



# The southward section of the Via Appia Antica inside the city

## Via Appia Antica

You are standing in Piazzale Numa Pompilio, which, today, marks the northern boundary of the Archaeological and Regional Parks of the Appia Antica, as well as the point where the Appian Way and the Via Latina diverge, now as in ancient times. Here you find yourself at about the mid-point between the earliest walls of Rome, erected in the 4th century BC (and known as the Servian Walls) and the second ring built by the emperor Aurelius in the 3rd century AD (Aurelian Walls).

From here the itinerary heads southwards to the monumental gateway of Porta San Sebastiano in the Aurelian Walls. From this point onwards the Appian Way coincides with the modern-day Via di Porta San Sebastiano, while behind you, towards the Circus Maximus, the ancient route can no longer be clearly distinguished because of the many alterations since the end of the 19th and the early 20th centuries.

The ancient Via Appia started at Porta Capena, one of the gates in the Servian Walls, just behind the Circus Maximus, and probably followed a more eastward path compared to the modern day Viale delle Terme di Caracalla. The itinerary, which in ancient Roman times was lined by monumental tombs and the palatial houses of wealthy citizens, now features the Oratory of the Seven Sleepers, inside a private property, the church of S. Cesareo de Appia, built over the remains of a Roman bathhouse, the house of Cardinal Bessarione and the Tomb of the Scipios, for which advance reservation is required.

The itinerary ends at the impressive Porta San Sebastiano, which today hosts the Museum of the Walls, and which was built very close to the so-called Arch of Drusus, in actual fact a branch of the Aqua Marcia supplying water to the nearby Baths of Caracalla.

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## Info



POI

6

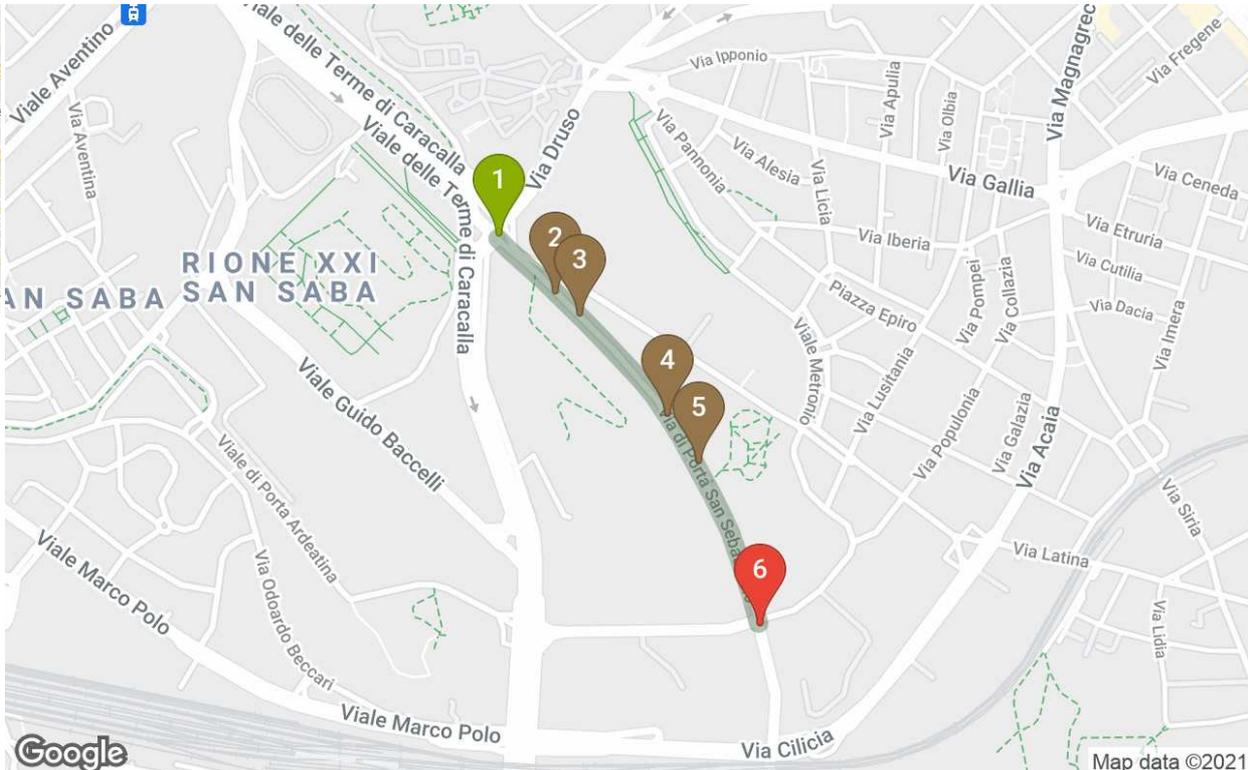


Distance

0.87 Km



Scan the QR code to access the navigable mobile version of the itinerary





## Piazzale Numa Pompilio

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### Roma / Tourist Services - Others

