The Artful Hermit. Cardinal Odoardo Farnese's religious patronage and the spiritual meaning of landscape around 1600

Witte, A.A.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Roberto Bellarmino's devotional method as set out in the *Scala di salire* used visible nature as a ladder to pass from the visible world to the invisible, from the physical to the metaphysical: and in contemporary literature on the hermit, this topic of transcendence was equally common. Also Giovanni Battista Passeri's description of Lanfranco's works from the Camerino degli Eremiti echoed this concept of ascension, but then through the means of painting. He stressed the artist's ability to depict landscapes - nowadays little appreciated - and hinted at the functionality of painted nature in relation to the saintly figures. According to Passeri, the landscapes were to transport the viewer from his real surroundings to another reality, namely that of the *staffage*:

He painted in them some holy hermits living in solitary and savage places, and he represented those deserts as being so mountainous, horrid and disastrous, that they contained in that horridness so much loneliness that in looking at them, the viewers would be invited to transport themselves to this slope to enjoy such charming loneliness, and although he always seemed to have little inclination towards landscape, these he did with so much taste and flavour that they were worthy of imitation.

Passeri's description presupposed the knowledge of Bellarmino's method of prayer: through regard of the landscape one was invited to follow in the footsteps of the hermits placed in them. While according to the religious treatise, nature was a means of aspiring to the level where the saints lived by following the path they had pointed out, according to the chronicler of Roman painting the visual example was supposed to result in the same ascent that had been described in words. In short, Lanfranco's works helped cardinal Odoardo to elevate his thoughts to the Creator hidden in nature thanks to the example of the hermits depicted in them. The figures and the landscapes were interrelated components, while nature should result in the viewer's identification with solitary saints, the staffage taught one how to regard nature as the stairway to heaven.

Passeri's *ekphrasis* also indicated the reality of solitary religious life. Seated within the Camerino degli Eremiti, the cardinal should identify himself with, and even turn into, a temporary hermit by regarding and contemplating the landscape-depictions. This implies on the one hand, that life as a hermit belonged to the range of possibilities for the *Seicento*-observer, but

---

1. *Dipinse in quell' alcuni SS. Eremiti habitanti in luoghi solitari*, e selvaggi e rappresento quelli deserti così alpestri, orridi, e disastrosi che contenevano in quella horridezza tanta amoniti che in vederli...
on the other, it also suggested that this was not truly serious option. In fact, the depiction of hermits in art in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century touches upon a paradoxical relation between ideal and reality that was triggered by the Council of Trent.

Images of hermits

Throughout the history of art, paintings of hermits were more than a reminder of a historical ideal; they referred to a reality that persisted from the early Christian era until well into the seventeenth century. Anchorite and eremetic strategies were not uniform; over the course of history a large variety of solitary existences developed in various regions, which is partly reflected in the terminology. The basic element, however, consisted in the distance from human society - the word hermit was derived from the Greek ἕρμας which means 'to be left lonely', which in Latin became eremus; anchorite comes from αὐξανόμενος that can be translated as 'to go away, to withdraw'. This solitary existence was in the Christian tradition accompanied by ascetic forms of penitence and the perpetual dedication to prayer. The combination of the two would lead to a purification of the heart, and an ascent of the soul to its Creator.

The first Christian hermits could be encountered in the first centuries AD., as far as hagiographic accounts confirmed, in the zone of upper Egypt called the Thebaid. The image of Saint Anthony Abbot devised in the fourth century by Athanasius proved a model for most later solitary monks. Main characteristics of his biography consisted in the radical conversion, the extended period of penitence in the Egyptian desert in total isolation from the world, earning a living by means of humble work, and the continuous study of the Bible resulting in the fervent defence of the Faith against heretics. Demons played an important role in these stories, functioning as a symbolic representation of the hermit's struggle against his own innate sins. Other possible forms of desert life also sprang up in these first centuries, such as stylites or pillar-saints, and gyrovagi or itinerant devout. These other forms of solitary devotional life were, however, not widely followed in the European context.

invitavano li riguardanti a portarsi a quella balza per godere così soavi solitudini, e benché egli sia sempre comparso con non molto genio al far Paesi dipinse quelli con tanto gusto e sapienza che si rendevano d’iscrivere imitati.ì

