as bishop, when a child in the audience shouted "Ambrose for bishop!".
- At bottom left the saint and his companions on a journey are fleeing an evil rich man's house

- as it is swallowed up by the ground.
- At bottom center is the saint's study-room (this scene is seriously damaged), and
- to the bottom right is a death-bed scene.

The chapel has been restored several times after neglect which damaged the frescoes, and in the process two sinopic by Masolino were discovered. One is of the Crucifixion and the other of the beheading of St Catherine, and these are now displayed outside the chapel. [1]

Left Aisle

In the left aisle is the monument to Visconte Bartolomeo di Basterot (1800-1887) and his wife, Martha Pauline de Fay de Latour Maubourg (1816-1839), by **Theodore Gaetano Forlivesi** of 1874. [a]

The slab memorial in the floor is for Cardinal Enrico Rampini di Allosio (d. 1450). [a]

Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary (10)

The chapel at the front end of the left hand aisle is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, because the Dominicans invented the devotion. It is also the Blessed Sacrament chapel, and has St Servulus enshrined under the altar. The altarpiece is by **Sebastiano Conca**, and depicts *Our Lady of the Rosary with SS Dominic and Catherine of Siena*. (1714) [1] [3]

Here also, on the right wall of the chapel, is a picture depicting *Our Lady with the Holy Child and the Infant John the Baptist*, by **Jacopo Zucchi**. The style is not to everyone's taste (fat little boys in the nude are seriously out of fashion in religious iconography), but the execution is good -especially of the flowers. Also, is one to Pietro Salvati from Foligno of 1628. [1] [3]

Located by this chapel are several monuments. Here is an important one to Cardinal Giacompo Antonio Venier, who died in 1479. It incorporates two columns from a 6th century tabernacle commissioned by the future Pope John II (in other words, together with the schola cantorum), and it seems that an important early piece of church furniture was destroyed here in the 15th century. [1] [a]

Chapel of St John the Baptist (11)

The corresponding chapel at the end of the right hand aisle is dedicated to St John the Baptist. It has a 16th century statue as an altarpiece, attributed to **Simone Ghini**. The altar is modern, since the chapel has been recently restored. There are remnants of damaged frescoes. [1]

Near the chapel are two 15th century funerary monuments. That of Cardinal Bartolomeo Roverella of 1476 is by **Andrea Bregno**, working with **Giovanni Dalmata** who executed the sculptural detail, notably *Our Lady with angels* and *the Eternal Father*. Also of Giovanni Francesco Brusati, nephew of Card Roverella and archbishop of Siena, is by **Luigi Capponi** of Milan, in 1485. [1] [3] [a]

Chapel of SS Cyril and Methodius (12)

The external chapel of SS Cyril and Methodius, the apostles of the Slavs and patrons of Europe, is off the right hand aisle. St Cyril's mortal remains were probably interred in the church below after his death in 869 (Methodius died elsewhere), and were not transferred when the church was rebuilt because he was not regarded as a saint back then. This title was only given to him in Rome, with Methodius, in 1880. [1]

This chapel amounts to the Roman shrine to the two saints, and is popular with pilgrims especially from eastern Europe. St Cyril translated the Bible into Slavic language, created the Glagolitic alphabet, and Christianized the Slavs. Pope John Paul II used to pray there sometimes for Poland and the Slavic countries. The chapel also holds a *Madonna* by **Giovanni Battista Salvi da Sassoferrato**. [1] [6]

The chapel was constructed in 1882, but the decoration dates from 1888, when the chapel was dedicated to the two saints on the instructions of Cardinal Josip Strossmayer. The large altarpiece fresco of *St Clement Presenting SS Cyril and Methodius to Christ*, as well as the wall frescoes depicting scenes from their lives, are by a painter called Novelli. [1] [d]

When the chapel was constructed existing frescoes on the aisle wall were whitewashed over. One of them was signed by the 15th-century painter, Giovenale da Orvieto, of whom no work has survived. [d]

Outside the entrance here is a monument to Teodoro Ramsden and his wife, by **Forlivesi** again in 1874. They were English expatriates living in the city. [1]

Shop (14)

The shop is now located in the former sacristy wing, through a door in the right hand aisle. The stock, especially the postcards, is good. The church depends on the income from the shop, so do patronize it. The door-surround to the sacristy bears the arms of Cardinal Venerio, and was made between 1476 and 1479 at the time when Giovanni Venerio was titular priest of San Clemente. [1] [d]

The two partial arches in the wall around the entrance to the shop are the remains of the clerestory wall of the Lower Church. right of the entrance to the shop is a memorial for Cardinal Girolamo Ghinucci. Pope Leo X named Ghinucci papal nuncio to England, where Henry VIII retained him for a period as advisor. In 1522, he succeeded Giulio de' Medici, the Cardinal protector of England as Bishop of Worcester. He held the bishopric until 1535 when he was deprived of the position by King Henry VIII. In the same year he was made a Cardinal by Pope Paul III, and served on commissions to reform the Church. He was Cardinal-protector of San Clemente from 25 January 1537 until his death in 1541. [5] [d] [k]

Chapel of St Dominic (13)

