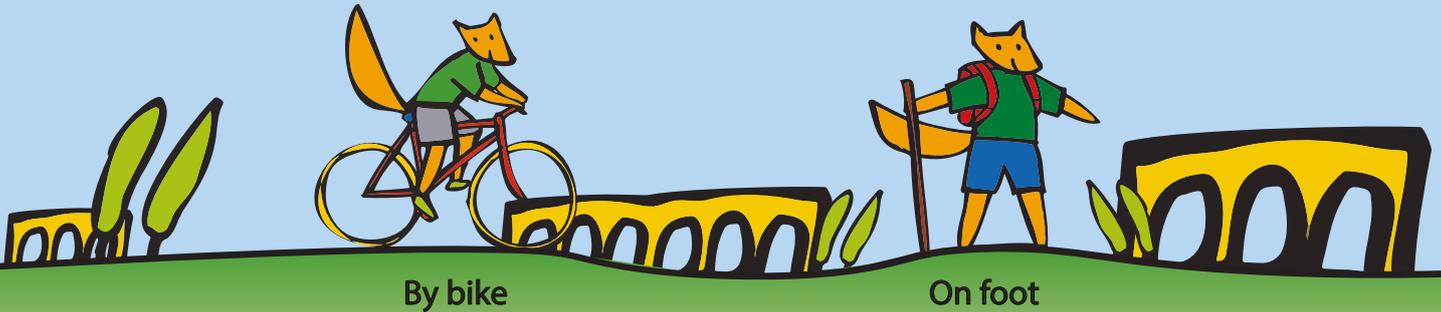


# Area of the Seven Aqueducts

## A Feast for the Eyes That Should Not Be Missed



By bike

On foot

Bounded by the Cinecittà and Quarto Miglio (Fourth Mile) neighborhoods, the Via Appia Nuova, and the Via Tuscolana, and crossed by the path of the ancient Latin Way, the area of the aqueducts represents the vestiges of a section of the Roman countryside that originally connected the Alban Hills to the gates of the city.

A literal crossroads of the Roman water supply system, the area takes its name precisely from the massive ruins of the network of ancient aqueducts that made Rome famous. Six of the eleven aqueducts pass through this area, with a combined flow equivalent to 13 m<sup>3</sup> (3434 US gallons) of water per second in the age of the city's greatest splendor. To this can be added the Felice Aqueduct, built under papal authority during the Renaissance and still used today for irrigation.

Like roads and sewers, the aqueducts were civil engineering projects on which the Romans showered particular attention, in order both to meet the hygienic needs of the inhabitants of the empire's major cities and to assert their own culture: in fact, they had to fulfill the requirements of *firmitas*, *venustas*, and *utilitas* ("solidity, beauty, and utility").

Much of the channels are not visible, in part because they travel mostly underground, and in part because some of the more recent aqueducts have been built onto the surface structures of the ancient ones, such as the Felice Aqueduct which follows the route of the ancient Marcian Aqueduct.

The area is still dominated by the majestic arches of the Claudian Aqueduct which, together with the lower arches of the Felice, the age-old trees, the ruins of ancient suburban villas like the Villa delle Vignacce, and the 18th-century farmhouses, lend the entire district an evocative appearance.

The proposed itinerary follows the main path which winds through the two rows of aqueducts from where the area intersects the Quadraro neighborhood to the opposite side of Via delle Capannelle.

### 1) Villa delle Vignacce

On Via Lemonia (towards Via del Quadraro), on an artificial embankment parallel to the road, are the ruins of one of the largest villas of the southeastern suburbs of Rome, the Villa delle Vignacce ("Villa in the Rough Vineyards").

The complex's two main building phases are evident in the two facing techniques: tuff nodules with brick mortices of the 2nd century AD and alternating bands of terracotta and tuff bricks of the 4th century. Recent excavations in the area, however, have revealed five different periods of use, from the 1st to the 6th century AD, involving numerous renovations and changes in function.



The bath complex in the villa included a large circular hall with domed ceiling surrounded by other, smaller rooms with apses; here was discovered one of the earliest examples of empty amphorae (terracotta transport jars) inserted into cement to lighten a structure, a building technique that became widespread during the age of Constantine (early 4th century). (The most significant example of the technique is in the dome of the Mausoleum of Helena along the Casiline Way, called “Tor Pignattara” because of the amphorae —pignatte in Roman dialect—visible in the damaged dome). The stamps on the bricks and the lead water pipes found in the villa suggest that the complex belonged to Quintus Servilius Pudens, a major brick manufacturer in the age of Hadrian (r. AD 117-138).