1 See Ost 1971, p.20-26 for a discussion of the relation between reality and painting of hermits.
4 On demons in early Christianity, see Angenendt 1997, pp.85-88.
5 On gyrovagi see LThK 1993-2001 vol.4, cols.1122-1124. For the definitions according to church-law, see Dictionnaire de droit canonique 1935-1965 vol.5, cols.417-420.
Due to diverse natural, cultural and political circumstances, the adoption of the anchorite lifestyle in Europe during the early and high Middle Ages resulted in significant changes to its form. The most important new requirement was that of organisation and supervision, and for that reason solitary religious were constrained to accept the coenobite, or (in modern terms) monastic lifestyle. They had to follow a written rule, and were subject to an elected prior, a general or other forms of institutional control. From devout laymen, who stood at the basis of the anchorite movement, the hermit was turned into a monk.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, new eremitic movements sprang up all over Europe, especially in France and Italy. Stories abounded about monks who were unsatisfied with the laxity of their communal life, the accumulation of riches spoiling devotional zeal, and laymen who abhorred the traditional monastic context for its deprivation. This all led to a crisis and subsequent renewal in monasticism. It also meant that aside from the positive choice for strict isolation and contemplation that had informed the early forms of anchorite life, it often sprang from negative feelings about the existing situation, whether this was directed against society at large or at the Church as an institution. In this same period, a noteworthy increase in hermit-iconography - for example the depiction of Saint Jerome in the desert, which played such an important role in the development of the genre of landscape - showed the general interest in and recognition of this religious phenomenon.

Some individual cases of hermits led to public recognition of their role in society as a moral example, and this was reflected in the arts. In early fourteenth-century Pisa, a funeral monument was erected in the Campo Santo for Giovanni C'ini, which expressed the popular reverence for this holy hermit: fresco-painting was used to represent his edifying solitary life to the contemporary viewer. Shortly afterwards, between 1330 and 1345, the original pictorial embellishment around the tomb was extended to the entire wall, offering the viewer a sample sheet of virtues and religious zeal to be imitated (fig.92). Not by chance, this 'Thebaid', in the form of an ample landscape, was situated adjacent to representations of death overcoming three
soldiers, the Last Judgement and Hell, as the ending of earthly life. This juxtaposition between the two frescoes implied that the life of the hermit was a victory over death because, by ascending the stairway to heaven with the help of prayer, the soul could not die.

Such a positive image of the hermit was also constructed in contemporary literature. In the years between 1320 and 1340, contemporary to the fresco in the Campo Santo, in the same town of Pisa, new translations into the vernacular were made of the stories of the Desert Fathers by the Dominican friar Domenico Cavalca. These were originally intended as sermons, but were also widely read by the laity. Another writer in this field was the Franciscan Angelo Clareno, who translated the *Scala Paradisi*, an ascetic devotional treatise probably written in the sixth century by the Greek monk Giovanni Climaco; this text was often accompanied by hagiographic accounts of hermits. These popularisations resulted in an even more heightened sense reality of the life as solitary saint. The hermit became a widely known figure, leading to widespread imitation in reality and the arts.

In most cases this medieval anchorite movement led to the foundation of new orders, or in other cases to the reform of existing ones in accordance with solitary ideals: this meant the encapsulation of the potentially segregational movements within the body of the church. The Augustinian hermits were formed by the forced congregation of individual hermits; in this case the arts helped to construct an image of the supposed 'founder'; their contemplative ideal was however replaced by a mendicant rule. In other instances, an identifiable founder attracted followers, which led to the foundation of a new monastic institution. In these circumstances, the arts and literature sketched out an image of the founder in solitary retreat, such as in the case of Saint Francis and Saint Romuald.

Apart from triggering iconographic changes, this renewal of the anchorite life also led to the creation of specific architectural conditions for the solitary life. Depending on the order, the 'monks' lived in separate cells around a communal cloister (the Cistercians and Carthusians) or

---

5 Ost 1971, p.21.
6 Hansen 1995.
7 For the Franciscan and Camaldolese orders, see the entries in the LdM 1980-1999, and Anson 1964; for the changes in the monastic landscape and its relation to the heremitical movement, see *L'eremismo in Occidente* 1965. See Leyser 1984, p.29f on the renewal of the heremitic life by Saint Romuald. For the early iconography of Saint
they had their own individual 'hermitage' within a walled-in compound, and only gathered in the adjacent church for the celebration of the Mass (the Camaldolese). In each case, the architectural setting was devised to sustain the concepts of isolation and contemplation, which formed the basis of the anchorite ideal that these orders sought to revive within the limitations of monastic regulation.

Cinquecento realities of solitary life

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, social upheavals, war, bad harvest and diseases led to renewed inspiration on the ideals of desert saints. It is significant that again in this case, as it had been in the Middle Ages, the positive choice was overshadowed by negative reasons. Firstly, people were deeply dissatisfied with laxity of life within the existing Orders, which led, for example, to the creation of the Capuchin Order as a corrective movement within the Franciscan family. Many other Orders were incapable, as a result of the fundamental critique expressed by the Reformation, to reflect upon a new direction, as the basis of regular life was called into doubt. Secondly, financial and social barriers to enter a religious Order could lead to hermitism: when financial requirements or a problematic past prohibited a person from taking the habit, anchorite status was the only alternative. As a result, the phenomenon of the unassociated hermit, not bound to a Rule by means of monastic vows, was more common in the sixteenth century than in earlier times. It also took more time to reincorporate these subversive movements, as the Catholic response to the Reformation was formulated only after 1545 at the Council of Trent.

