

ROME

An Illustrated Guide to Its Monuments & Art

Isola Tiberina

From Rome with Love

Robert and Karla

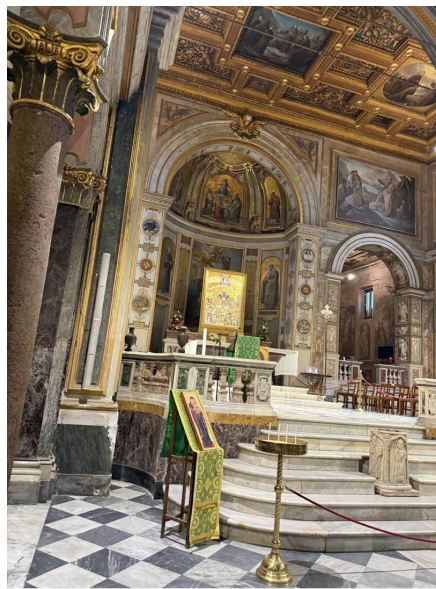
Photographed on site · Notes compiled for viewing

Basilica di San Bartolomeo all'Isola (St. Bartholomew on the Island)

Location: Isola Tiberina (Tiber Island), Rome



The Baroque facade and the 12th-century Romanesque bell tower; the frieze reads 'In this basilica rests the body of St. Bartholomew the Apostle.'



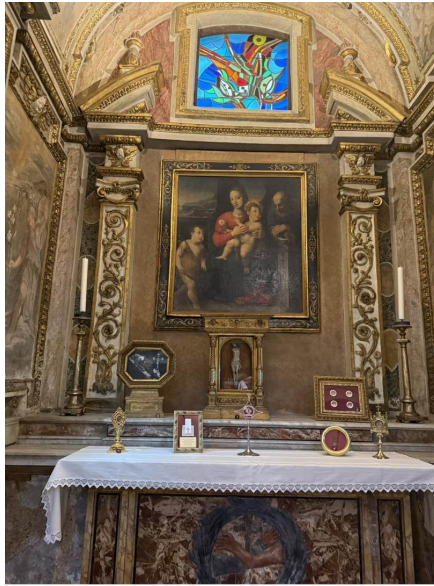
The chancel and high altar; behind it hangs the modern Icon of the Witnesses of Faith of the 20th–21st centuries.



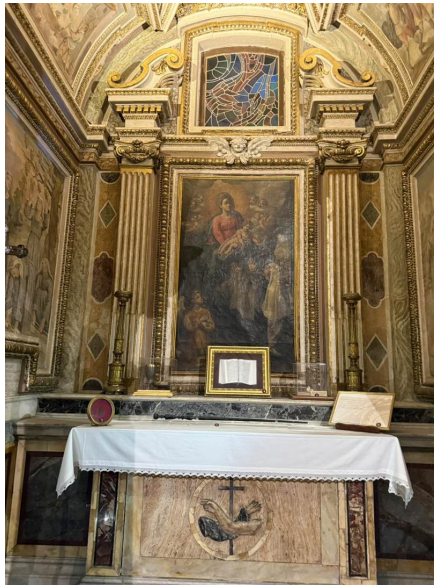
Detail (zoomed) — the 11th-century marble wellhead on the altar steps, over an ancient spring; its carved figures include Christ, Otto III, St. Adalbert and St. Bartholomew.



Detail (zoomed) — the carved, gilded coffered ceiling (1624); the central painted panels show the martyrdom of St. Bartholomew.



A side chapel — a Holy Family altarpiece above relics of modern martyrs, kept by the Community of Sant'Egidio.



A side chapel — a Madonna altarpiece above martyr memorials, with a martyr's open book displayed on the altar.

Description

A basilica on Tiber Island, easily mistaken for a plain Baroque church but in fact far older. Behind the 1624 facade — inscribed ‘In this basilica rests the body of St. Bartholomew the Apostle’ — rises a 12th-century Romanesque bell tower. The aisled interior, lined with ancient columns, has a carved gilded ceiling; on the steps of the raised chancel sits an 11th-century marble wellhead over an ancient spring, and a modern icon hangs behind the high altar. Today it is the memorial church of the ‘New Martyrs,’ its side chapels holding relics and mementos of 20th- and 21st-century Christians killed for their faith. Several of these views were cropped or zoomed because of distance and the strong interior light.

Inscription & Translation

Facade frieze: “IN HAC BASILICA REQUIESCIT CORPVS S·BARTHOLOMAEI APOSTOLI” (the 11th-century wellhead inside also carries a carved Latin inscription).

“In this basilica rests the body of St. Bartholomew the Apostle.” The apostle’s relics lie beneath the high altar in an ancient porphyry basin. Bartholomew was martyred by being flayed alive, which is why he is shown in art with a knife — as on the carved wellhead inside.

Date & Age

Founded in 998 by Otto III, Holy Roman Emperor, over the ruins of the ancient Temple of Aesculapius, and completed about 1001. The Romanesque bell tower dates to around 1113. After a flood in 1557 the church was rebuilt, gaining its present Baroque facade in 1624. So it layers thousand-year-old foundations, a ~900-year-old tower, and a 400-year-old front. It has been the New Martyrs’ memorial since the 1990s.