This is Piazzale Numa Pompilio, currently one of the access points to the Archaeological Park of the Appia Antica following its recent extension in 2018. From here, by scanning the QR codes on the board, you can take any of the itineraries that criss-cross the Appia Antica Park.

The Via di San Sebastiano, which runs southwards from this point, is an urban section of the Appian Way. The road began further north, in the vicinity of the ancient remains that can be seen between the slope of the Caelian hill and the FAO Building, where archaeological excavations have unearthed the ancient course of the Servian Wall, the first walls enclosing Rome, from where the Appian Way, beginning at the Porta Capena gate, then ran to the Porta San Sebastiano gate in the later Aurelian Walls. This is the place where another ancient road, the Via Latina, branched off from the Appian Way, which began its course further north at Porta Capena, located behind the curved section of the Circus Maximus. The initial section of the Via Latina is now called Via di Porta Latina. Both roads eventually led to Capua, the Appia Way running near the Tyrrhenian coast, while the Via Latina followed an inland route, crossing the Salto and Liri river valleys.

The square is named for the second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius, who, legend has it, often visited the nearby Camene Valley to hold secret trysts with the nymph Egeria. In the traffic island in the middle of the square is a small round domed structure with three niches, dating to the 11th-12th century. This was probably a copy of a *compitum*, a Roman shrine dedicated to the lares compitales, divinities which were worshipped at crossroads because they protected travellers. To the north-west, not far from Piazzale Numa Pompilio, but outside the boundary of the Park, rise the majestic ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, while at the end of the Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, ensconced in the narrow valley between the Palatine and Aventine Hills, are the remains of the Circus Maximus. On the hill to the east of the point in which you are standing is the villa of the famous Italian comedy actor Alberto Sordi.

### 👁 Visit Duration

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2 min.

### 📍 Address

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Piazzale Numa Pompilio - Roma (RM)

### 🚶 How to get

From METRO LINE B station CIRCO MASSIMO walk for 12 minutes, alternatively take the BUS 118 to PORTA SAN SEBASTIANO/NUMA POMPILIO stop.



## Church of S. Cesareo de Appia

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### Roma / Place to visit - Churches

The church of San Cesareo de Appia, which, in the 16th century was also called San Cesareo in Palatio, because mistakenly identified with the no longer existing oratory on the Palatine dedicated to Saint Caesarius, has very ancient origins: the first church was built there in the 8th century, featuring a single nave and two small apses (in the Middle Ages it was also known as the church of San Cesareo in Turrim, with reference to a nearby tower, which has since disappeared). This unusual ground plan was altered, possibly during the reign of Boniface VIII between 1294 and 1303, when a narthex was added and the nave enlarged and provided with a single larger apse, instead of the two previous smaller ones. The present appearance of the church, which features many interesting similarities with the nearby church of SS. Nereo e Achilleo, dates to the reign of pope Clement VIII, when Cardinal Baronio commissioned important works in view of the Jubilee of 1600; the floor was raised and a new facade built, featuring a pediment, pilasters and large windows in the upper part, and an aedicular door in the lower part. Inside, the Cosmatesque altar, ciborium, bishop's chair and ambo were redesigned and a cycle of frescoes commissioned from the painter Cavalier d'Arpino with scenes from the life of St. Caesarius, martyr of Terracina.

In the 1930s, some extensive surveys carried out beneath the floor of the church led to the discovery of ancient baths dated to the 2nd century AD, consisting of a large rectangular room with brick walls clad with marble slabs and black and white mosaics on the floor, one of which depicted the god Neptune riding on a chariot and the Nereids, probably belonging to an important Roman house, in an area inhabited, in ancient times, by several important senatorial families (*Aradii Rufinii*, related to members of the *gens Valeria*).

### 🕒 Info

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Open to the public by reservation only. Call 338 4916838.

### 👁️ Visit Duration

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5 min.

### 📍 Address

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Via di Porta San Sebastiano 2 - Roma (RM)

### 🚗 How to get

From METRO LINE B station COLOSSEO take the BUS 118 to S.SEVERIANO/NUMA POMPILIO stop.



