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VIA APPIA. REGINA VIARUM

“We covered it with bypasses, car parks, supermarkets, ploughing fields, quarries, and steelworks. We barred it with gates, disguised it with a hundred other names, and sometimes we attacked it with pickaxes harder than Isis would do [...]. But it stubbornly resisted. It obstinately indicated a direction to the heart of the Mediterranean; it sent us signals [...]. She was begging for something [...] simple and modest. To be [...] travelled, to be lived. Thus, one day, a bunch of explorers [...] set out to walk it all over again, from start to end across 612 km over 29 days and approximately one million steps. Their journey [...] ended on 13 June 2015, some 2327 years to the day its construction began.”

Appia. The Long Road from Rome, Paolo Rumiz

Nearly 10 years have passed since Paolo Rumiz embarked on his journey along the Via Appia, whose construction started in 312 B.C. based on an astonishing engineering design including bridges, viaducts, and tunnels across vast expanses of water and swamps, and through mountains for 500 km along an extremely rational route. This vital artery was notable for its innovative roadbed, designed for stability and drainage, as well as its pavements and regularly spaced post stations, which offered accommodations, small spas, and horse exchange points. Milestones were placed along the sides to mark distances on this road, conceived as a *via publica*, i.e., toll-free, then gradually extended from Rome to Brindisi. Yet, that was not the end of the journey. Indeed, it marked the first step towards the Mediterranean and the East. That world used to gaze toward a distant horizon – to our modern eyes, that world is now fading, obscured by wars and the shipwrecks of migrants denied salvation at sea. The *Regina Viarum*, as the poet Statius called it, still calls to be travelled 2,300 years later, longing to once again connect peoples and cultures.



SERIAL CULTURAL HERITAGE
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CRITERIA: It was originally conceived as a strategic road for military conquest, advancing towards the East and Asia Minor. The Via Appia later enabled the cities it connected to grow, and new settlements emerged, facilitating agricultural production and trade. This property is an ensemble of engineering works, illustrating the advanced technical skill of Roman engineers.



“Quitting great Rome, Aricia welcomed first me in a sorry inn: Heliodorus, nursed in Greek and rhetoric, consorting me. To Forum Appii next. A den, to be detested, of brokers and sailors vile. We did this in two days, but rank and file More lightly laden do these two in one. The Appian way is not a dreary one.”

The most famous journey along the Via Appia is the one narrated by Horace in the 5th satire, Book 1. In the spring of 37 B.C., the poet accompanied Maecenas on a diplomatic mission on behalf of Octavian and narrated the adventures of their two-week expedition.

Leaving Rome, Horace and his fellows stop at **1 Aricia** and **2 Forum Appii**, preserving remains of the ancient Roman village. From there, a navigable canal leads to Terracina. The journey is uncomfortable: the overcrowded boats, pulled by mules and driven by drunken boatmen, navigate through swarms of mosquitoes and swamp frogs. In the late morning, they have breakfast in **3 Terracina**, beneath the imposing Temple of Jupiter Anxur, which still stands today in a spectacular location. They then move on to **4 Fondi**, where a local politician greets them in grand style, but his vain airs only cause Horace and his fellows to mock him. They stop in **5 Mamurra**, now Formia, as guests of Murena, Maecenas’ brother-in-law. The following day, they reach **6 Sinuessa**, where Horace’s close

friends, including the poet Virgil, join them. After their lunch at an inn, they all set off together towards **7 Capua**, where Maecenas plays ball, while Horace, suffering from an eye problem, and Virgil, dealing with poor digestion, prefer to rest. The next day, they stop in **8 Caudio**, now Montesarchio, and then in **9 Benevento**. There, a thoughtful innkeeper nearly sets the place on fire while cooking thrushes on a spit. As the flames rise to the roof, the masters, servants, and the innkeeper scramble to extinguish the fire, all while holding onto their plates to save dinner. The following day brings an unpleasant journey, with a strong headwind and a stop in **10 Trevico**, at an inn filled with eye-burning smoke. Here, waiting in vain for a girl who promised him her graces, Horace

falls asleep and is trapped in an erotic dream. A carriage takes the fellows 24 miles along an alternative route, the *Via Minucia*, towards a village that remains unnamed, possibly Ascoli Satriano – Horace doesn’t explain why, though it was probably clear to readers at the time. Here, water is so scarce that it’s sold, but the bread is so good that people stock up on it. In **11 Canosa**, by contrast, the bread is as hard as stone. After a rainy journey, they finally reach **12 Ruvo**, exhausted. A bumpy road takes them to **13 Bari** and then to **14 Egnatia**; where they mock a priest who tried to convince them that incense in the temple burned without flame. **15 Brindisi** marks both the end of the journey and the conclusion of the long tale.



