

## Catacombs of Domitilla

The catacomb of the exile



“Domitilla, an excellent example of Coronatio Martyrum” Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie. These catacombs extend along the ancient Via Ardeatina on the site of the property of the noblewoman Flavia Domitilla, the niece of Flavio Clemente who was a consul from 95 AC and who had married a niece of Emperor Domitian (81-96), also with the name of Flavia Domitilla. This part of the gens Flavia apparently sympathised with early Christian communities; historians writing at the time, note that Flavio Clemente was condemned to death for religious reasons by Domitian, while Flavio's wife and niece were exiled to the Pontine Islands. Before their exile, the consul's niece donated her property at the Ardeatina to the needs of the Christian community; eventually the largest underground Christian cemetery of Rome would be excavated on this site.

The most important martyrs of the cemetery are Nereus and Achilleus, two soldiers who were probably victims of Diocletian's persecution (304 AC). They were buried in the basilica, a majestic apsed hall, built during the time of Pope Siricius (385-399). Entering first through a narthex, the basilica is then subdivided into three naves by columns capped with recycled capitals.

Another very ancient nucleus is the hypogeum of the Flavi, originating for private pagan use at the end of the second century AC. Later, during the third century, the hypogeum housed Christian tombs decorated with scenes inspired from the Holy Scripture. Completing the site, is the cubiculum of Veneranda, the arcosolium of the Little Apostles, and the cubiculum of the gravedigger Diogenes.

To know more buy [The catacombs of Domitilla and the Basilica of the Martyrs Nereus and Achilleus](#)

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