## House of Cardinal Bessarion

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### Roma / Place to visit - Casali

Just south of the junction between Via di Porta di San Sebastiano and Via di Porta Latina, attached to the Church of San Cesareo, is the 15th century villa of cardinal Bessarion, a humanist scholar of Byzantine origins. The house, together with the Church of San Cesareo, belonged to the Diocese of Tusculum, of which he was bishop.

Appointed cardinal by pope Eugene IV, the scholarly prelate played a leading role in the discussions for the reunification of the western (Catholic) and eastern (Orthodox) churches.

The building was erected over ancient or medieval foundations. Two Roman tombs have been discovered there, over which a house was built, which was later converted into a hospital, at the beginning of the 14th century, and which then became a monastery. The house's current appearance dates back to the mid-15th century, when the elegant loggia facing the road was added.

### 🕒 Info

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**Aperto:**

Sabato e domenica

**Chiuso:**

25 dicembre, 1 gennaio, 1 maggio

*Prenotazione obbligatoria allo 060608.*

*Ingresso consentito solo a gruppi accompagnati - max 15 persone a visita.*

### 👁️ Visit Duration

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30 min.

### 📍 Address

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Via di Porta di San Sebastiano 8 - Roma (RM)

**🚶 How to get**

From METRO LINE B station COLOSSEO take the BUS 118 to PORTA SAN SEBASTIANO/NUMA POMPILIO stop, alternatively from METRO LINE B station CIRCO MASSIMO walk for 1 km along Viale Terme di Caracalla.



## The Oratory of the Seven Sleepers

### Roma / Place to visit - Churches

This site, located at number 7 of Via di Porta San Sebastiano, just beyond the church of S. Cesareo but on the opposite side of the street, is inside an estate owned by the Pallavicini family and features the remains of a number of structures dating from Roman to Medieval times, with different functions, superimposed over the centuries. The oldest remains date back to the mid or late Republican period and are the bases of two large tombs facing on Via Appia; in the Julio-Claudian period the two tombs were demolished to make place for a *columbarium*, a brick building with niches to store cinerary urns, entered via a small side street from the Appian Way; the most monumental remains are those of a brick building, dating to the beginning of the 3rd century AD, thought to have been a bathhouse, perhaps the *balneum Bolani* mentioned in several literary sources and inscriptions. Here you may also see a pool with a mosaic floor, two stone thresholds and a floor mosaic depicting fighting athletes.

At a certain point in time this large Imperial-era building, four ground-floor rooms of which have been preserved, was used to house a small Christian church, with a barrel-vaulted ceiling, an apse and frescoed walls. On the end wall, in a lunette, is a bust of Christ Blessing flanked by hosts of angels, while the small apse features an image of the Archangel Gabriel. In the bottom corners of the lunette appear the kneeling figures of the two patrons who commissioned the artwork, named, in an inscription that has since been lost, as Beno de Rapiza and his wife Maria Macellaria, who also financed the frescoes in the lower basilica of S. Clemente in Rome. The wall paintings have been dated to between the end of the 11th and the early 12th century. The longer walls of the hall were also decorated with frescoes, only faded traces of which can be seen today. The church was originally dedicated to the Archangel Gabriel, according to the earliest existing source that mentions the oratory.

Mention of a dedication to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, instead, appears for the first time only in 1757, in an account by Alberto Cassio of the restoration work commissioned by pope Clement XI Albani, in 1710, to reopen the church to the faithful, in which he speaks of an "early veneration" of the Seven Sleepers around a "chapel". Unfortunately, we know nothing about the establishment of this cult. According to the earliest versions of the story of these Eastern saints, during the persecutions by the Roman emperor Decius (AD 249-251), seven young men of Ephesus retired to a mountain cave to pray, where they fell asleep, but their hiding place was discovered and the emperor ordered the mouth of the cave to be sealed, after which they were thought to have died and were venerated as martyrs. About two centuries later, during the reign of the emperor Theodosius II in Constantinople (408-450), in the midst of heated theological discussions about the resurrection of the body in the day of judgement, a landowner of Ephesus, acting through divine inspiration, led the Bishop to the sealed cave of the martyrs, knocked down the wall and found the sleepers inside, who awoke, imagining that they had slept but one day. After being informed of this prodigy, Theodosius ordered the construction of a church on the site of the miracle.