ONE ROAD, MANY LIVES

“Ms. Letizia, I couldn’t have answered the question you asked me last night and explained the reason for my curiosity because, even if we had been alone, I certainly wouldn’t have been able to do so in that very moment, so unexpectedly that question coming from your mouth shook me up, and my colleague’s taunt brought me back to reality.”

Excerpts from the letters by Ugo H. to Letizia L. dated 30 September 1929 and found on a lead pipe buried under the Doric Tomb in 1999.

A 500 km straight line that cuts across Italy in the most rational way possible, travelled by merchants, armies, and adventurers for as long as 2,300 years. This is the Via Appia. So many stories have played out on its stones – the History made by politicians, economists, and conquerors, and the personal history of all those who have walked this road and made it a part of their lives over the centuries. The small church of *Domine Quo Vadis* marks the spot where, according to Christian tradition, the Apostle Peter fleeing persecution had a vision of Jesus. “Lord, where are you going?” Peter asks. “I am going to Rome to be crucified again,” Jesus replies. Peter then understands that his destiny is to face martyrdom in the name of his faith. In 71 B.C., the Roman army defeated Spartacus and his army of 6,000 rebellious slaves – all of them were crucified along the Via Appia, one every 35 meters across 200 km from Capua to Rome. At the 35th mile, near Cisterna di Latina, the remains

of one of the post stations that stood at regular intervals on the Appian Way are visible; they were sorts of roadside inns ahead of their time, where horses would be changed, dust and tiredness could be shaken off in small spas, meals were served, and a room could be taken for sleeping. At Tre Tavernae post, where the Via Appia entered the Pontine Marshes, St Paul on his way to Rome was greeted by a group of Roman Christians who had come to meet him: “After three months, we set sail in a ship of Alexandria which had wintered in the island, whose figurehead was ‘The Twin Brothers’. Touching at Syracuse, we stayed there three days. From there we circled around and arrived at Rhegium. After one day, a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli, where we found brothers, and were entreated to stay with them for seven days. So we came to Rome. From there the brothers, when they heard of us, came to meet us as far as The Market of Appius and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage” (*Acts*, 28:15). This is not just about ancient history: in 1999, excavations along the initial stretch near the Doric Tomb revealed two lead cylinders bearing the date of 30 September 1929. Inside were some photographs and letters about the love affair of Ugo, a married man, and Letizia, a young unmarried woman. They were colleagues and their letters, spanning three years, recount a passion as intense as it was unacceptable to the society of the time. This ill-fated affair was sealed in a time capsule and hidden in a place that perhaps held significance for them. Since their discovery, the letters of Ugo and Letizia are preserved in a display case at the Capo di Bove Archaeological Complex, near the spot where they were found.



«WE STUDIED THE ANCIENT ROMANS AT SCHOOL. SO, CAN YOU TELL ME WHY THEY WERE SO FAMOUS? FOR THE COLOSSEUM? FOR THE CENTURIONS? FOR SUPPLI? FOR THEIR ROADS! THEY USED TO RUN AS A SPIDER'S WEB ACROSS THEIR TERRITORIES. THEY STARTED FROM ROME AND REACHED EVERY PLACE! I WOULD HAVE GONE FOR SUPPLI - I HAVE GRANDMA'S ONES IN MY BACKPACK.»

This dialogue opens the adventures of the three explorers in the comic strip *Gli Esploratori dell'Appia perduta* by Gud. You can start your personal exploration at the **1 Column** marking the first of the 335 miles (540 km) running from Rome to Brindisi. Here starts the Via Appia, the longest straight road in Italy, never deviating for 90 km, all the way to Terracina. Along this ancient route, a second stop is due at the **2 Church of Domine Quo Vadis**, Latin for "Lord, where are you going?". According to Christian tradition, it was where the Apostle Peter had a vision of Jesus while fleeing Rome to escape Nero's persecution.

