

Marco Scataglini

TUSCANIA

the heart of Etruria



An American in Tuscania

Seen from satellites, Tuscania is a stoney island in a sea of green.

I remember vividly my first visit a decade ago, coming in by car from Tarquina, the Etruscan stronghold on the Mediterranean coast 15 miles to the west. We followed a winding road mercifully uncluttered by billboards, past rolling hills populated by sheep who stopped chewing to stare and to wonder, past ploughed fields just starting to awake from a winter's sleep.

Overhead, lots of blue, blue sky punctuated by puffy white clouds. I'm greeted on the outskirts of Tuscania with scenes that remind me of my Midwestern origins: huge green monsters parked in front of the John Deere agency, grain silos silent but ready. And then the surprise! After a brief business district clogged with cars parked at odd angles, we enter other world.

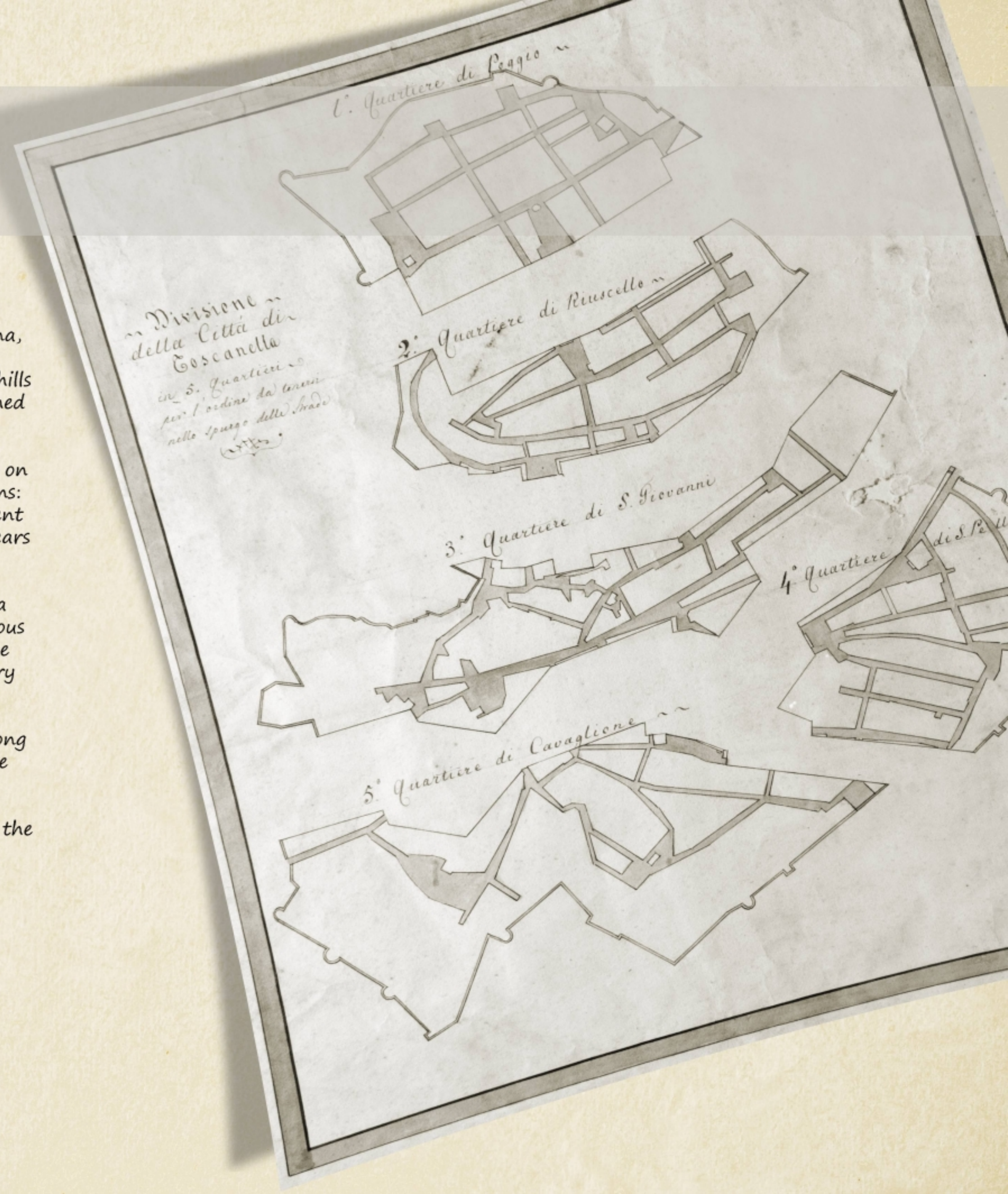
Tile-topped houses cluster together between churches and palaces painted in a palate of earth tones, all protected within walls built centuries ago of the porous local stone. We enter through a gate made for carts not cars, bells chiming the time of our arrival. Each house is different, each door unique, each with a story to tell.

