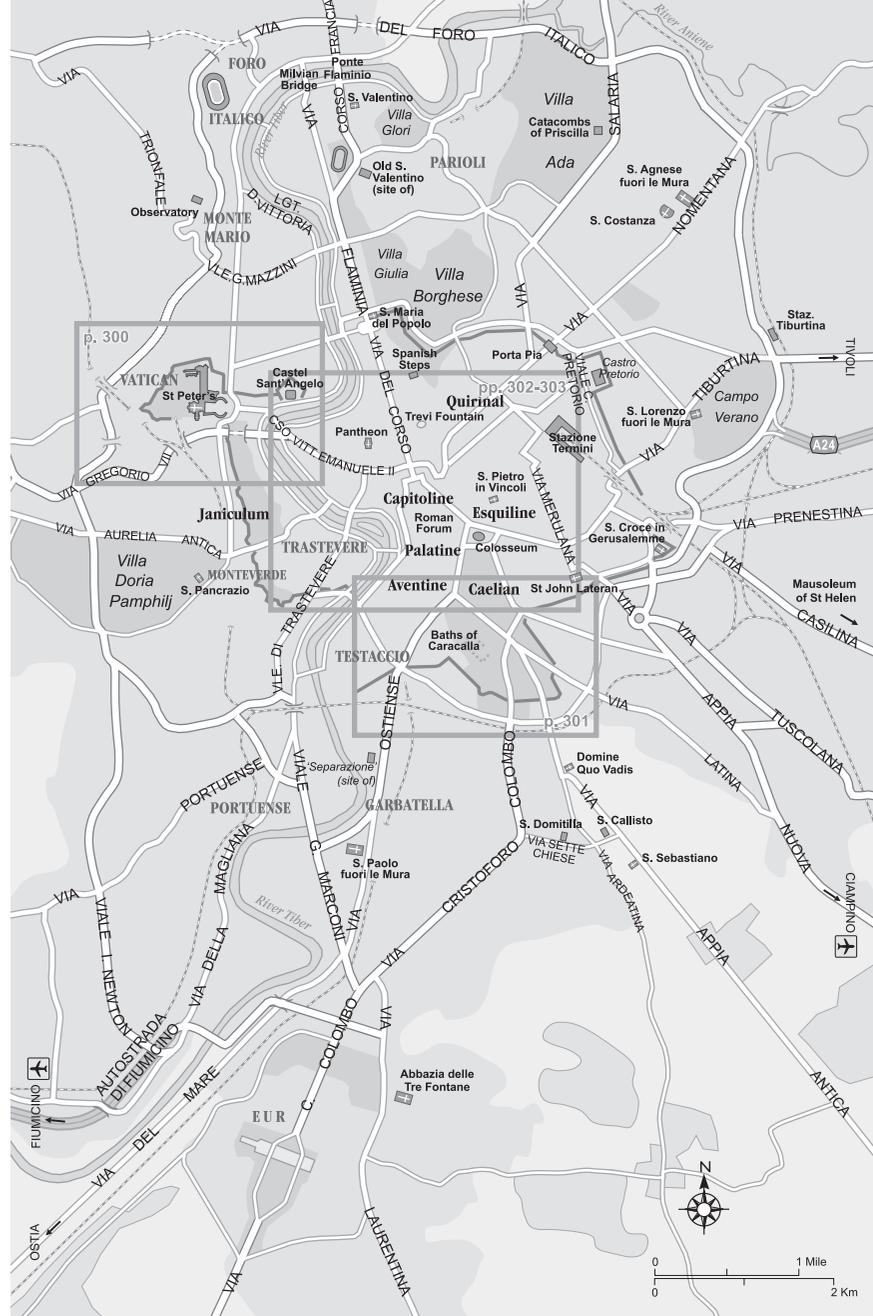


its famous seven hills, stood on the east bank, while west of the river was the district of *Transtiberim*, the modern Trastevere, home to a community of Jews and, later, to Christians. From this dense heart, the arterial consular roads radiated out: the Via Salaria and Via Nomentana to the northeast; the Via Tiburtina and Via Praenestina to the east; the Via Aurelia to the west; and in the south the Via Ostiensis, leading to the port of Ostia, the great mouth via which the belly of Rome was fed with Alexandrian corn. It was close to this road, at Tre Fontane, that St Paul was martyred, and just beside it, under San Paolo fuori le Mura, that he now lies entombed.

Those ancient roads still exist, or at least, modern roads do, that follow the ancient routes. The most famous of all the roads, still paved in sections with ancient basalt slabs, lies to the southeast: the Via Appia, site of the most celebrated catacombs. It is along the Via Appia that St Paul arrived in Rome, and along the same road that St Peter tried to flee it.

The road that leads north from the city, the Via Flaminia, preserves its straight lines within the centre as the Via del Corso, always filled with traffic and pedestrians, and with famous landmarks on either side: the Spanish Steps and Trevi Fountain to the east and the Pantheon to the west.