Peter is said to have asked, "where are you going, Lord?" to which Jesus replied, "I am going to Rome to be crucified again." Understanding the message, Peter returned to Rome to face martyrdom for the good of the Church. Inside are two footprints etched in stone believed to be those of Jesus. The **3 Catacombs of Saint Callixtus** date back to the early period of Christianity and served as the official cemetery of the Church of Rome in the 3rd century A.D. Millions of Christians were buried here, including 16 popes and dozens of martyrs. Just a tip: stay close to your group and guides during the visit – getting lost in the 20 km of tunnels is both easy and dangerous! Once back into the daylight, go for the **4 Mausoleum of Cecilia Metella**, built for a noble Roman matron, possibly the daughter-in-law of Marcus Licinius Crassus, the man who defeated Spartacus and his army of 6,000 rebellious slaves fighting for freedom in 71 B.C. Crassus ordered their crucifixion along the Via Appia, placing one of them every 35 meters for over 200 km. In the 14th century, the Mausoleum of Cecilia Metella was incorporated into a tower as part of a castle built by the Caetani family. Today, visitors can watch a video mapping presentation at the Castrum Caetani in which Cecilia Metella herself tells the story of her mausoleum – 3D viewers are also available to see what the castrum looked like in the Middle Ages. Our final stop is **5 Villa dei Quintili**, the largest and most luxurious villa in the Roman countryside that was the property of two brothers, both senators, who were killed by Emperor Commodus. After their deaths, he took possession of the residence and even spent his holidays there.



KIDS



VIA APPIA: REGINA VIARUM in books

Reading suggestions to learn everything about Via Appia.

• **Satire I.5**, Quintus Horatius Flaccus (1st century B.C.). In Satire I.5, Horace describes the *Iter Brundisinum*, the journey he made from Rome to Brindisi in 37 B.C. along with the poet Virgil, Maecenas, and other outstanding characters.

• **Silvae II.2**, Publius Papinius Statius (1st century A.D.). Statius coined the expression "*Regina Viarum*" for the Via Appia, in verse 12 of *Silvae* II.2.

• **Corinne or Italy**, Madame de Staël (1807). Madame de Staël was the daughter of the minister of finance of King Louis XVI of France. The writer and *socialite* authored what is considered the first novel of 19th-century women's literature, a work inspired by her own life. The protagonist of *Corinne* visits the Via Appia with her lover: "She led him through the gates to the old Appian Way, whose traces are marked in the heart of the country by ruins on the right and left, for many miles beyond the walls".

• **Pictures from Italy**, Charles Dickens (1846). When Dickens visited Italy with his family, he was already a renowned novelist. In 1845, he was in Rome and had the chance to walk along the Via

Appia: "One day, we walked out, a little party of three, to Albano, fourteen miles distant; possessed by a great desire to go there, by the ancient Appian way, long since ruined and overgrown. We started at half-past seven in the morning, and within an hour or so, were out upon the open Campagna. For twelve miles, we went climbing on, over an unbroken succession of mounds, and heaps, and hills, of ruin".

• **Dinanzi alle terme di Caracalla**, Giosuè Carducci (1877). One of the best-known *Barbarian Odes*, written in April 1877, closes with an image of the Via Appia: "Febbre, m'ascolta. Gli uomini novelli / quindi respingi e lor picciole cose: / religioso è questo orror: la dea/ Roma qui dorme. / Poggiata il capo al Palatino augusto, / tra 'l Celio aperte e l'Aventin le braccia, / per la Capena i forti omeri stende / a l'Appia via".

• **Egle**, Giosuè Carducci (1892). Another poem from Carducci's *Barbarian Odes* paints a beautiful portrait of the Via Appia in winter: "Stanno nel grigio verno pur d'edra e di lauro vestite / ne l'Appia trista le ruinoso tombe. / Passan pe 'l ciel turchino che stilla ancor da la pioggia / avanti al sole lucide nubi bianche".

• **Rome**, Émile Zola (1896). The French writer arrived in Rome in 1894 and stayed for several weeks. It was when *Rome*, the second novel in *The Three Cities* trilogy was born. Zola expresses his admiration for the Via Appia through

the words of Pierre Froment, the young abbot and protagonist of the book experiencing a sense of awe in that place: "Ah! that Appian Way, that ancient queen of the high roads, crossing the Campagna in a long straight line with rows of proud tombs on either hand – to Pierre it seemed like a triumphant prolongation of the Palatine. He there found the same passion for splendour and domination, the same craving to eternise the memory of Roman greatness in marble and daylight".

• **Appia. The Long Road From Rome**, Paolo Rumiz (2016). In June 2015, Rumiz completed a series of trips along the Via Appia with Riccardo Carnovalini, a professional trekker, Alessandro Scillitani, filmmaker, and Irene Zambon, architect. The journey was first recounted in episodes in the daily newspaper *La Repubblica*, and later collected to help the work of a technical committee especially set up for the recovery and enhancement of the queen of all roads.

Children's books:

• **Gli esploratori dell'Appia perduta**, Gud (2020). Emperors, popes, directors, the best-off – among the millions who have travelled the Via Appia throughout its millennial history, someone may have lost a treasure. The three friends protagonists of this comic strip are determined to find it.