Massive medieval towers loom overhead to watch us as we thread our way along cobblestoned streets which eventually open onto a piazza, water gushing in the fountain from the mouths of dolphins.

Soon we have traversed the entire town and arrive at a park overlooking out the river valley below. Peace

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Countryside



Cork oak tree



Countryside



"About nine or ten miles to the east of Canino lies Toscanella, an Etruscan site of considerable interest. It may be reached in a carriage, either from Viterbo, Corneto, or Canino. This part of the great plain is diversified by oak-woods, which afford a pleasing contrast to the naked sweeps nearer the sea and the Ciminian Mount. Toscanella, with its many lofty towers, is the most conspicuous object in the thinly-peopled plain, and may be descried from a great distance. Yet it stands on no eminence, but as usual on the level of the plain, nearly surrounded by profound ravines. It is a mean, dirty town; and its interest lies in its picturesque situation, its Etruscan remains, and its churches, which are choice specimens of the Lombard style. Here and there in the streets is a rich fragment of mediaeval architecture. The walls of the town are of the same period; no trace of the ancient fortifications remain, except on the adjoining height of San Pietro".



The hill of Saint Peter, with the remains of the Rivellino castle on the left



The Rivellino castle and the church of Saint Peter



The church of Saint Peter surrounded by towers



Via della Lupa



The Rivellino castle during a severe snowstorm



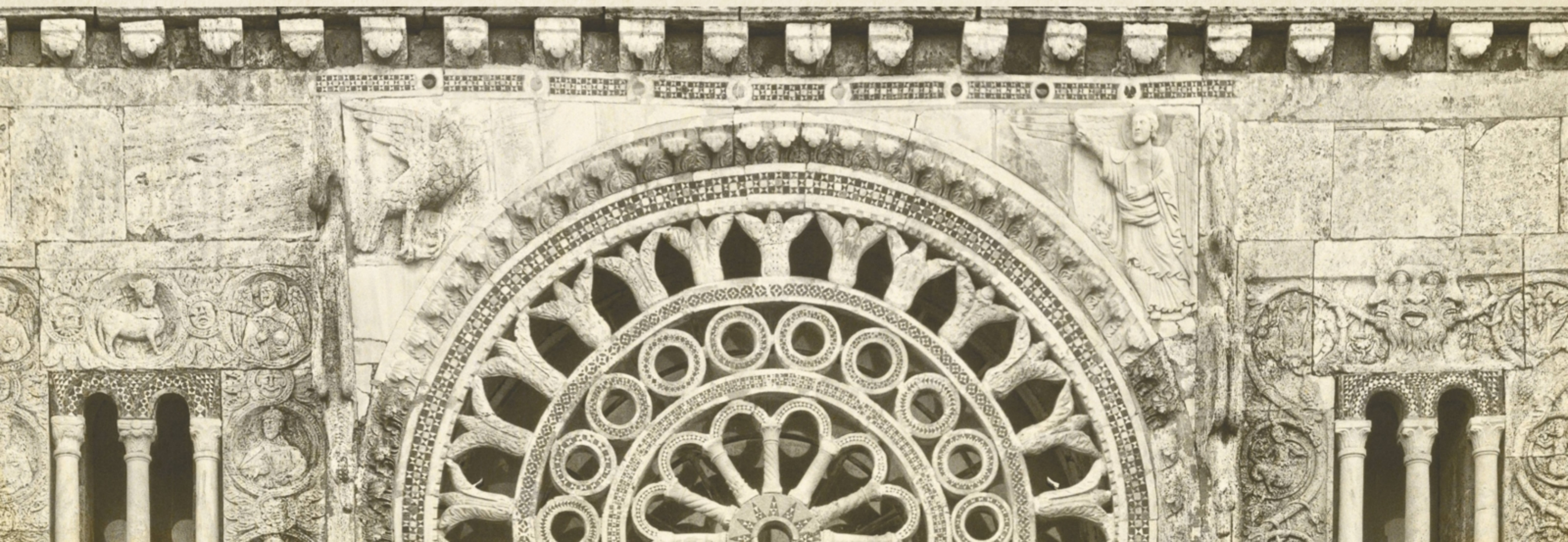
Panoramic view of the town centre after the snowstorm