Social criticism played a conspicuous role in the image of the hermit around 1500. A person refused admittance to a monastic institution would direct his wrath towards the institution of the Church; monks zealous for regular reform would criticise the institution for its slowness in introducing regular observance. This kind of hermit was the most visible, as they expressed their discontent in public, mostly in the form of prophecies about the coming end of the world - or, on the other hand, would tell their audience the story of their own sinful past and penitence as


an example. This turned the anchorite into a critic of society as a whole.

Accounts from the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries mentioned the appearance of itinerant hermits going around predicting the end of the world, urging people to repent. In a poem on the signs of nearing the end, one hermit was identified with the Old Testament prophet Elijah for reasons of appearance as well as his sudden disappearing: ‘An old hermit with a long beard and hair goes crying ‘peace, peace’ through Rome, then when he pleases, invisibly, he goes away, and many firmly believe that he is Elijah.’ Other prophetic hermits dressed in accordance with the iconography of Saint John the Baptist or other desert Fathers, to add more weight to their divine inspirations and their call for penitence. It even led to ascribing saintly powers to people dressed in this way. This phenomenon was most effective with the lower classes in society, as a Roman diary of 1485 explicitly mentioned that 'the men of wealth esteem these things, but without the intemperance of the common people.' Such solitary and itinerant persons encountered in diaries were not always real hermits; for example, Franciscan or Capuchin friars were often referred to as 'hermits.'

By the middle of the sixteenth century, public opinion began to turn against these figures: references to itinerant hermits illustrate the opprobrium of the people for their poor and dirty appearance. Even more important is the fact that the subversive element in the image of the hermit, the individual call for penitence and the implicit critique of the ecclesiastical authorities were considered anticlerical, and a threat to society and the institution of the Catholic Church in particular. The way out of religious turmoil that they represented, by turning their backs on corrupted human society alike became unacceptable, and unworthy of imitation. This type of hermit had become an anti-social and almost devilish character. Appropriate action should be taken against them, predominantly by ecclesiastical authorities, which had been called by the Tridentine Council to control and supervise all forms of religious life in their diocese. As a result, the unassociated and unprofessed hermit became a persona non grata.

---

1 Nobili 1984.
2 Niccoli 1990, pp 91-98.
3 Niccoli 1990, pp 93-94, citing Memoria deli novi segni ci spaventosi prodigj, s.d.s.L, fol. lv: 'Un antico romitto Cumi barba longa e chionia Va gridando per Roma 'pace, pace' poi quando che li piace' invisibil va via e multi ch'el sia Eia credon ferro.
4 De Vascho, Il diario di della citta di Roma, cited after Niccoli 1990, p 96: 'gli uomini da bene stimavano queste cose ma non con tanta vehemenza come il volgo'. On the public image of sanctity and ascetic practices in relation to class, see also Weinstein Bell 1994, pp 210-211.
5 On the use of the hermit as anticlerical type in Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, see Mayer 1993, p 287.
The case of Fra Pelagio

Under pressure from ecclesiastical authorities and secular governments, around the middle of the sixteenth century individual hermits were watched-over closely and, if necessary, their behaviour was corrected. In 1559, troubles revolving around an independent hermit living in Rome led to juridical steps, of which the court-case records offer an interesting example of how popular reverence for these solitary men contrasted with institutional action raised against them. This case also reveals which elements of solitary life had become unacceptable to the ecclesiastical authorities.

The particular hermit who was sequestered, Fra Pelagio, lived as a recluse behind Saint Peter’s on the Vatican Hill in the middle of the sixteenth century this was still a largely uninhabited spot and he was interrogated in a preliminary police-hearing. He told his interrogators that he was a child born out of the illegitimate affair of a married woman from Cosenza. After a period in his life which he only referred to as a time of luxury, he went to live near Vicenza, where he took the habit of a hermit and changed his name into Fra Pelagio. From there he wandered through Italy and France, made a pilgrimage to the cave of the Magdalene at St. Maximin, and proceeded to Barcelona in Spain. There he claimed to have been living in the palace of the future archbishop, Jacob Cassador, and subsequently at the monastery of Sor Maria, Cassadors’ mother. During the following sojourn in Valencia he received protection from the influential Francisco Borja.

Ultimately in 1545 he returned to his native Cosenza. There he dwelled on the Monte Cucuzzo, where his prophetic and healing gifts came to the fore. This attracted a ‘pupil’, whom he adopted, and renamed Fra Serva Maria. When he finally returned to Rome after a failed attempt to visit the Holy Land, his first dwelling was at the Porta Portese, a desolated area where according to his testimony ‘they throw garbage and dead horses’. He also lived for a while in the palace of the Cardinal Du Bellay in the Borgo.

After the death of Julius III Del Monte, he built himself a dwelling – probably a kind of shack or recluse – behind Saint Peter’s with the financial and practical help of many high-ranked persons, both ecclesiastics and nobles. These persons frequented him in the years preceding 1559, asking his advice on spiritual as well as political matters. The names mentioned by Pelagio

\[\text{For a modern account of this process, see Cohen 1992; the acts of this process are to be found in ASR, Governatore, Tribunale Criminale, Processi (XVI sec.) b.48 caso 14, fol.673l.}
\[\text{Cohen 1992, p.235}
\[\text{Cohen 1992, p.215}
\]
include the Colonna family, barone Giuliano Cesarini, the Caraffa, Lippomani, and even bishops and regulars, and even a Jesuit Father called Barbadilla. These people he told prophecies like the coming death of the reigning pope, and claimed that the new pontiff would grant him a cardinal’s hat: he cured visitors or advised them on spiritual and practical matters.

