

“And those who once with unresisted sway
Gave armies, empire, every thing away;
For two poor chains, have long renounced the whole,
And only ask the Circus and the Dole.”

Gifford's Juv.

The great Circus was situated between the Palatine and the Aventine hills. A very inconsiderable trace of its ruins now alone remains. It was the work of Tarquinius Priscus, the fifth of the Roman Kings, but added to and completed by the last of them, Tarquinius the Proud. Whatever were the sins and vices of the latter, which cost him his kingdom, he is at all events entitled to the merit of having done much to advance and improve the city. To him is due the completion at least of one of the greatest and most useful works, and which tended much to the comfort and health of Rome, the Cloaca Maxima, though that also was commenced by Tarquinius Priscus. It still remains to vindicate its claim to that distinction, and is a lasting monument of Etruscan masonry and of the architectural skill of that early age. Its large open passage shews itself near the Circus Maximus; from that running under the Velabrum, it emptied into the Tiber where it is distinctly to be seen, near the Ponte Rotto, which occupies the site of the old Pons (Emilius).

The Velabrum lay between the Palatine and the River (its position is marked out by the modern Via di Georgis in Velabro). It was originally a low marshy piece of ground, through which the water flowed in a sluggish stream, but navigable for small boats.

Aut qua Velabri regio patet, ire solebat
Exiguus pulsa per vada linter aqua.

Tibul. lib. 2, El. 5.

Qua Velabra suo stagnabant flumine, qua que
Nauta per urbanas velificabat aquas.

Prop. lib. 4, El. 10.

After it was drained by Augustus it still retained its low character, and was a market place for provisions (Hor. 2 Sat. 3, 229), yet it seems to have been one of the streets through which the triumphal procession passed (Ovid Fast., lib. 6, 405), and Suetonius tells us that Cæsar, when he triumphed for his conquests in Gaul, as he passed through the Velabrum, was nearly thrown out of his chariot from the breaking of the axle. (Suet. Julius Cæsar, 37.)

Of all the ancient bridges which spanned the Tiber within the city, the only one still subsisting is the Pons Ælius, so called after the Emperor Hadrian, by whom it was built, who was of the Ælian family. It has, however, as might well be supposed, been renewed at later periods, though the original structure in great part still remains. At its extremity on the other side of the river was the grand Mausoleum, built by Hadrian, and in which he was afterwards buried. It is now the Castle of St. Angelo, a heavy circular tower, having been converted into a fortress by Belisarius, and as such has continued to the present time. From this bridge, leaving the castle on the right, the street leads to St. Peters and the Vatican. As, however, I do not intend to enter these, I shall invite you to recross the Tiber, but by a different bridge, lower down the stream, the Ponte Sisto, so called from Sixtus the XIV., by whom it was built, on the ruins of the old Pons Janiculensis at the foot of the northern part of the Janiculum hill. After passing it, close by the left hand, is the Spada Palace. Though it does not accord with my design to notice the interior of any modern building, I must beg you for a moment to look into