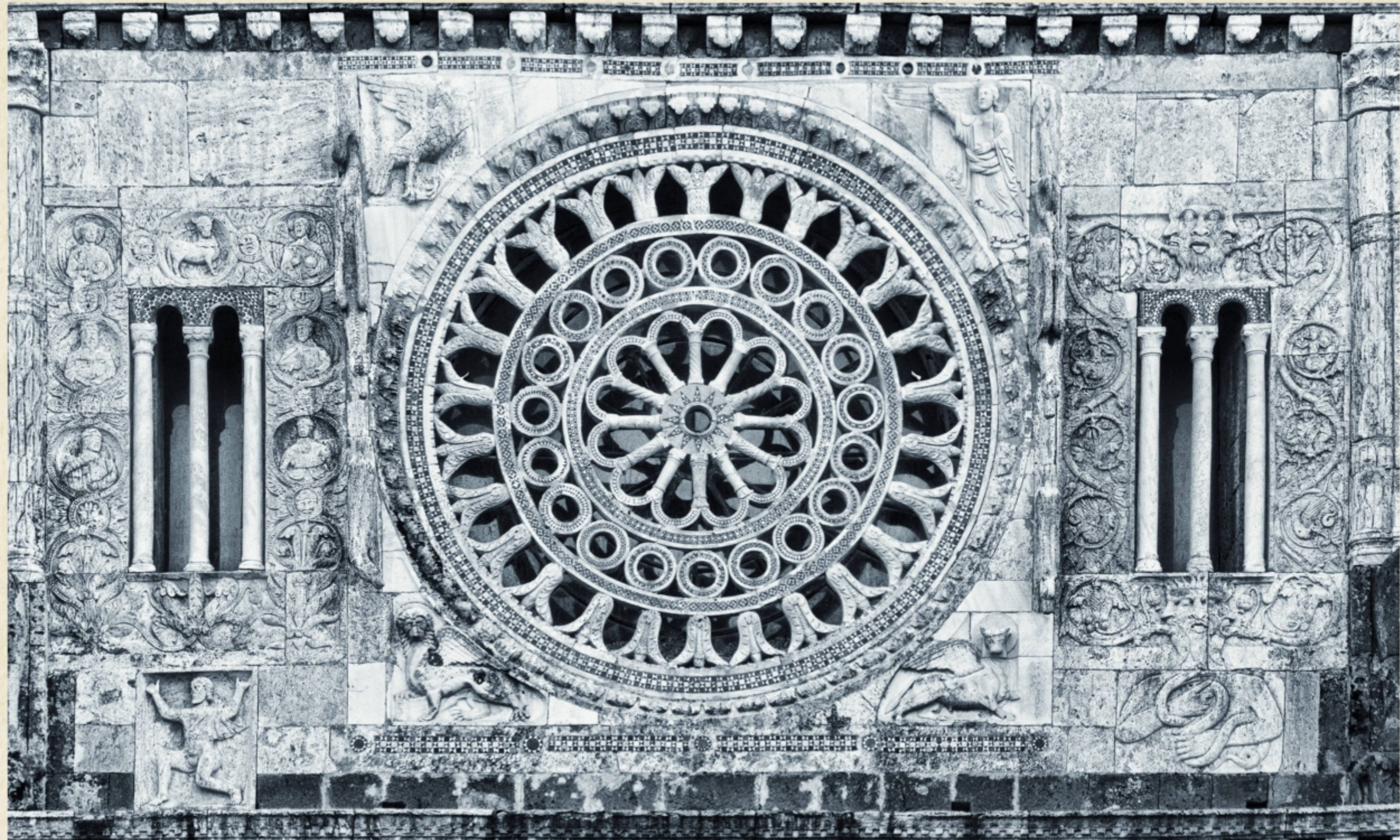


The Rivellino castle



"The richest jewel on this tiaraed height is the church of San Pietro, one of the most interesting ecclesiastical structures of Central Italy. Its style is Italian Gothic, sister to the Byzantine, and elder cousin to the Norman. This church cannot compete in grandeur or richness with the celebrated Duomi in the same style, at Pisa, Siena, and Orvieto; yet, in the small and snug way, it is a gem, and will repay the lover of art for an express visit to Toscanella. Its charms lie chiefly in its façade, which though so rich in its general effect, is most grotesque in detail. Beasts, birds, and reptiles move in stone about the marigold window, the round-arched doorways, and the arcaded galleries — here stepping forth from the masonry, there chasing one another up and down the façade. Scarcely a square foot but displays some grotesquery in high or low relief, some grinning head, some uncouth form, some fantastic chimaera. The whole façade is teeming with life. This is not in harmony with the repose of architecture, still less with the solemnity and dignity of ecclesiastical edifices. Perhaps it was to qualify this profane character that a sprinkling is introduced of angels, saints, men, and devils. But what can we say of trifacial heads — grim caricatures of the Trinity — more than once seen on this façade? — or of artisans and tradesmen at their respective avocations, all in caricature? Yet such in a band of reliefs surround the porch of San Pietro".