Although Fra Pelagio’s prophetic pretensions and increasing popularity might seem to be the cause of this legal action, it was another aspect that explains the interest of the clerics in his case. In his testimony, it was explicitly mentioned that although he took the habit of a hermit, he did not conform to any Rule or accept Holy Orders from the appropriate ecclesiastical authorities. He thus did not have any supervision, institutional context or spiritual regulation to obey. In various testimonies this was explained in connection with Communion - by some witnesses it was stated that he had not been going to church or receiving the consecrated Host, and one said that he outright refused to receive it, or go to Mass. When these persons had asked him about this, he started to insult them, fulminating against the institution of the Church, and calling them names.

Interestingly enough, other witnesses declared exactly the opposite: they were of the opinion that the spiritual innocence of Fra Pelagio exempted him from these obligations. The important fact is that most people in this group, clearly in favour of the hermit, were monks: a Hieronymite friar and the already mentioned Jesuit Barbadilla. It must have been the latter’s commitment to Fra Pelagio that aroused the suspicion of Society’s general Lainez, and led to the preliminary hearing laid down in these acts.

In the light of regular reforms, it must be concluded that the latter aspects were the particular interest of the authorities, rather than the fact that he had foretold the future. During his testimony Pelagio repeatedly swore obedience, submission and loyalty to the Church, which almost reads as an alternative monastic vow. The reason for Lainez and two other Jesuits to follow the tracks of Fra Pelagio was founded on the very aspect of his heretical beliefs

14 Cohen 1992 erroneously supposed that Pelagio was questioned about his prophecies on the death of the pope, whereas this aspect played only an insignificant role in the written acts.
15 For example in ASR, Governatore, Tribunale Criminale, Processi (XVI sec.) b.48 fos.59r-v: ‘Et p[er]che haveva inteso da [desser] Jacomo Hercolani alariista che cura de sacramenti, che costui non si comunicava et che non adiva messa, io andai da lui co questa intenzione a trovarlo lí in quella casa, per intendere da lui come si governava in no pigeitar sacramento et no odir messa, . . . io no mi ricordo bene, ma mi pare che mi dicesse che io ero putuo ad interrogarlo di queste cose et comincio a gridare, et mi ricordo che quasi co’spirito profettico comincio a voltarsi verso la chiesa et disse questa Babilonia sedesterà un giorno, vera uno che l’estirperà et altre parole simile contro la chiesa santa.’ See also Cohen 1992, p.233. The case of Fra Pelagio also relates to mental illness which in this period.
concerning the Sacraments. As mentioned in the acts, the Jesuit Father Babadilla often had been frequenting Pelagio, and might have considered leaving his Order to associate himself with the independent recluses. This would have turned a regular Catholic into a potential apostate. It was out of fear of this that Lainez handed the case over to the secular juridical authorities. How it ended, however, is not known as a regular court case did not ensue, probably because it was more a case for the ecclesiastical authorities than a worldly court. As the example of Fra Pelagio illustrated, individual hermits violating the new Tridentine decrees on observance of the Rule and spiritual supervision ran the risk of transgressing the strict rules on religious conduct. For this reason, these forms of religious life were suppressed in the latter part of the Cinquecento.

De-historicising the hermit

Still, the figure of the hermit remained a familiar sight on the streets of Italian cities, and a popular subject in the arts. In the Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca, a Florentine linguistic project initiated around the middle of the sixteenth century but not published until 1612, the explanation of the words 'Romito' and 'Lremita' were identical in significance, and reflected the general contemporaneous reality of the hermit:

Eremita. From eremo. Hermit, man, who lives in the desert. Gr[eeke] ἔρημος which is translated in Lat[in] eremita, solitarius. G.V.2.4.5. And in a vision he saw a saintly hermit. 17

The entry on the synonym 'romito' simply referred back to 'eremita', but the word 'Romitaggio', i.e. hermitage, was wryly explained as 'the place where hermits live'. From these examples and definitions it can be gauged that the hermit was a contemporary figure who did not break with the historical past; in fact, it suggests that the hermits were perceived in the early Baroque as identical to their predecessors of the first centuries AD.

was considered as a form of divine infusion; see Foucault 1975 pp.45-46; for the relation between signs of holiness and psychological characteristics, see the case-study on Ignatius of Loyola in Meissner 1992.

