

(ENGLISH TEXT)

Via Appia "Regina Viarum"

In the UNESCO ' s list for the Recognition as WORLD HERITAGE

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Description

Via Appia is the first and most important of the great roads built by the Ancient Romans and is, therefore, also known as "*regina viarum*". It was built towards the end of the IV century BC, in 312, to ensure swift and direct communication between Rome and Capua. According to the Roman historian Livy, it was built by the censor Appius Claudius Caecus and named after him.

The project reveals a surprisingly modern conception: by-passing all intermediate towns, the road is aimed straight at its goal. Outstanding feats of engineering, bridges, viaducts, galleries, ensured an unwaveringly straight course, across expanses of water, swamps and mountains; many of these works are practicable to this day.

Via Appia also provides evidence as to the revolution in road construction brought about by the Romans. Till then, roads were little more than dirt tracks that became impracticable for wheeled vehicles at every rainfall. The Romans conceived specific road beds, for stability and drainage, that were paved with close-fitting slabs of dressed basalt, thus ensuring viability in all weather conditions. This enabled them to build a vast network - state roads alone covered over 120,000 km - that remained intact for centuries and is still the backbone of the road systems of all the countries in the Mediterranean area.

Also the legal status of these roads is truly innovative. The Persians and the Egyptians had built roads, but the Romans went further, they built a widespread and structured road network which, unlike earlier roads, was not reserved for the travel of kings or of their armies; it was a public, toll-free, system destined to serve the rural and urban population. All the roads had sidewalks and milestones indicating the main distances and to further facilitate travel, there were post stations at regular intervals providing change of horses and accommodation. This highly efficient road system was used by the *cursus publicus*, the Roman postal service, to deliver the post in all the Empire's provinces and, more importantly, for the exchange of messages between the provinces and the Empire's capital city.

For the first 90 km Via Appia ran straight from Rome to Terracina and was flanked, for the last 28 km, by a canal collecting waters of the reclamation works; travellers could then change to boats instead of travelling in wagons or on horseback. After Terracina, the road swerved towards Fondi, across the towering gorges of Itri and then down to Formia, Minturno and Sinuessa (now, Mondragone); from there straight again towards Casilinum (modern Capua), on the river Volturno and then on to the ancient town of Capua (today, S. Maria Capua Vetere).

Via Appia was extended several times, as the Empire conquered the south of Italy; first up to Benevento, just after 268 BC, then across the Apennine Mountains up to Venosa and again up to Taranto. Finally, in the II century BC, it reached Brindisi, the main harbour for ships bound for Greece and the East. Over the years, the original course from Benevento to Brindisi was gradually substituted by a shorter, easier route across the region of Puglia until, at the beginning of the II century AD, the Emperor Trajanus turned this into a real alternative itinerary and gave it his name. The new Via Appia Traiana allowed travellers to go from Rome to Brindisi in 13-14 days covering a total of 365 miles, just under 540 km.

Thanks to constant maintenance, Via Appia, remained perfectly efficient for several centuries, until the Middle Ages, when the road went through a period of regression and abandon. In the XIV century, it became once again the main route of access to the South of Italy. Fully restored by the Popes and the Kings of Naples, the road was included by Napoleon among the routes he considered essential for his political and military activities. Via Appia is important in the history of architectural restoration for the many works aimed at reclaiming and restoring it, undertaken as of the XVI century.

Statements of authenticity and/or integrity .

For centuries, private citizens and illustrious personalities alike have been actively involved in the conservation and protection of Via Appia, which was certainly influenced also by the need to maintain the road in efficiency. Particularly important restoration works were performed at the beginning of the XIX century involving the more qualified artists and architects of the time. These works, carried out with a remarkably modern outlook and great scientific accuracy, gave rise to a proposal for a vast monumental park comprising Via Appia's entire course, from Rome to Brindisi. Although the project was never implemented and despite the absence of a general plan, the importance of the road itself and of its monuments was generally acknowledged so that its conservation is now assured through a number of restrictive measures, in accordance with the national legislation concerning cultural heritage, and through a number of parks created on large stretches of the road's course.

Comparison with other similar properties .

Via Appia outranges all the other Roman *viae publicae* because of its excellent state of conservation: the entire course, both the first tracing and the alternative itinerary built by Trajanus, are clearly identifiable, and so are the innumerable monuments and complexes that were built, in the course of several centuries, alongside the road itself. Furthermore, Via Appia plays a unique role in the framework of the Roman road network in that it induced the development of sites, ideas, works, testimonies and memories which, in the course of over 2300 years of history, formed a complex cultural environment, universally recognized as such by European and American writers, painters, poets and travellers who were undeniably marked by Via Appia and the adjacent territory areas.