

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

Castel Sant'Angelo

From Rome with Love

Robert and Karla

Photographed on site · Notes compiled for viewing

Plate 13

Castel Sant'Angelo (Hadrian's Mausoleum)

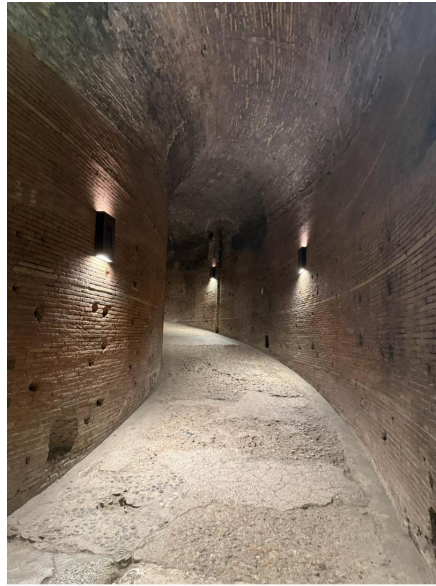
Location: Right bank of the Tiber, near the Vatican, Rome



The great brick drum of the mausoleum rising above the fortress walls, the bronze angel just visible on top.



The approach over the Ponte Sant'Angelo — the ancient Pons Aelius — lined with angels designed by Bernini, Saints Peter and Paul at its head.



The ancient spiral ramp (rampa elicoidale) that carried Hadrian's funeral procession up into the tomb.



The bare Roman core — massive masonry pocked with the holes that once anchored its marble facing.



The Sala Paolina, the frescoed grand hall of the papal apartments built for Pope Paul III.



The bronze Archangel Michael by Verschaffelt (1753) on the summit — the angel that gives the castle its name.

Description

A colossal cylindrical monument on the Tiber's right bank that has been, in turn, an emperor's tomb, a fortress, a papal refuge, a prison and now a museum. It began as the Mausoleum of Hadrian; in the Middle Ages it was crowned with a bronze angel and renamed for it. These views move from the outside in: the great drum and the statue-lined bridge, then the ancient spiral ramp and the bare Roman burial core, the richly frescoed papal apartments above, and finally the bronze archangel on the summit. The background below is drawn from the castle's own placards and verified sources.

Inscription & Translation

No single inscription features in these views. In antiquity the entrance hall held a colossal statue of the Emperor Hadrian, of which only the head survives — now in the Vatican Museums.

The building's Roman name was the Mausoleum of Hadrian (the 'Mole Adriana'). Its present name, 'Castle of the Holy Angel,' comes from the angel on its roof and the legend attached to it (see Significance).

Date & Age

Built between 123 and 139 AD by the Emperor Hadrian (architect Demetrianus) and completed in 139 — a year after Hadrian's death — by Antoninus Pius, so the core is about 1,890 years old and stands roughly 50 metres tall. The spiral ramp and burial core are original Roman work; the papal apartments are 16th-century; the bronze angel dates to 1753; and the building became Italy's national museum here in 1901.

Artist / Creators

Imperial Roman architecture, built for Hadrian. The papal apartments were frescoed in the 16th century — the Sala Paolina by Perino del Vaga and his workshop for Pope Paul III. The bronze

Archangel Michael (1753) is by the Flemish sculptor Peter Anton von Verschaffelt, replacing earlier statues, including a marble one of 1536 by Raffaello da Montelupo. The angels lining the bridge were designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and carved by his pupils (1668).

Significance

One of Rome's great survivors — Hadrian's tomb turned papal stronghold. Its name comes from 590 AD, when (by tradition) Pope Gregory the Great, leading a procession against the plague, saw the Archangel Michael sheathing his sword atop the mausoleum, taken as a sign the plague would end. Linked to the Vatican by the Passetto di Borgo — a fortified corridor built in 1277 — it sheltered popes in danger, most famously Clement VII during the Sack of Rome in 1527. Mausoleum, fortress, prison, treasury and refuge, it compresses nearly two thousand years of Roman history into a single round tower.

Rome from Castel Sant'Angelo

Location: The terraces of Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome



Looking down the Tiber: the river curves past the Ponte Vittorio Emanuele II, with the dome of St. Peter's rising at the right.



The Passetto di Borgo — the fortified corridor to the Vatican — runs toward the dome of St. Peter's.



Over the castle's gun-bastion and the umbrella pines toward the rooftops of Prati and the Janiculum hill.



The stone pines of the Parco Adriano gardens directly below the ramparts.

Description

From the castle's ramparts and rooftop terrace — about fifty metres up — the city opens out in every direction. These four views look across the Tiber and its bridges toward St. Peter's, along the Passetto di Borgo that runs to the Vatican, out over the castle's own gun-bastions to the southern hills, and down onto the umbrella pines of the gardens below. They were chosen from many overlapping photographs to show distinct vistas rather than repeat the same sweep.

Inscription & Translation

No inscription — these are open views. The landmarks worth naming are the dome of St. Peter's, the Passetto di Borgo, the Tiber and the Ponte Vittorio Emanuele II, and the wooded Janiculum hill.

Nothing to translate. A quick orientation: the dome that dominates the western skyline is Michelangelo's dome of St. Peter's, and the long arched wall reaching toward it is the Passetto di Borgo, the popes' covered escape route to the Vatican.

Date & Age

A terrace has crowned this building since antiquity, when the mausoleum already stood some 50 metres high. The panorama takes in monuments of every era at once — the ancient river crossings, the Renaissance dome of St. Peter's (completed in 1590), the medieval Passetto (1277), and the 19th-century embankments and bridges along the Tiber.

Artist / Creators

Not an artwork but a vantage point. Among the landmarks in view, the dome of St. Peter's is the work of Michelangelo (completed by Giacomo della Porta in 1590), and the Passetto di Borgo was built for Pope Nicholas III in 1277.

Significance

For centuries this was the highest secure vantage over the city and the approach to the Vatican — exactly why the popes valued both the castle and the Passetto that linked it to St. Peter's. Today it gives one of Rome's most famous panoramas, sweeping from St. Peter's across the river to the hills, and it is especially celebrated at sunset.