17 A similar case is that of Fra Ludovico di Monte Faito in Calabria; after gaining fame as hermit and itinerant preacher in the 1570s, he was accused of demonic possession and imprisoned in 1586 in the Certosa in Naples. In 1588, he was transferred to Rome to be questioned by the Congregazione del Sant'Uffizio. One of the important accusations against him was that of sacramental error: he advised people to confess in front of an image, thereby ignoring the function of the priest. Apart from this, Fra Ludovico had also gathered a number of disciples who had sworn obedience to him, probably without any ecclesiastical approval of a regular Rule or his position as 'prior'. Another accusation raised against him concerned sexual promiscuity with these disciples. In contrast to Pelagio, Ludovico was found guilty by the religious court and imprisoned for the rest of his life. See Sallmann 1996, pp.237-247 for this case.

Contemporary paintings conveyed an analogous message of timelessness. Guglielmo Sirleto's iconographic programme for the Stanza della Penitenza in Caprarola was based upon this particular view of historicity. He had corresponded with and certainly knew personally Cardinal Cesare Baronio, the leading figure in the emerging field of ecclesiastical history; and Sirleto was one of the main Roman exponents of the programme of ecclesiastic and monastic renewal. He linked historical awareness to the Tridentine reforms of the Catholic church, according to which the early Christian past was the example on which the present should be remodelled. One of the recommendations of the twenty-fifth session of the Council had been that in monasteries 'the ancient and regular discipline may be the more easily and promptly restored.' The use of the words 'ancient' and 'regular' in this phrase signified that not merely the written Rules, but the historical foundations, the first version of these rules, should be taken to heart. Books on church history were thus not meant to be a description of time gone by; these were to revivify the spiritual ideal to which the regulars should return. In ecclesiastical historiography since Trent, the chronological progression of time was subservient to Catholic ideology.

An important example of a chronological discussion of the anchorite ideal in the service of regular observance was closely related in time and context to the two Stanze in Caprarola: the Historiarum Camaldulensium of 1575, which discussed the background and history of the Camaldolesian Order. The author Agostino Fortunio belonged to this Order, the Rules of which had reintroduced the anchorite ideal within the context of a monastic institution on the basis of the Benedictine Rule. However, the Camaldolesian Order had only been founded in the twelfth century and needed to point out the direct relation between their own Rule and the eremetic life of early Christianity. To defend this position with historical arguments, Fortunio discussed the history of monasticism, and positioned the Camaldolesians as direct heirs to the desert Fathers. In other words, there was a direct link between past and present, as there was between hermit and monk. Fortunio used the etymology of the word 'monk' to prove this: 'The Greek word for monk is ὁ μοναχός, which means living life in solitude.'

After an exposition on the Vestalian Virgins and the Nazarenes, the introductory chapters

---

11 Denzler 1964, pp.32, 145.
15 On the Camaldolese Order and its specific interpretation of the solitary life, see DN 1937-1994 vol.2, cols.50-60.
of the *Historiarum Camaldulensium* examined the Gymnosophists, Hyperboreans, Druids and Essenes as pagan forerunners of the Christian tradition - the groups in the four roundels in the Stanza della Solitudine.\(^{45}\) Fortunio continued with a chapter on the origins of monastic life in the examples of Elijah and Saint John the Baptist, predecessors of Christ; then he went on to discuss the first monastic communities formed in Egypt, and stated that from the hiding-place of the *Eremon* the first communities of monks, bishops, pastors and indeed the entire ecclesiastic community had come forth.\(^{46}\) Desert-fathers were thus the founders of the first coenobite communities; and from this basis, the various religious orders sprang up. This facilitated the Camaldolese monks to take these hermit-saints as exemplars for their own life, and copy the historical ideal to their own practice. In doing so, they annihilated the historical changes that had occurred in monastic life since the sixth century. Regarding this theme in relation to the two Stanze, the subject of the iconography of the Stanza della Solitudine preceded that of the Stanza della Penitenza: Christ as the centre of the former was related to the Cross in the latter room. But the iconography within the rooms was governed by a will to return to the spiritual ideal. In this sense, the influence of Tridentine concepts of history, as expressed in Fortunio's book, also influenced the decoration at Caprarola.

Not only does the text of the *Historiarum Camaldulensium* show striking similarities with the iconography in the two Stanze, there are also arguments that relate its author to the circle of Alessandro Farnese. Fortunio belonged to the Camaldolese Order of which Alessandro Farnese became cardinal protector in 1565 after the death of his brother, Cardinal Ranuccio Farnese (1530-1565).\(^{47}\) It is plausible that direct contacts existed between the Camaldolese and the *letterati* at Farnese's court, possibly even directly between Fortunio and Panvinio.\(^{48}\) The *Historiarum Camaldulensium* documented the interpretation of early Christian history both as a continuation of the classical era, and as a moment in time, which represented a timeless ideal. It

\(^{45}\) Fortunio 1575, p.13: *Monachus grecce dicitur tou ποιητής, quod est in solitudine vitæ degere.'

\(^{46}\) Fortunio 1575, pp.15-21 discussed the *'Brachmanarum, seu Salmoneorum Gymnosophistarum apud Indios Draidum apud Gallos Sacerdotum Augypti-Essenorum apud Iuduos Magorum apud Persas Sacrosanctae Nazareorum Virginum Vestalium apud Romanos.'