The modern city flings itself widely over both Tiber banks. The river lies between, deeply entrenched, fringed by plane trees and bordered by busy roads, the *lungoteveri*. It flows so far below the level of the modern



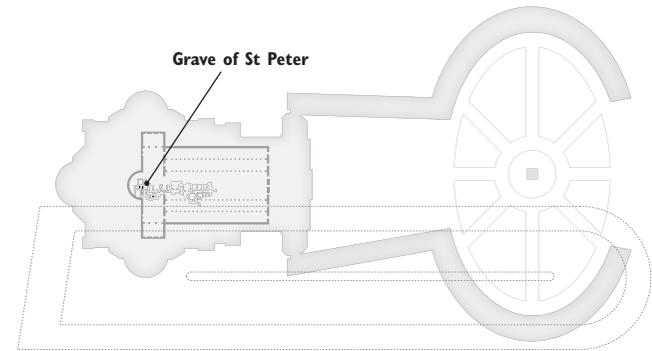
The sumptuous Baroque basilica that we see today is the successor to a smaller church built by order of Constantine over the site of that grave, the spot where the body of the martyred Apostle was laid to rest. The grave is still there, but it has had several layers built around it over the years and now lies like a Russian doll, many times encased and difficult to access.

NB: The description below deals only with the tomb of St Peter. To read about St Peter's basilica, see p. 70.

The street of tombs

Admission is by previous appointment only. Visitors must be over fifteen. Guided tours lasting approx. 90mins are given to groups of a maximum of twelve people. To book, email scavi@fsp.va or Fax: +39 06 6987 3017. To apply in person, go to the Ufficio Scavi (left of the basilica; ask the Swiss Guard to let you through), which is open Mon–Sat 9–5. Don't expect a response for several weeks. If you do not have time to wait, you can take a superb virtual tour at www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/necropoli/scavi_english.html.

Most of the burials in the street of tombs are pagan; the only purely Christian mausoleum is Mausoleum M. On its vault, Christ appears as *Sol Novus*, the 'New Sun', shown beardless and dressed in Roman garb, driving a chariot, with a globe in his left hand and brilliant rays emanating from his head. The iconography is clearly



Plan of the burial site of St Peter, showing the outline of the current St Peter's Basilica and St Peter's Square with the original Constantinian basilica beneath and the street of tombs below that. The position of the Circus of Nero is indicated by a dotted line.

derived from images of pagan sun-worship, which was instituted by Marcus Aurelius at the end of the second century. Images that have no pagan derivation but which are purely Christian include Jonah and the whale and fishermen. In the large, mainly pagan Mausoleum H is a Christian inscription asking Peter to pray 'for the holy Christians buried beside your body'. The site of Peter's grave is marked on the plan above. It takes the form of an empty space beneath a commemorative monument of the mid-second century known as the Tropaion of Gaius, which is built up against a wall plastered in red. This wall bears the name of the saint in Greek letters: ΠΙΕΤΡ... (the

the busy Corso (*map p. ???, C2*). The narrowness of the pavement and the incessant hurly burly of people and traffic make it difficult to stand back to admire the façade, which in any case is besmirched with a thick layer of grime. But it is a famous work by the architect and painter Pietro da Cortona, a vertical, upthrusting arrangement of columns, broken by a Serlian window on the upper level. In the church crypt (*open Tues–Fri 4–7, Sat and Sun also 10–1, afternoon hours 3–6 in winter*) are remains of a first-century Roman building claimed as the house of St Luke and also of St Paul, where he lived under guard. We know that Paul wrote many of his epistles from Rome. It is very tempting to believe that he wrote them right here, in one of these two churches.

The road to martyrdom

Because nothing is known for certain about St Peter's time in Rome, it is impossible to say what the two great Apostles might have discussed, what disagreements they may have had, how they collaborated with each other, how their ministries overlapped, if indeed they overlapped at all. If they lived and worked here at the same time, they presumably had plenty of contact with each other. And when they were each sent to their deaths, it is reasonable to suppose that they took their leave of each other. The attractive tradition of the farewell embrace has found its way into an icon type, wherein Peter and Paul are shown with their arms around each other, a last fraternal gesture



'Near this spot, a small chapel dedicated to the Crucifixion, demolished at the beginning of the twentieth century to allow the widening of the Via Ostiense, marked the place where, according to a hallowed tradition, the princes of the apostles, Peter and Paul, were separated on the eve of their glorious martyrdom.'

and exchange of moral support as each sets off towards his place of martyrdom. The scene of this goodbye hug has been set by the side of the Via Ostiense (in Italian, Via Ostiense), and until the road was widened in the early twentieth century, a chapel stood there, dedicated

of St Peter and St Paul in 2008, at the inauguration of the Pauline Year, which marked two thousand years since the saint's birth. It has remained burning ever since, and, according to the text set up beside it, 'gives light to each pilgrim who comes through the Pauline Door into the Papal Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls to venerate the memory of the Apostle of the Gentiles'.

In around the year 1450, an English Augustinian friar by the name of John Capgrave wrote a handbook to Rome entitled *Ye Solace of Pilgrims*. In it he offers a compelling reason why San Paolo fuori le Mura should be entered by the west door:

The altar of St Peter's church stands in the west and the altar of St Paul's church stands in the east. Some pilgrims there be that know the cause why men go in at the west end of St Paul's, for the readier way is to enter by the north side. The cause why those men that know the place enter by the west is this: for after the time that St Paul's head was smitten off two miles thence, it was carried and hidden where the west door is now and afterwards found and kept with great reverence. And in the worship of that head whosoever enters by that door has every day twenty-eight years of indulgence with remission of the third part of their sins.

Unless it is a Holy Year, in which case the *Porta Santa*

(see p. 88) will be open, the **Pauline Door (3)** is that by which the public enters today. It is the work of Guido Veroi (2008) and shows scenes from the life of the saint, including his conversion and his martyrdom. Veroi (b. 1926) had hitherto been best known as a medallist. His designs include the former 500 lire piece and a commemorative 2 euro coin for the Vatican, struck in 2004.

