TOSCA – THE SITES

Sant'Andrea della Valle – ACT I

Victorien Sardou initially set his first act in the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale (pictured left) because it was surrounded by empty spaces through which Angelotti could have escaped.

Puccini made the decision to move his setting to Sant'Andrea della Valle (pictured right). This church is much closer to the Palazzo Farnese and the Castel Sant'Angelo, however, it is located in a developed and gentrified area, so it would have been more difficult for an escaped prisoner to elude notice.

Sant'Andrea della Valle is one of the great churches of Rome; the seat of a Cardinal-Prince. Its dome is second in size only to that of St. Peter's. The church was built in 1591, on land adjacent to the site of the Pompey's Theatre (where Julius Caesar was killed). In the church, there are four chapels, one decorated by Michelangelo, and none are named after the Attavanti family. None of the chapels are closed by a lockable grill, and there is no painting of either Mary Magdalene or the Temptation of Lazarus, such as those on which the fictional Cavaradossi is supposed to be working.

The Palazzo Farnese – ACT II

The Palazzo Farnese is admired as the handsomest palace of the high Renaissance in Rome. It was built — partly under the direction of Michelangelo — for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, later to become Pope Paul III. In 1731 Palazzo Farnese was bequeathed to the wife of Philippe de Bourbon, grandson of the French King Louis XIV. Their oldest child was given the title of King of

the Two Sicilies. In 1757 it passed to Ferdinand IV, husband of Marie Caroline (Queen of Naples and Sicily), and the palazzo became the seat of Bourbon authority in Rome. Under the French and the short-lived Roman Republic, it was ransacked and looted. In 1800, when the Bourbons regained control, it became the headquarters of Naselli, the Governor of Rome. In Victorien Sardou's *La Tosca*, Scarpia's offices were in the Castel Sant'Angelo, but in the opera his quarters would have been on the top floor of the Palazzo Farnese. In 1874 the palazzo was made into the residence of French ambassador to the new Kingdom of Italy, and between 1908 and 1911, it was purchased by the French Republic. It is still the site of the French Embassy.

The Castel Sant'Angelo – ACT III

The Castel Sant'Angelo was built between 135 and 139 as a mausoleum for the Emperor Hadrian and his successors. The last burial was in 211, and the ashes were scattered long ago. In 271 Hadrian's Tomb became a defensive work guarding the bridge over the Tiber, and in the fifth century, the mausoleum was converted to a regular fortress. It is said that the marble facings and the statues were probably destroyed by the Goths. There has been an angel at the top since 590, when Pope Gregory the Great saw the apparition of an archangel announcing the end of a plague. He erected a marble angel and renamed the fortress as the Castel Sant'Angelo. He built the circular ramp on which one reaches the upper stories today. This had a drawbridge half way up which still existed in 1800.

In the Middle Ages the Castel became the principal place of refuge for popes during attacks on the Vatican. In the fifteenth century it was connected with the Vatican by a long corridor, still seen today. When Rome was threatened in 1525, Pope Clement fled to the Castel Sant'Angelo with a guard of soldiers and a few favored cardinals, one of whom was pulled up in a basket just before the fortress was closed. During a summer-long siege, Clement, although in luxury, was

effectively a prisoner. Finally, in December, he made his escape disguised as a merchant.