This little chapel is at the bottom of the right hand aisle, and is on the site of the original mediaeval campanile. The chapel was redecorated in 1715. The late Baroque altar was designed by **Fontana**, arranged as an aedicule with diagonally-set free-standing Corinthian columns framing the altarpiece. The chapel contains three paintings depicting scenes from the life of St Dominic. The altarpiece shows *St. Dominic in Ecstasy* by **Carlo Roncalli**, and on the side walls are representations of two of his miracles – the *Miracle of Prince Napoleon Orsini* on the left wall also by **Roncalli**, and the *Miracle of the Mason* (1714) on the right wall, by **Conca**. The walls are decorated with polychrome marbles and stucco work. [3] [f]

Location:

Address: Via Labicana 95,
Via di San Giovanni in Laterano /
Piazza San Clemente 00184 Roma
Coordinates: [41° 53' 22" N 12°29'51"E](#)

Info:

Telephone: +39 06 7740021
Fax: +39 06 77400201
Web site: www.basilicasanclemente.com
Twitter: https://twitter.com/Basilica_Roma

Opening times

Monday-Saturday: 9.00 am - 12.30 pm / 3.00 pm - 6.00 pm;
Sunday and Holidays: 12.00 pm (noon) - 6.00 pm;

Mass Schedule:

Monday-Saturday: 8.00 am and 6.00 pm;
Sundays and Holidays: 9.00 am, 11.00 am and 6.30 pm;
Saturdays and the evenings before Days of Obligation: 6.30 pm.

Excavations:

Admission to the excavations: € 5,00; Admission for students under twenty-six years of age (with I.D.): € 3,50.

Artists and Architects:

Andrea [Bregno](#) (1418-1506), Italian sculptor and architect of the Early Renaissance
Arnolfo [di Cambio](#) (13th century), Italian architect and sculptor
Aristide [Leonori](#) (1856-1928), Italian architect and engineer
Carlo Stefano Fontana (ca.1675-1740), Italian architect
Carlo [Roncalli](#) (18th Cent), Italian painter
Gaetano Forlivesi (19th cent), sculptor
Giovanni Antonio Grecolini (1675-1725), Italian painter
Giovanni Battista Salvi da [Sassoferrato](#) (1609-1685), Italian Baroque painter
Giovanni Domenico Piastrini (c.1678-1740), Italian painter
Giovanni [Dalmata](#) (1440-1514), Dalmatian sculptor
Giovanni [Odazzi](#) (1663-1731), Italian painter and etcher of the Baroque period
Giuseppe Bartolomeo [Chiari](#) (1654-1727), Italian painter of the late-Baroque
Ivan [Duknovic](#) [aka *Giovanni Dalmata o di Traù*] (1440-1514), sculptor from Trogir, Dalmatia
Jacopo [Zucchi](#) (1541-1590), Florentine painter of the Mannerist style
Luigi di Pietro [Capponi](#) (1445-1515), Italian sculptor
Magister Paulus (12th cent), Italian sculptor, mosaic floor maker
Novelli (19th cent), painter
Pier Leone [Ghezzi](#) (1674-1755), Italian Rococo painter
Pietro [da Pietri](#) (18th cent), Italian painter of the late-Baroque period
Pietro Rassinì, Italian painter
Pietro Rasini (18th cent), Italian painter
Salvatore Nobili (1865-1919), Italian painter
Sebastiano [Conca](#) (1680-1764), Italian painter
Simone [Ghini](#) (15th cent), Italian sculptor
Theodore Gaetano Forlivesi (19th cent), Italian sculptor
Tommaso Chiari (1665-1733), Italian painter
Tommaso di Cristoforo Fini [aka [Masolino da Panicale](#)], (1383-1447), Italian painter

Burials:

St [Clement](#)
St [Flavius Clement](#) (Roman consul and martyr)
St [Ignatius of Antioch](#)
St. [Sevolo the Paralyzed](#) (d. 590)

Cardinal [ANASTASIO](#), (?-c. 1125)
Rebuilt basilica
Memorial and site of burial lost

Enrico Cardinal [RAMPINI](#), (ca 1390-1450) [also see [here](#)]
Slat memorial in left aisle

Bartolomeo Cardinal [ROVERELLA](#), (1406-1476) [also see [here](#)]
Buried in a magnificent monument next to the chapel of S. Giovanni Battista

Giacopo Antonio Cardinal [VENIER](#), (1422-1479) [also see [here](#)]
Girolamo Cardinal [GHINUCCI](#), (1480-1541) [also see [here](#)]
Gianantonio Cardinal [CAPIZUCCHI](#) (1515-1569)
Vincenzo Cardinal [LAURO](#), (1523-1592)
Benedetto Cardinal [NARO](#), (1744-1832)
Buried in the chapel of the *Passione of the Redentore e S. Caterina*

Francesco Cardinal [CANALI](#), (1764-1835)
Amleto Giovanni Cardinal [CICOGNANI](#), (1883-1973) [also see [here](#)]
Giovanni Francesco Brusato (d. 1477)
Archbishop of Nicosia

Visconte Bartolomeo di Basterot and his wife (1874)
Pietro Salvati from Foligno (1628)
Giovanni Francesco Brusati (1485)
Teodoro Ramsden and his wife (1874)
Joseph [Mullooly](#) (1812-1880) [also see [here](#)]

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