\(^{47}\) Fortunio 1575, p.27: *Quod factum est divina clementia at Monasticus ordo, qui magis deprimi posse videtur, aequo magis etiam atq; etiam spendescere coeperit, & caput alius atollereere. Quod videlicet ex Eremon, Monachorique; cognationibus Episcopis; atq; animarum Pastoribus legi. ac currq; coeperunt sunt, qui vel etiam invivissimi ad omnes amphoræ gradus, dignitatesq; Ecclesiae per longissimam annuum curriculam evenerunt.'

\(^{48}\) Fortunio 1575, p.311 mentioned Ranuccio Farnese, in his annals of 1557: *'Per eos diem cum in falsis concessisset Robertus Pusius Cardinalis Ordinis Protector, Raynutius Farnesius tituli s. Angeli Praesbyter Cardinallis, & summus poenitentiarus Camaldulæs accepet in clientelam.'* Mittarelli 1764 vol 8, p.124-125 described how Alessandro was asked by the Camaldolese Order to replace Ranuccio as protector in 1565.

\(^{49}\) For Fortunio, in secular called Agostino Fiorentino, see *DBI* 1960-present, vol 49, p.256-257 and Cochran 1981, p.449-450; for Alessandro Farnese's protectorate over the Camaldolese Order which started in 1565 after the death of his brother cardinal Ranuccio, see Mittarelli 1764 vol 8, pp.124-125.
was written to serve as the basis for spiritual and monastic reform in the late sixteenth century; the aim was a revival of the historical ideal in the present, and therefore an abolition of time. In the Stanza della Penitenza, the informed viewer should relate these past examples to his own religious reality, and take the abstinence and penitence practiced by the hermits as inspiration for his own spiritual ascent. The old anchorite examples were relived in the present and painting facilitated this goal.

The room at Isola del Liri which repeated the idea of the Caprarola Stanza della Penitenza, used another device to convey the same message of the timelessess of the eremitic ideal. In this Stanza, the saints had been deprived of their attributes and therefore were made anonymous and de-historicised. Around 1600, the series of penitent saints ordered by Federico Borromeo from Paul Bril indicated another 'actualisation' of the theme with the same device. The panels executed by Bril copied almost literally the compositions engraved by Sadeler after the designs from Maerten de Vos, except for the omission of the characteristic attributes of the saints. For example, Saint Anthony Abbot was 'robbed' of his little piglet and the bell, and thus of his identity. Through the absence of historical distance the actuality of these solitary religious figures was emphasised. They were recognisable as hermits by their dress, attire, and setting, but remained nameless, and were thus open to identification by the onlooker. How did these 'realities' compare to the repression of real hermits from the late sixteenth century onwards?

After the close of the Tridentine Council, a phenomenon comparable to the encapsulation of anchorite movements in the later Middle Ages occurred: hermits were turned into monks. The resulting crossover between monastic and anchorite life is confirmed by the way these figures were described in seventeenth century diaries. In August 1648, the roman lawyer Giacinto Gigli mentioned an interesting but at first sight puzzling example of hermits resident within the walls of Rome. The small chapel of Santa Maria del Buon Aiuto, situated near San Giovanni in Laterano (fig.93), was the site of a murder which involved two hermits:

In those days a strange event occurred, that a Hermit killed another hermit, his companion, and then went to the Cardinal Vicar, and said that he had murdered his companion, because he had been told to do so by the Holy Spirit, and he showed a handwritten note by the deceased which said that he left him as heir to all his belongings, because he had done him the favour of killing him. This case happened in a chapel located

---

49 For the room in Isola del Liri, see chapter I, pp.52-55.
50 For the series of hermits by Paul Bril commissioned by Borromeo, see Jones 1988b, and Jones 1993, p.78.

223
near the wall of Rome between San Giovanni in Laterano and Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, where the body was found in the midst of lots of blood. He was put in jail, but was cleared of the charge because of being mad.\footnote{For Giacinto Gigli, see Nussdorfer 1992, pp.109-114, and DBI 1960-present, vol.54, pp.673-674.}

Although Gigli used the word romito, in reality the church of Santa Maria del Buon Aiuto was part of the larger monastic community of Santa Croce, situated directly behind it. This complex had been inhabited since the later Middle Ages by the Cistercian Order, an offspring of the Benedictine Rule striving after a more severe and secluded interpretation of monastic life.\footnote{Gigli 1994, vol.2, p.532: 'In questi giorni occorse un caso strano, che un Romito ammazza un’altro Romito suo compagno, et poi ando subito a trovare il Cardinale Vicerio, et disse, che lui haveva ammazzato quel suo Compagno, perché gli l’haveva comandato lo Spirito Santo, et mostrò una Scrittura di mano del morto, che diceva, che lo lasciava herede di tutta la sua Robba, perché gli haveva fatto carità di ammazzarlo. Occorse questo caso in una Cappella, che stà nelle Mura di Roma tra S. Giovanni Laterano, et Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, dove fu trovato il morto con molto sangue sparsi. Fu costui messo prigione, ma si giudica, che sarà scusato per pazzo.'} Thus, the two religious belonged to a regular Order and lived a life dedicated to incessant prayer and contemplation.\footnote{On the Cistercenser Order, see Helyot 1721 vol.5, pp.388-400 and DHP 1974-1997 vol.2, cols.1059-1098.}