The cult of the Seven Sleepers then spread throughout the Eastern Christian world, eventually reaching Rome and the West, where the presence of an Oratory dedicated to them in such an outlying part of the city could be linked to a tradition according to which the martyrs had subsequently been buried inside the basilica of S. Sebastiano on the Appian Way. The church was rediscovered in 1875 by Mariano Armellini, who wrote a study on it. At the beginning of the 20th century, Tomassetti found that it was being used as a cheese storeroom, which new function had prompted the drilling of holes through the walls to put up shelving, seriously damaging the frescoes. The building and frescoes were finally restored only in the early 1960s.

**⚠ Not open to visitors**

**👁 Visit Duration**

60 min. cc.

**📍 Address**

Via di Porta San Sebastiano - Roma (RM)

**🚶 How to get**

From METRO LINE B station CIRCO MASSIMO walk for 12 minutes, alternatively take the BUS 118 to PORTA SAN SEBASTIANO/NUMA POMPILIO stop.



## Tomb of the Scipios

### Roma / Place to visit - Tombs

At about 300 metres south of Piazzale Numa Pompilio, at 9 Via di Porta San Sebastiano, is the famous Tomb of the Scipios, a monumental tomb belonging to one of the most famous aristocratic families of ancient Rome, which was re-opened to the public at the end of 2011.

The tomb was built on a road linking the Via Appia Antica and the Via Latina, undoubtedly after the construction of the Via Appia. It is one of the most famous and important tombs of the Republican period and even served as model for the tombs built, later on, by other aristocratic Roman families outside the Porta Capena gate. Nearby was the so-called "Temple of the Storms", which is mentioned by Ovid but has not yet been found or even located, and which was probably built by the son of Scipio Barbatus in 259 BC, outside the Porta Capena gate.

The tomb was cut into a tuff ledge, on a square plan with galleries, while niches were cut into the walls to house about thirty sarcophagi, corresponding to about four or five generations of the family. At the end of the main gallery was the sarcophagus of the founder, Scipio Barbatus, who served as consul in 298 BC, a copy of which is displayed there today (the original is in the Vatican Museums). The type of sarcophagus, in the shape of an altar and painted, bears witness to the importance of the deceased, clearly the founder of the tomb.

We do not know how the facade of the tomb must have looked, although it was certainly given a monumental appearance after the mid-2nd century BC, when a second, smaller, burial chamber was opened. Cicero and other authors tell us that the tomb contained statues, both of the members of the family and of the poet Ennius, a dear friend of Scipione Africanus. The inscriptions, either painted or engraved on the sarcophagi, besides naming the deceased also mention their feats and careers, and constitute an extremely important source for reconstructing the political history of the 2nd century BC.

### Info

Entry allowed only for accompanied groups with reservation required at 0039 060608. Max 12 people at a time.

### Visit Duration

30 min.

### Address

Via di Porta San Sebastiano 9 - Roma (RM)

### How to get

From METRO LINE B station CIRCO MASSIMO take the BUS 118 to PORTA S. SEBASTIANO / SEPOLCRO DEGLI SCIPIONI stop.

### Audioguide



Scan the QRCode to access the Listen to the audioguide



## Porta San Sebastiano

### Roma / Place to visit - Gates

When the Aurelian Walls were built in the 3rd century AD, a gate was opened here to allow the passage of the Via Appia, about one Roman mile south of the demolished Porta Capena. Initially called Porta Appia, in the Middle Ages its name was changed to Porta San Sebastiano, being the gate through which pilgrims left the city on their way to the catacombs dedicated to the martyred saint Sebastian.

The gate still features its two impressive defence towers, now hosting the Museum of the Walls, operated by the local authority of Rome. The present appearance of the gate, however, is the result of the restoration work carried out by the emperor Honorius in the early 5th century (AD 401-402), during which the two original archways were merged into one and the upper walkway was covered over, creating a second open walkway further up.

The museum contains an interesting exhibition and offers the possibility of walking along a stretch of the ancient covered walkway. The so-called "Arch of Drusus", several metres from the gate and the Museum, is one of the arches of the Aqua Antoniniana, an aqueduct which also crossed the Via Appia.

### Services

- Accessible area
- Drinking water
- Info point
- Restroom

### Info

**Opening hours:**  
9.00 - 14.00

**Closing days:**  
Monday, 25 December, 1 January, 1 May

*The ticket office closes ½ hour before the closing time*

### Visit Duration

30 min.

### Address

Via di Porta San Sebastiano 18 - Roma (RM)

### How to get

From METRO LINE B station COLOSSEO take BUS 118 to PORTA SAN SEBASTIANO stop

### Audioguide



Scan the QRCode to access the Listen to the audioguide