The magnificent rose window on the facade of the church of Saint Peter



The church of Saint Peter



The cript of the church of Saint Peter



Santa Maria Maggiore church



Santa Maria Maggiore church



Santa Maria Maggiore church





View from Piazza Basile



Piazza Duomo



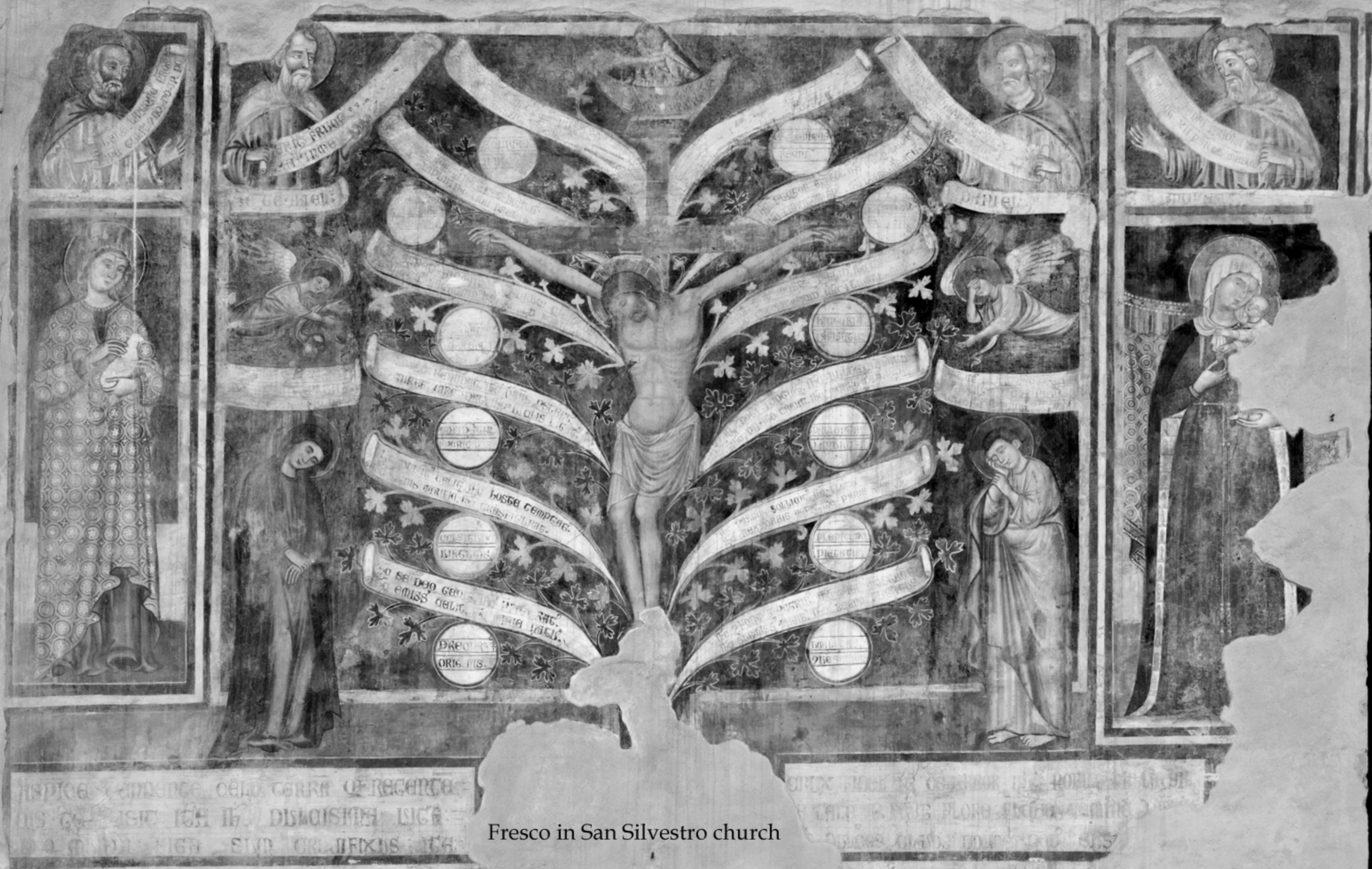
Largo Cavour fountain



Belvedere fountain



"Palazzo Spagnoli", in the town centre





The abbey of San Giusto

"Of the original town there is no vestige beyond some substructions and rock-hewn sewers, on the height of San Pietro. Here, too, are traces of the Roman colony, in fragments of reticulated walling; and remains of a circus were discovered, a few years since, in the ravine beneath.

The ancient town must have been larger than the modern, for it comprehended the height of San Pietro, which is without the modern walls, and which, being rather more elevated than the rest of the town, and at the extremity of the tongue of land, was evidently the Arx of Tuscania. That it was continued as a fortress during the middle ages, is proved by the tall, square towers that produce, which encircle, like a diadem, the brow of the hill.

Eight are still standing, more or less impaired. They are double, like certain of the Round Towers of Ireland — a tall, slender tower being encased, with no intervening space, in an outer shell of masonry. Lest some should be led away by this analogy to cherish the idea that they are of very ancient construction, or, by a bold leap, should arrive at the conclusion that the Etruscans and Irish had a common origin, I must repeat that the masonry of these towers stamps them indubitably as of the middle ages".





