

Sant'Egidio in Trastevere



Sant'Egidio in Trastevere is a 17th century convent and titular church in Trastevere. The dedication is to St Giles (“Egidio” in Italian), who was very popular in the Middle Ages but who is obscure historically. He was from Greece, and migrated to what is now Languedoc in France at the end of the 7th century. There, he founded a monastery (now the town of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard) near Nîmes, and died there in c. 710. The legends written about him helped to make him one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers in the Middle Ages, and many churches were dedicated to him. His cultus was probably introduced to Rome in the 9th century. [1]

History

The present church is the descendant of two old ones, and the name has been transferred between them. This causes confusion. The church that was originally dedicated to St Giles was called San Lorenzo in Ianicolo or de Curtibus, which also appears in the mediaeval catalogues as San Lorenzuolo (variously spelt). This indicates that the church was a small one, and so was probably part of the major building program of the 11th century which provided the surviving built-up area with diminutive parish churches. The first probable record dates from 1123, when Santa Maria in Trastevere had a church dependent on it called San Lorenzo (no other name given). This church has been identified by scholars with one called San Lorenzo in Ianicolo, which was mentioned in the records of the monastery of San Cosimato in Trastevere in 1191. [1]

In 1610 the church was in bad repair, and was granted by the Chapter of Santa Maria in Trastevere to a butcher called Agostino Lancelotti who undertook to restore it. In the process it was re-dedicated to St Giles, and given to a new community of Discalced Carmelite nuns which had settled in a house next door. This had been founded by Margherita Colonna, Princess of Venafrò, in 1601. [1]

The site of the present church was then occupied by another church, called Santi Crispino e Crispiniano. This had originally been a parish church in the Middle Ages, dedicated to St Blaise. As San Biagio, it was also listed in 1123 as a dependency of Santa Maria in Trastevere, and was known in the Middle Ages as San Biagio in Trastevere or San Biagio dei Velli after a local landowning family. [1] [a]

In 1591 it was given to the Università dei Calzolari, or guild of shoemakers. They re-dedicated it to their patrons, Sts. Crispin and Crispinian. However, they did not remain in possession for long. In 1628, through the influence of Princess Colonna, the Carmelite nuns were able to regain possession of the oratory of San Biagio and incorporate their church into their complex; the guild later moved to the church of Santa Bonosa. This left the nunnery with two churches, which they decided was one too many. [1] [4]

The present church was built as a result in 1630 through the generosity of Prince Filippo Colonna, who also paid for a remodelling of the convent. The nuns decided to demolish the old church of Sant'Egidio and rebuild San Biagio, dedicating it to Our Lady of Carmel and St Giles. It has been universally known since then as Sant'Egidio, however. [1]. [4] [a]

This was a fairly large convent. The present entrance to the museum, to the south of the church up the modern longitudinal double staircase, was the main entrance to the convent which led into the north-east corner of its cloister. This had arcaded walks on all four sides, and a fountain in the center. Buildings occupied three sides, but the west side faced directly out into the nuns' extensive gardens which occupied almost the whole block. At the far western end of the gardens was a little chapel tucked into the corner of the property. The nuns needed these gardens, because their rule of life did not allow them to go out of the convent enclosure. [1]

Unfortunately, the sisters were dispossessed in 1873 in the blanket seizure of Roman convents by the new Italian government. The latter was influenced by anti-clericalism, as well as the need to find accommodation for government employees when Rome became the capital of Italy in 1870. So, when the government quickly decided that it did not want the convent it did not give it back to the sisters, but donated it to the city of Rome in 1875. [1]

In 1918, the complex was converted into a sanatorium for children suffering from malaria. The disease had been endemic in Rome for its entire history, because the mosquitoes used to breed in the marshes in the river valley. Paradoxically, at about the same time as the hospital was founded the incidence of malaria in the city started to decline rapidly, owing to the wetlands being drained for development. [1]