Artist / Creators

Founded by the Emperor Otto III (998). The Baroque facade (1624) is by the architect Orazio Torriani; the carved coffered ceiling also dates to 1624, its central panels repainted in 1865. The 11th-century wellhead is by an unknown medieval carver. The modern Icon of the Witnesses of Faith and the martyrs’ memorial were created under the Community of Sant’Egidio, which has cared for the basilica since 1993. (The two side-chapel altarpieces — a Holy Family and a Madonna — are older devotional paintings; their authorship is not recorded on site.)

Significance

One of Rome’s most layered sacred places. Tiber Island has been linked with healing since 293 BC, when a temple to Aesculapius was founded here; the church rose directly on that temple, and the tradition continues in the Fatebenefratelli hospital across the square (whose founder, St. John of God, is honoured by the column outside). The basilica holds the relics of the apostle Bartholomew, and since the Jubilee of 2000 it has become Rome’s memorial to the ‘New Martyrs’ — Christians of every continent killed for their faith in modern times — turning an ancient church into a living memorial.

Plate 09

The Tiber at Isola Tiberina (Crossing to Trastevere)

Location: Tiber Island and its bridges, Rome



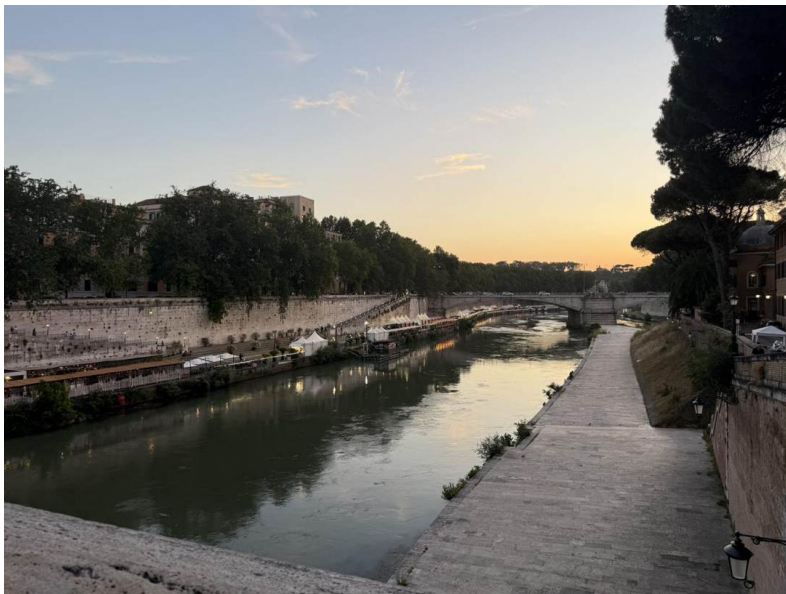
One branch of the Tiber as it divides at the island; the Fatebenefratelli hospital lines the island bank at left.



The downstream tip of Tiber Island — shaped like a ship's prow — with the weir and, beyond, the lone arch of the broken Ponte Rotto.



The Ponte Rotto — the surviving arch of Rome’s first stone bridge — with the 19th-century iron Ponte Palatino behind, and riverside cafés on the bank.



The other branch at sunset, the ‘Lungo il Tevere’ riverside below, looking toward the Trastevere bank.

Description

Crossing into Trastevere by the island’s ancient pedestrian bridges, the river Tiber splits into two channels around a small, ship-shaped land mass — Tiber Island. These four sunset views look along each channel from the bridges: first one branch, where the Fatebenefratelli hospital lines the island, and then the other, with the island’s pointed downstream tip, the river’s weir, and the romantic ruined arch of the Ponte Rotto between them. It is one of the most atmospheric river crossings in the city.

Inscription & Translation

No inscription — these are river views. The named structures are the bridges: Ponte Fabricio and Ponte Cestio (which carry you across the island), the ruined Ponte Rotto, and the iron Ponte Palatino.

Nothing to translate here. Worth knowing: Ponte Fabricio is signed by its Roman builder in large carved letters on its arches, naming Lucius Fabricius, the official in charge of the roads in 62 BC.

Date & Age

The crossings are deeply ancient. Ponte Fabricio, linking the island to the left bank, was built in 62 BC and is the oldest bridge in Rome still in use. Ponte Cestio, to the Trastevere side, dates to around 46 BC (largely rebuilt in 1888–92). The Ponte Rotto is the ruined survivor of the Pons Aemilius, Rome's first stone bridge (2nd century BC). The island itself has been a place of healing since 291 BC; the tall embankment walls date from the 1870s–90s.

Artist / Creators

These are works of Roman engineering rather than single artists. Ponte Fabricio (62 BC) bears the name of Lucius Fabricius, the curator viarum who built it; Ponte Cestio is named for a member of the Cestius family. The Pons Aemilius (Ponte Rotto) was Rome's earliest stone river-bridge.

Significance

Tiber Island is one of Rome's most storied places — a ship-shaped island linked with medicine since 291 BC, still home to a working hospital and the basilica of San Bartolomeo. Its bridges knit the city together: Ponte Fabricio, the oldest standing bridge in Rome, reaches from the old Jewish Ghetto and the Theatre of Marcellus, while Ponte Cestio carries you on into Trastevere. The broken arch of the Ponte Rotto, marooned midstream, is a favourite Roman image of a city that has always risen again after its floods.