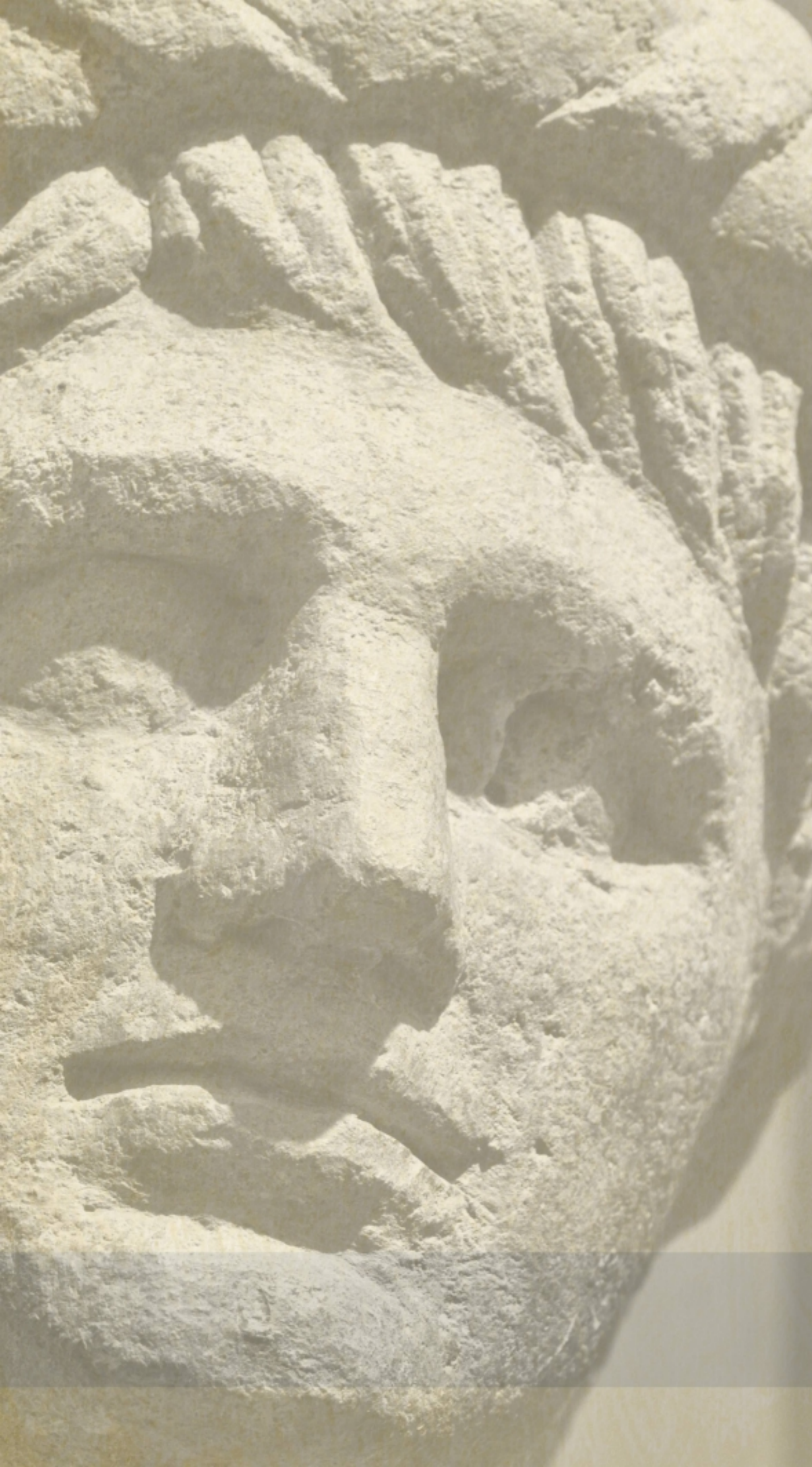
Archeological Museum



Tomba della falsa porta (False Door tomb), Castelluzza necropolis



Tomba del Dado



Colombario along the Via Clodia

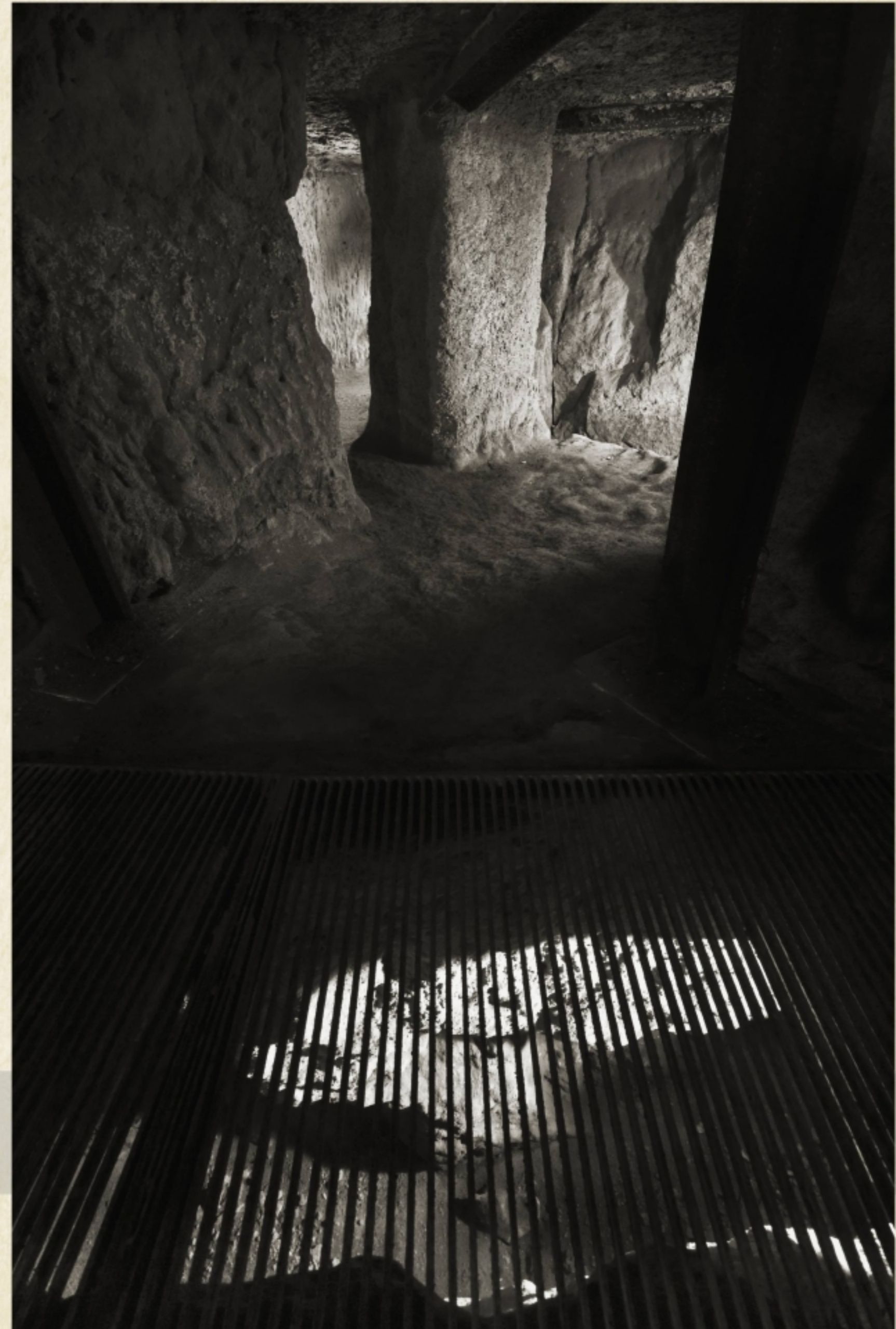
“In the cliffs round the town are several instances of columbaria, such as exist at Veii and Sutri. They are large chambers in the rock, filled from floor to ceiling with small niches, like pigeon-holes, capable of holding an urn or pot, but differing from the niches in Roman columbaria, in the absence of the olla-hole. One of these tombs, in the cliff above the Viterbo road, is remarkable for its size, and its division into three chambers, with a massive pillar of rock supporting its roof. As the Romans seem to have taken the idea of their columbari from the Etruscans, it is difficult, in the absence of all sepulchral furniture, to pronounce on the origin of these and similar tombs; yet I think it probable that these niched sepulchres were — in type at least — Etruscan”.