The hospital was named Sanatorio Ettore Marchiafava, after a very important Roman medical researcher who helped to identify the rôle of the Plasmodium parasite in causing malaria. The Sisters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, based at San Vincenzo de'Paoli all'Aventino, helped with the nursing. [1]

The institution became redundant after the Second World War, as malaria vanished in Rome. It was then decided to convert the old convent into a branch of the Museo di Roma specializing in the city's folklore and poetry, and work began in 1969. The new museum, the Museo del Folklore e dei Poeti Romaneschi, was opened in 1977. Perhaps predictably it did not attract many visitors, and the brief was expanded to include material on the lives of ordinary Romans in modern times before the 20th century. Hence, in 2000 the institution was renamed Museo di Roma in Trastevere. [1]

In the context of Roman churches, the most interesting exhibits comprise the collection of watercolors by Achille Pinelli which feature many city churches as they were in the early 19th

century. This is an invaluable record of churches that have since been demolished or rebuilt, although the artist was not always accurate in his depictions and especially tended to reproduce façades in an etiolated way. Only a selection of pictures can be exhibited at any one time, but serious scholars should be able to obtain views of the rest. [1]

Community of Sant'Egidio

The church was given to the Comunità di Sant'Egidio, a lay organization founded in Rome in 1968 to aid poor people directly worldwide, and to work for peace and understanding through ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. The original inspiration came from Andrea Riccardi and a group of fellow college students meeting at the Chiesa Nuova, and the nascent lay community began to hold evening prayer liturgies at Sant'Egidio in 1973. It took the name of the church. Beginning as a small outreach in the rougher Roman shanty suburbs, it has spread throughout Italy and is now international in scope, with around 60,000 members. Since 1998, the evening prayer of the Community has moved to Santa Maria in Trastevere, for the large number of Romans participants and pilgrims. [1]. [5] [a]

The church was restored in 1998 by the Community. The restoration of the church has left in there original place some large canvases, of value, with pictures of Carmelite history, as well as the grates that at various points created communication between the church and the cloister. [a]

The church is now served by diocesan clergy, and has gone back to being a dependency of Santa Maria in Trastevere which it originally was in the 12th century. It has no pastoral responsibility beyond the activities of the Community. [1]

The title was established in 2019 with Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi, Metropolitan Archbishop of Bologna, the first Cardinal-Protector. [2]

Exterior

The plan is based on a long, narrow rectangular nave ending in a short transept, and then a shallow rectangular apse. There is an external side chapel on each side of the nave, also shallow. The fabric is in brick, rendered in a dull orange except for the façade, but little of this is visible from the street. [1]

The pitched and tiled roof runs under one ridge line from façade to apse, and the two ends of the transept have their own dormer pitched roofs which insert into the main one. At the far right hand side of the main roof, beyond the transept, is perched the campanile which is a kiosk with an arched opening on each face and a tiled pyramidal cap. [1]

Façade

The façade has a single order, and is rendered in white with architectural details in travertine limestone. A pair of gigantic quadrupletted Corinthian pilasters on high plinths occupy the corners, and support an entablature and triangular pediment. The projecting cornice and the pediment gable have both dentillations and modillions (little brackets), and in between the latter are rosettes. The central zone of the façade, in between the pilasters, is recessed and the entablature and pediment are vertically stepped to accommodate this. [1]

The ornate molded Baroque doorcase is embellished with curlicues and strapwork, and above the lintel is a dedicatory inscription:

D[eo] O[ptimo] M[aximo], B[eatae] V[Irgini] Mariae de Monte Carmelo
dicatum, an[no] sal[utis] MDCXXX.