The Castel also became a state prison as well as a papal residence, and during the Middle Ages, the people of Rome tried to destroy it as a hated symbol of oppression. Unlike the storming of the French Bastille, they failed; it was just too strong. Luxurious apartments for the popes and their families occupied the whole third floor. The quarters of Sardou's Scarpia may have been in one of them. Among the inhabitants of the castle during the Renaissance were members of the infamous Borgia family, including the beautiful Lucrezia, her evil brother Cesare, and their father Pope Alexander VI. The Borgia apartments have two square holes in the floor, one reputed to lead to a dungeon, the other to the River Tiber for the disposal of bodies.
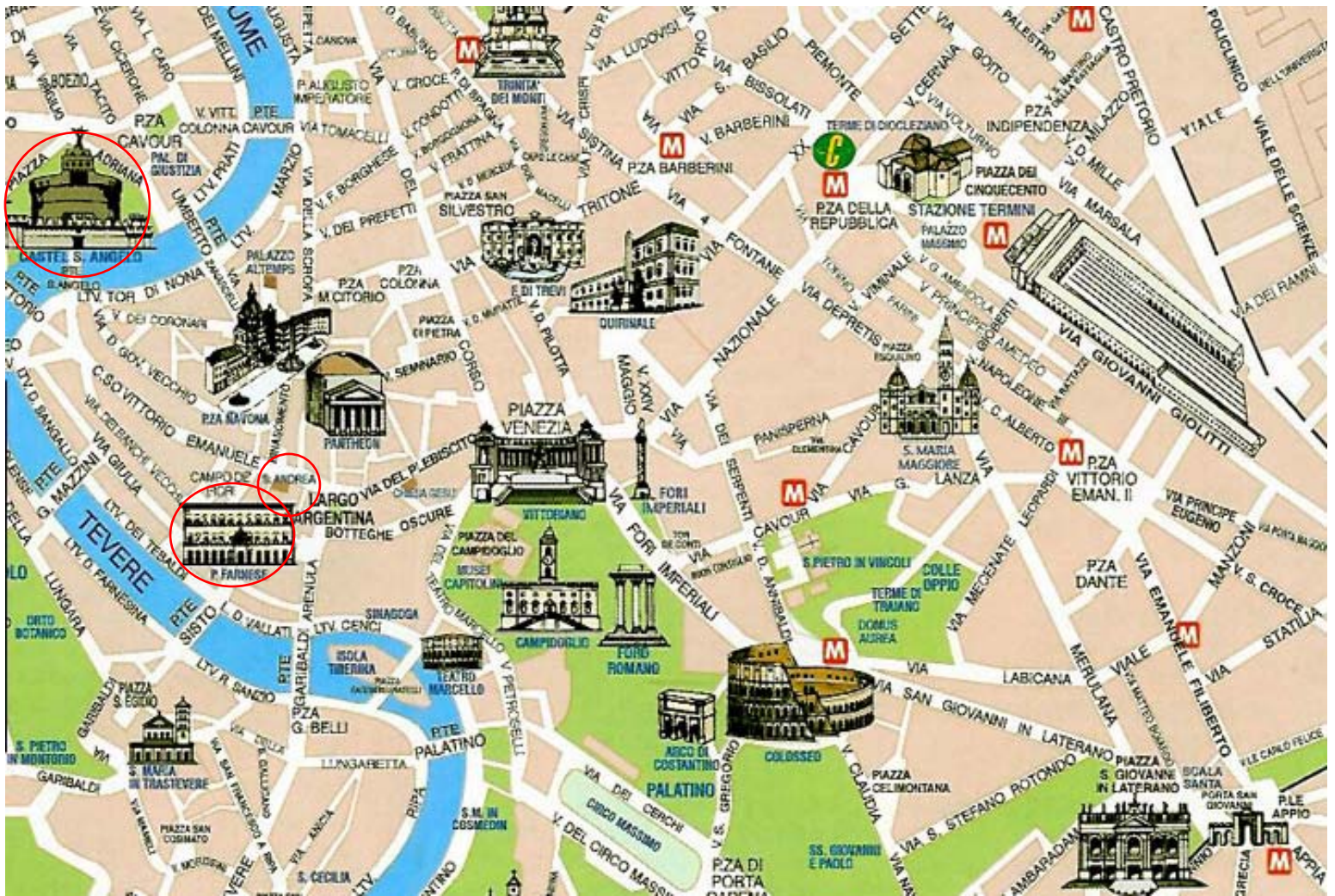
As a prison the Castel was not always so bad. We know much about conditions there in the sixteenth century from the artist Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571). In his autobiography this famous goldsmith and sculptor tells how he was imprisoned for stealing the papal jewels, injured during a brief escape, and then recaptured. (It was usually easy to escape from the Castel.)

In the eighteenth century, the marble angel was replaced by the present eighteen foot tall bronze one. Under the French, the statue was painted red, white and blue and a liberty cap was set on its head. The angel is usually part of *Tosca* sets. It stands on a small terrace set back from the edge of the tower. Tosca is supposed to jump from there into the Tiber River but that is clearly impossible. At that time, 1798-9, one could walk out of prison upon payment of a bribe, and many did. In *La Tosca,* Angelotti's sister is able to bribe the jailor not only to allow her brother to leave the prison, but even to drive him from Rome in a carriage. Such conditions did not last.

Late nineteenth-century tourists were shown, along with the papal apartments and other features, the live political prisoners behind the bars. The Castel remained a prison until 1901 when it was converted to a museum. Then, Mussolini "restored" the Castel and converted it into a regular tourist attraction. The view from the terrace of this powerful symbol of the combined power of the Church and the State is one of the finest in Rome.

Map of the Sites

Sant'Andrea della Valle (Act I), The Palazzo Farnese (Act II), The Castel Sant'Angelo (Act III)

Sources: operapedia.org, encarta.msn.com, media-cdn.tripadvisor.com, odyssey-tours.com