## 2) Cistern of the Villa delle Vignacce

Not far from the villa, next to the Marcian Aqueduct (at this point replaced by the Felice Aqueduct), stands a two-story cistern (reservoir) with a trapezoidal plan, two rows of semi-circular niches, and mixed facing of tuff nodules and brick mortices which provided water to the Villa delle Vignacce complex.



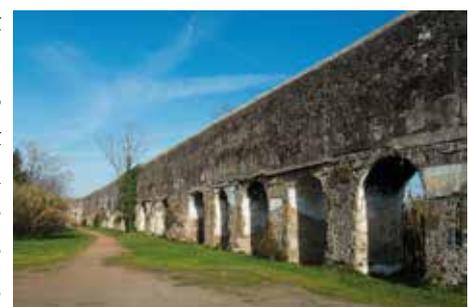
## 3) Old Anio Aqueduct

Built between 272 and 270 BC and financed with the spoils from the war against Pyrrhus of Epirus (280-275 BC), this is the oldest aqueduct in the area. The channel was built underground with square blocks of tuff covered by two slabs of limestone set in a tent-like position. The Old Anio, which originated at the Anio River, turned at Capannelle towards Rome, reaching Porta Maggiore using only the underground channel. Its route in this area (not visible) runs east of the other aqueducts, more or less beneath Via Lomonica, except in the vicinity of the Villa delle Vignacce, where a short section of it runs between the Marcian and Claudian Aqueducts.



## 4) Felice Aqueduct

The Felice Aqueduct, whose name derives from the first name of the pope who built it between 1585 and 1590, Sixtus V (Felice Peretti), destroyed most of the arches of the ancient Marcian Aqueduct and assumed its exact route. The waters run in an underground channel from the springs at Pantano Borghese along the Praenestine Way until the “Roma Vecchia” Farmhouse, where the elevated channel begins, reaching Domenico Fontana’s Moses Fountain in Largo Santa Susanna.



## 5) Watch-tower on a Cistern

Only the eastern corner remains of a rectangular 13th century tower built with the typical Medieval technique employing small blocks of peperino tuff mixed with re-used fragments of marble and brick, as well as a brick relieving arch. The structure stands on a square Roman basaltic lava cistern with side buttresses and vaulted ceiling. The tower, built right on a branch of the Marrana dell’Acqua Mariana, was probably used for monitoring the channel.



## 6) Claudian and New Anio Aqueducts

Construction of both aqueducts began under Caligula in AD 38 and ended under Claudius in AD 52. The Claudian Aqueduct was fed by a spring in the Anio River valley close to the spring that fed the Marcian Aqueduct. At Capannelle, where the so-called piscine limarie ("settling basins") are located, the channel emerged from the ground and gradually rose, running on continuous arches for almost 10 km (6 miles) to the center of Rome. In the area of the modern Via del Quadraro the arches reached their maximum height



along the route, about 28 m (92 ft). The building materials include peperino tuff, other tuffs, and travertine; beginning in the reign of Hadrian (AD 117-138) the arches were strengthened from below with brick reinforcements. At the point where the channel emerged from the ground a second one was added on top for the New Anio Aqueduct, named to distinguish it from the original (Old) Anio Aqueduct. Built with bricks, the New Anio was the highest of Rome's aqueducts, and several minor aqueducts branched off of it, including the one providing water to the Villa of the Quintilii (Itinerary 2).

## 7) Chamber Tomb

Near the railway stand the remains of a Republican-era chamber tomb with square plan: round cement and tuff core, walls faced with reticulate tuff chunks and tuff brick mortices. Beside the door are visible arcosolia (arched recesses) on three sides and smaller niches for the cinerary urns.



## 8) "Roma Vecchia" Farmhouse

Between miles IV and V of the Ancient Latin Way, between the Claudian and Marcian Aqueducts, is the "Roma Vecchia" Farmhouse, a group of buildings concentrated around an inner courtyard. The main structure, dated to the 13th century, is made with blocks of peperino tuff, chunks of basaltic lava, and re-used marble fragments, and it incorporates the ruins of Roman-era buildings. The name of the estate on which the structure lies, "Roma Vecchia" ("Old Rome"), derives from the nearby ruins of the Sette Bassi Villa, which appeared so large to 18th-century minds as to be considered a city in itself.

The inner courtyard houses important archaeological artifacts that were recovered in the area between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century and collected by the estate's owners, the Torlonia family.