Above this in turn is a raised segmental pediment, containing a swag tied with ribbons, and this is supported by two little pilasters bearing the symbol of a column. This refers to the Colonna family, of course, who put up the money for the building. [1]

Above the entrance is a large vertical rectangular window in a wide molded frame, and this is crowned by a triangular pediment containing a strap and bead motif. There are little rosettes at the upper corners of the frame, and the rosette motif together with the beads recall the prayer devotion

of the Rosary. [1]

Interior

The church has a single nave, with a shallow rib-vault ceiling, and is decorated in a cool, understated color scheme of white and light grey. There are two side chapels, the one on the right dedicated to St Giles and the left hand one, to the Crucifix. There are several modern icons in the Byzantine style on display, demonstrating both the ecumenical interest of the Community in the Eastern churches as well as its ontologically based preference as regards devotional artworks in its prayer liturgies. [1]

Monuments

To the left of the entrance is the funerary monument of the marchioness Veronica Rondonini Origo, designed by **Carlo Fontana** and executed by **Lorenzo Ottoni** in 1706. It features her marble bust in a tondo above the inscription, and her coat-of-arms below. [1] [4]

To the right is the monument of Petronilla Paolina de' Massimi, of 1663. It features a sarcophagus in low relief in front of a stylized obelisk, and has two putti. One holds a plaque with a cameo portrait of the deceased, the other sits on a pile of symbolic clutter while holding a wreath. The coat-of-arms below has a pair of wings, which means that the possessor is dead. [1]

In the floor is a memorial inscription for marchioness Laura Maria Muti, died 1734 at the age of 44. Also an inscription for Maria Anna Manganeli, died at the age of 46 in 1796.

Over the entrance is a painting, possibly representing St. Teresa of Avila, a Carmelite nun and prominent Spanish mystic and religious reformer.

Chapel of St Giles

The chapel on the left-hand side, which is dedicated to St Giles, has an altarpiece painting of the saint featuring the deer which, according to the legend, let him drink her milk every day. It was painted by **Cristoforo Roncalli** (Il Pomarancio). It was painted in 1610, so it seems to have been executed for the previous Sant'Egidio, the former San Lorenzo in Ianicolo. The painting is set into a fake marble aedicule, resembling verde antico and yellow Siena marble. [1]. [3]

On the balustrade is a stylized Byzantine painting of *St. Francis*, painted by a member of the Community. [b]

The Community has been using the altar as a bookstall containing bibles in many languages. [1] [a]

Chapel of the Crucifix

The right hand side chapel is dedicated to the Crucifix, but was originally dedicated to St Teresa of Avila, the founder of the Discalced Carmelite nuns. The altarpiece used to be a painting by **Andrea Pozzo**, depicting *Our Lady with Sts Joseph and Teresa of Avila*, but this has been moved to the presbyterium choir. On the altar there is a collection of crosses, forming a "mountain of Crosses" from different countries of the world. [1] [a]

The Crucifix over the altar came to the church as a thank you gift from the Armenian Patriarch. The Sant'Edigio charity helped the victims of the 1988 earthquake in Armenia. [5]

Sanctuary

The sanctuary comprises the transept and apse, the latter having a lunette window. It is divided from the nave by a pair of balustraded stone railings, and in front of these is a modern reading desk with a copy of the icon of the *Madonna and Saints* by **Andrei Rubliev**. To the right of this is a candlestick in the form of a Jewish menorah, and this has an icon of the *Baptism of Christ*. [1]

The marble high altar is dedicated to the prophet Elijah, and the reason for this is that the Carmelite tradition was that he was their actual founder. The design reflects that of the church's façade, with a

pair of ribbed Corinthian columns supporting a vertically stepped triangular pediment. [1]

The altarpiece is a painting of *Our Lady of Mount Carmel Giving the Scapular to Simon Stock*, and was executed by **Andrea Camassei** in 1630. St Joseph is in the background. Simon Stock was a 13th century superior of the Carmelites. The Carmelites refer to him as a saint, but the Catholic church in its revised Roman Martyrology lists him as a beatus only. [1]. [3]

In the sources the church is sometimes found referred to as Sant'Eligio, and this is a reference to Elijah. [1]

To the sides of the transept are paintings of *The Coronation of Our Lady by the Trinity in a vision to St Teresa of Avila*, and *The Glorification of St Teresa by Our Lady and St Joseph*, painted by a Carmelite brother known as **Il Fiammingo** because he came from the Low Countries. [1]