The main reason why Gigli used the word 'hermit' will have been rooted in the appearance of these monks, their relative isolation, and their daily occupations; their habit and rule reflecting their life of severity and penitence (fig.94). Tridentine reforms and the call for observance led the Cistercians back to their anchorite origins, which was noticed and interpreted as such by lay observers.\footnote{For the church (or Oratory) of Santa Maria del Buon Aiuto, see Bachowiecki 1967-1974 vol.2, pp.521-523; see Arneth 1942, p.989 and guida romanai di Roma 1967-present, vol.15,1, p.18 for the dependence of this edifice on the Cistercenser Order.}

**Itinerant hermits in and around Rome**

Next to these 'domesticated' or coenobitic hermits, individual, or, if one prefers, 'real' hermits continued to be present in Rome and its campagna. Although the phenomenon was restrained in the late sixteenth century by regulations and prohibitions, it was not rooted out completely.\footnote{See Helyot 1721 vol.5, pp.390-391, and DHP 1974-1997 vol.2, cols.1061-1062 on the reform-movements in various Cistercian congregations at the end of the sixteenth century.}


They had to request the bishop's consent on their residence as well as on their autonomous status, for which licences were given. In most cases, they were assigned the care over a rural chapel or church, where they had to assist in Mass and keep the place tidy. The rest of their time was supposed to be spent in prayer, or reading edifying publications.

\footnote{See Ferrero 1970, esp. p.709 for a list of hermits in Tivoli based on the Episcopal archives.}
While in Tivoli and other dioceses Episcopal supervision over these hermits was considered enough to curtail the phenomenon of solitary religious, the attraction of Rome for hermits on pilgrimage posed a more complex problem which was addressed at several synods. As religious without monastic or confraternal affiliation were deprived of their customary shelter, they wandered around town begging for alms, a phenomenon that hindered secular and religious government alike. The institution in 1587 of a special hospital for these hermits was the solution proposed and realised by pope Sixtus V Peretti. The papal brief *Cum nostrae* ordered the Italian hermit Albentio del Cetraro from Calabria to institute a refuge for the hermits visiting the city of Rome on pilgrimage. The aim was to 'avoid with zeal the danger for the health of the souls, and the bad example and the scandal' which the vagabond solitaries represented. In 1591 this was confirmed with the donation of a piece of land in the Borgo Pio near the Vatican, where, with the financial help of a number of Roman citizens, Albentio was able to build a small chapel and an adjacent house. The situation of this complex close to the Porta Angelica, one of the gates to the Vatican, led to the naming of this society as the Hermits of Porta Angelica.

The choice for Albentio as head of this community was by no means coincidental; as the documents stated, he was a 'cleric hermit', or, in other words, a solitary religious who was ordained a priest, and thus obedient to the ecclesiastical authorities. It also meant that he could receive other members into his congregation. In this way, control was regained over those religious who had cultivated the escape from ecclesiastical supervision. In other words, the hermits were remodelled into something comparable to a regular Order, be it in this case only during the time they spent in the Holy City.

According to the aforementioned papal brief of 1591, the primary task of this new religious community was to feed and lodge 'foreign hermits' for the period of eight days which these anchorites were allowed to spend in Rome. After this period, they were constrained to return home. Moreover, they had to carry a letter from the bishop or vicar of their place of origin to attest to the fact that they had asked prior permission to undertake the pilgrimage. That

---

1 The rules of conduct for hermits in the diocese of Sabina instituted during the episcopate of Gabriele Paleotti in 1594 can be found in *Constitutiones Synodales* 1737, p.87f. See also *Dictionnaire de droit canonique* 1935-1965 vol.5, cols.420-421, and Sallmann 1992, p.187.
2 Ferrero 1969 p.292: 'ad animarum salutis periculum, ac perniciosum exemplum et scandalum enixe evitandum...'
3 Ferrero 1969 p.294 gives the full text of this donation.
5 *Dictionnaire de droit canonique* 1935-1965 vol.5, col.419.
6 Ferrero 1969, p.294: 'la quale potra accrescere et ampliare secondo il bisogno dell'esercito suo, alloggiare per otto giorni soli, et non più. Romitì forastieri, i quali vengono a Roma per visitare questi santi luoghi, purché portino letere
these requirements and restrictions were not always obeyed can be concluded from the edict issued by Paul V in 1606, which forbade hermits to stay anywhere else in the city of Rome, or beg for alms without written permission from the prior of the Santa Maria delle Grazie a Porta Angelica. Any hermit present in the city of Rome was moreover constrained to go and stay in the house erected by Albentio del Cetraro, or otherwise was thrown in prison and subsequently banished from the city. To restrict them even further, the maximum stay was reduced from eight to seven days.\(^5\)