A “colombario” on the Via Clodia (Caponetti farm)

“The necropolis lay in the broad, deep ravines round Toscanella, and on the opposite heights. There are many tombs in the cliffs, not with architectural façades, as at Castel d'Asso or Norchia, but with simple door-ways, and interiors presenting little variety — unadorned chambers surrounded by rock-hewn benches. The most remarkable tomb on this site is in the cliffs below the Madonna dell'Olivo, about half a mile from the town. Here, a long sewer-like passage leads into a spacious chamber of irregular form, with two massive columns supporting its ceiling, and a rude pilaster on the wall behind. But the peculiarity of the tomb lies in a cuniculus or passage cut in the rock, just large enough for a man to creep through on all-fours, which, entering the wall on one side, after a long gyration, and sundry branchings now blocked with earth, opens in the opposite wall of the tomb. Till lately, this was the only instance known of anything like a subterranean labyrinth in an Etruscan sepulchre, but it is now quite eclipsed by that in the singular Poggio di Gajella of Chiusi”.

The so-called “Tomba della Regina” (Queen’s tomb)





Another view of the "Queens' Tomb" (near Madonna dell'Olivo church)



Night view of the so called "Capanna di sasso" (Stone Cabin) along the ancient Via Clodia, built on a little etruscan necropolis



Ara del Tufo necropolis; in the background, the Saint Peter's hill

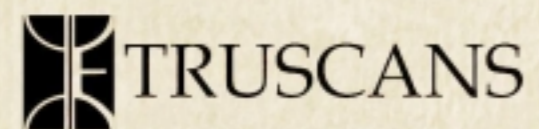
“Of the origin and history of Tuscania we have no record. The only mention of it in ancient writers is found in Pliny, who classes it among the inland colonies in Etruria; and in the Peutingerian Table, which shows it to have been on the Via Clodia, between Blera and Saturnia. It is from its tombs alone that we know it to have existed in Etruscan times...”



The recently discovered necropolis of Guado Cinto, not far from Ara del Tufo settlement



Marta river



collection of "zines" by

Marco Scataglini

Texts taken from

"Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria"
by George Dennis (1848)



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