The lectern in front of the altar has an icon of the *Tree of Jesse*. Suspended above the altar, the triptych of icons with the *Crucified Christ and Five Mourners*. On the left side the "Christ of powerlessness", old wooden sculpture in Franciscan style, of a crucified without arms. It reminds the faithful who are called to be the industrious arms of Jesus. [1] [a]

On the Main Altar stands a large icon of 1600 from Russia, which depicts the *Mandyllion* or the *Face of Jesus*, painted on cloth held by two angels. It is the image of the face of Jesus "not drawn by human hands." The most ancient tradition of the Mandyllion is that of the legend of Abgar, king of Edessa, who, being sick, sent a servant to Jesus for healing. Jesus would have impressed the features of this face on a cloth and delivered to the servant, as soon as the king came in contact with the cloth he was healed. The Mandyllion enjoyed great veneration and was later taken to Constantinople; it disappeared during the invasion of the Fourth Crusade in the early 13th century. [a]

To the right of the altar is the *Icon of the Miracle of Pentecost*. Modern work of icon painters of the Sant'Egidio Community which offers a particular image of the Christian community, with the traits of Byzantine iconography. This upper part depicts the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples gathered around the table with the bread and wine of the Eucharist. At the center, the empty seat of Jesus, ascended into heaven, blessing from above. Below, the preaching of Peter, which generates conversion (on the right) and at the same time is rejected (the left side). Below, the embrace of peace shows that from hearing the Word of God are born reconciliation and fraternal life. On the left side is a copy of the icon of *Our Lady of Kazan*. [a] [b]

Access

The church is open when it suits the Community, which is liable to be in the evening only after people have had their suppers. The Community is not very interested in making the church accessible to visitors, and has a point if it says that this is low on their list of priorities.

The Community takes its prayer life in common very seriously. If you find the church open and wish to visit, please don't try to wander about during a liturgy or prayer meeting because you will be stopped.

Liturgy

The feast of St Giles is celebrated on 1 September, and that of Our Lady of Carmel on 16 July.

It was noticed several years ago that Mass was being celebrated at 20.30. The Community does not seem to advertise its public liturgies on the internet, so this has not been checked recently.

Artists and Architects:

Andrea [Camassei](#) (1602-1649), Italian Baroque painter and engraver

Andrea [Pozzo](#), S. J.(1642-1709), Italian Jesuit Brother, Baroque painter and architect, decorator, stage designer, and art theoretician (also see [here](#))

Andrei [Rublev](#) (c. 1360 – c. 1430), medieval Russian icon painter
Carlo [Fontana](#) (1634-1714), Italian architect of the Late Baroque period
Cristoforo [Roncalli](#) [aka *Il Pomerancio*] (1552-1626), Italian Mannerist painter
Lorenzo [Ottoni](#) [aka *Il Lorenzone*] (1658-1736), Italian sculptor
Lucas De La Haye aka Fra Luca Fiammingo (17th cent.), Flemish painter

Info

Location:

Coord: 41° 53' 24.4"N 12° 28' 7.5"E

Address:

Piazza S Egidio 3
00153 Roma

Phone:

06 58 56 61

Fax:

06 58 00 197

Links and References

1. [Roman Churches Wiki](#)
 2. [GCatholic.org web site](#)
 3. [Corvinus blog](#)
 4. [Info Roma](#)
 5. [Roomassa blog](#)
- a. Info sheet from church
- b. Personal communication with church staff
- c. Research by Michael Lynch
- [Info on #abruzzolink](#)
 - [from encyclopedia.com](#)
 - [from wikipedia](#)
 - [from un-aligned.org](#)

Other links

[Romapedia blog](#)

[Roman Despatches](#)

[Raccolta Foto de Alvareis](#) on flickr

[Italian Wikipedia page](#)

[Official diocesan web-page](#)

[Museum's website](#)