## 9) Marcian, Tepula, and Julian Aqueducts

Behind the "Roma Vecchia" Farmhouse there is a section of low arches made with parallelepiped blocks of peperino and other tuffs belonging to the Marcian Aqueduct. Brought to Rome in 144 BC by the praetor Quintus Marcius Rex, the Marcian Aqueduct ran for 91 km (57 mi) from a spring in the upper valley of the Anio River, between Arsoli and Agosta. In the late Republican period, in order to reduce the costs of construction, two new aqueduct channels were added above the Marcian's, the Tepula ("Tepid") in 125 BC and the Julian in 33 BC, both of which tapped springs in the foothills at Grottaferrata and Marino. At "Roma Vecchia" the Marcian's channel emerged above ground and traveled on arches for about 9 km (5.5 mi), reaching Porta Maggiore while supporting the channels of the Tepula and Julian. In the 16th century the Marcian's arches were destroyed and its pillars re-used as the foundation for the Felice Aqueduct desired by Pope Sixtus V.

### 10) Marrana dell'Acqua Mariana

In 1122 Pope Callixtus II built this artificial ditch to provide water to mills and to irrigate the kitchen gardens belonging to the Basilica of St. John Lateran, tapping the waters of the ancient Tepula and Julian Aqueducts. Its name derives from the natural stream located uphill, which ran into an estate called "Maranus" documented as early as the Middle Ages; the corrupted forms "marana" and "marrana" eventually came to indicate any ditch in the Roman suburbs. In this area the ditch originally ran parallel



to the aqueducts, using the paving of the Ancient Latin Way near the "Roma Vecchia" Farmhouse as the bed. In the 20th century the water was diverted into the Fosso del Calicetto, which empties into the Almo River.

Recently the Appia Antica Regional Park sponsored the recovery of a section of the original course and cleaned up the small artificial lake near "Roma Vecchia," using some of the overflow from the Felice Aqueduct.

### 11) Ancient Latin Way

On Via di Roma Vecchia, parallel to the arches of the Claudian Aqueduct and corresponding to the original course of the Marrana dell'Acqua Mariana, is a significant section of the paving of the ancient Latin Way, constructed in the second half of the 4th century BC over an older road used by the Etruscans in pre-Roman times to conquer Campania. Starting along with the Appian Way at Porta Capena in the Servian Wall, the Latin Way led to Capua.



### 12) Tomb

Further along on Via di Roma Vecchia stands a late Republican chamber tomb with rectangular plan, originally roofed with a vault; parts of the side walls faced with reticulate tuff chunks and tuff brick corner mortices are preserved. The presence of side buttresses indicates that the structure may have had a hydraulic function, as suggested by the English archaeologist Thomas Ashby at the beginning of the 20th century.



### 13) "Del Sellaretto" Track Maintenance House

At the point where Via di Roma Vecchia turns towards Via Tuscolana stands an historic track maintenance house, called "del Sellaretto," belonging to the railway line—the first one in the Papal State—built by Pope Pius IX and inaugurated on July 7, 1856. The house was abandoned when the Rome-Naples railway line was built in 1892, offering shorter travel times.



#### 14) Sette Bassi Villa

The Sette Bassi Villa is the largest villa in the Roman suburbs after the Villa of the Quintilii (Itinerary 2), with so great an expanse of ruins as to be considered a city in itself: for this reason the area was called "Roma Vecchia" ("Old Rome") in the 18th century. The villa, today adjacent to the route of the Via Tuscolana, was in antiquity located near mile VI of the Ancient Latin Way, to which it was connected by a diverticulum (secondary road). The residential section of the complex consists of three contiguous nuclei of buildings arranged along the sides of an enormous open area probably used as a garden. The structures were built in three distinct, but nearly contemporaneous, phases between AD 135 and 160 and were probably designed with a unified plan. Several buildings belonging to the villa's "rustic" section, intended for the complex's agricultural activities, lay to the northwest. In this area,



isolated from the other structures, in the modern farming property, there is a small brick temple with rectangular plan and elongated side walls forming a projecting body (in antis structure), dating to the end of the 2nd century AD. The complex was supplied with water by a private aqueduct on small arches, several of which are preserved, which branched off of the nearby Claudian or New Anio Aqueduct. The name "Sette Bassi," first documented in the early Middle Ages, probably derives from Septimius Bassus, praefectus urbi (urban prefect, a sort of primitive mayor of Rome) in the age of Septimius Severus (r. AD 193-211) and one of the villa's owners.

Authority: Archaeological Superintendency of Rome

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