

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

Circo Massimo

From Rome with Love

Robert and Karla

Photographed on site · Notes compiled for viewing

The Palatine Hill from the Circus Maximus

Location: Circus Maximus, Rome (looking northeast to the Palatine)



Framed by two stone pines: the open Circus Maximus, with the imperial palaces of the Palatine Hill — the Domus Augustana and the Severan Arches — rising beyond.



A wider view moments later: the long Severan Arcades and palace ruins along the crest of the Palatine, above the grassy Circus Maximus.

Description

Two evening views taken from a moving car across the Circus Maximus on 17 June. The broad flat field is the Circus Maximus itself, ancient Rome's great chariot-racing track. Rising on the hill beyond is not a free-standing amphitheatre but the southern flank of the Palatine Hill, crowned by the ruins of the imperial palace — the curved facade of the Domus Augustana and the tall brick Severan

Arches that the emperors raised out over the valley so they could watch the races below. Umbrella pines frame the scene in the golden evening light.

Inscription & Translation

No inscription — these are open landscape views. The named elements are the Circus Maximus (the field) and, on the Palatine above, the imperial palace: the Domus Augustana and the Severan Arches (Arcate Severiane).

Nothing to translate. One note on identification: the long row of arches here is often mistaken for the Colosseum, but the Colosseum stands on flat ground at the far north end of this valley — it does not rise on the wooded hill across the Circus. What is on the hill is the emperors' palace.

Date & Age

The Circus Maximus was monumentalised over many centuries (its track goes back to the Roman kings, with grand rebuildings under Caesar, Augustus and Trajan). The palaces above date from the Empire: the Flavian Palace (Domus Flavia and Domus Augustana) was built for Domitian about AD 81–96, and the Severan Arches were added under Septimius Severus (AD 193–211). The ruins you see are therefore roughly 1,800–1,950 years old.

Artist / Creators

Imperial Roman architecture rather than the work of one named artist. The Flavian Palace was designed for the emperor Domitian by his architect Rabirius (late 1st century AD); the Domus Severiana and its great arcades were built out over the hillside under the emperor Septimius Severus (early 3rd century AD). The Circus Maximus below was developed by many rulers across Rome's history.

Significance

This is the classic view of the Palatine — the hill that is the legendary cradle of Rome and the very source of the word 'palace.' From these terraces the emperors looked down on the chariot races in the Circus Maximus, the largest entertainment venue of the ancient world. The pairing in these photographs — the empty racetrack below and the ruined palace above — captures the heart of imperial Rome in a single frame.