Probably as a result of these papal decisions, the Congregation of Porta Angelica proved a success; hermits continued to flock to Rome during the early years of the seventeenth century and were temporarily lodged by the congregation. In 1618, Angelo Maria da Genova was permitted to found a second hermitage, for stricter cultivation of the anchorite ideal; whether and where this was realised is unknown. A few years before, abundant alms had facilitated a reconstruction of the simple chapel into a veritable church. This had been dedicated to Our Lady of Graces, a reference to the miraculous image of the Virgin that Albentio had brought from the Holy Land, which was placed on the altar of the new church.\(^5\)

At the same time, these papal briefs signalled problems arising with respect to the hermit’s juridical position in relation to their attire.\(^6\) In 1638, for example, Urban VIII issued an edict which forbade hermits to wear the habit of the Third Franciscan Order without express permission by the Superior of that Order.\(^7\) This generic Franciscan tertiary habit consisted of a simple brown tunic with or without a cloak, obviously much resembling the usual clothing of the solitary religious.\(^8\) Apart from coincidental similarity, itinerant hermits probably dressed intentionally in this way to deceive authorities and the general public in order to obtain permission to beg for alms.\(^6\) In any case, the problem continued to exist, as a papal decision of 1669 stated that the many hermits who had taken a habit without explicit permission were considered breaking the rules. This latter decree ordered all hermits in Rome to either lay down their habit, request sojourn in the convent at Porta Angelica, or, as was required at the end of the testimoniali del suo Vescovo, o Vicario, ne si possin prolungare il detto termine di otto giorni senza licenza scritta di Monsignore Viceregrete.\(^7\)

\(^{11}\) Ferrero 1969, p.295.

\(^{12}\) For the church and convent, see Armellini 1942, pp.975-976 and Lombardi 1996, pp.360-361.


\(^{14}\) This edict of October 5, 1638 is in Bullarium Romanum 1857-1885 vol.14, pp.671-672. It was followed only one month later by an edict issued by Antonio Barberini on November 27, 1638, in which disobedience to the former edict was connected with severe punishment; see Ferrero 1969 p.297-299 for the texts of both edicts.

\(^{15}\) For the habit of the Franciscan Third Order, see Helvot 1721 vol.7, p.217.

\(^{16}\) See Sallmann 1992 p.186-187
eighteenth century in the case of permanent hermits - enter a Third Order, and thus become a lay-brother. In all options, some kind of profession was to be made, whether simple or solemn.

These papal directives and prohibitions on dress suggest that the image of the solitary religious was constituted for a large part by his clothing, and indicated that this was a reasonably constant factor during the seventeenth century. Almost throughout the entire Christian era the hermit possessed certain visual characteristics, which made him immediately recognisable. He was a man of mature age and often of a robust constitution but emaciated body, and walked on bare feet, or else on sandals. He had a long (i.e. uncut) beard and hair, dressed in a habit of rough fabric of poor quality or even made of leaves or other natural materials, which expressed the highest ideal of poverty. In all cases, this covering would be held together by an equally rough cord or a leather strap. Sometimes this dress was supplemented by a scapular, or a cloak, or a cappuccio similar to that of pilgrims - even though such additions were explicitly forbidden in papal decrees between 1638 and the end of the eighteenth century, as these were considered characteristics of the Franciscan and the Carmelite habits respectively. Descriptions of the itinerant preachers at the beginning of the sixteenth century also referred to these characteristics, in the first place the dress of sackcloth or even animal skin, pelle selvatica. In other respects, elements of the hermit's clothing were also linked to the pilgrim: the uncouth appearance and the protective mantle: as has been argued above, many hermits were in fact pilgrims, in the spiritual but often also in the real sense of the word.

Objects would heighten aspects of this image: the hermit could carry a stick referring to the element of travelling or spiritual pilgrimage; a book, a wooden cross, or a rosary would point at devotional practices; or he could hold things that reminded one of mortification and penitence such as a skull, a whip, or chains. These themes were most apparent in the imagery of the hermit in literature and the visual arts, as they represented exemplary qualities. For the general


73 Female hermits were relatively few; women wanting to live a solitary religious life usually had themselves walled in; on the difference in asceticism between men and women, see Weinstein Bell 1994, pp 155, 220-238. The idea of the desert was often used in the writings of female saints; see Petroff 1994, pp.110-136 on the influence of the Vitae Patrum on thirteenth-century women mystics. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, religious women were not allowed to live alone; too strict asceticism was dissuaded; see Sensi 1992, pp.20-21. An example of a late medieval female saint turning her back to the monastic community and living a solitary life on her own is the Augustinian nun Rita da Cascia, she was beatified in 1628; see Scaraffia 1986, pp.184-185 for details on solitary life in her hagiography.


75 See the various decrees transcribed and published by Ferrero 1969, pp.298, 300, 319, 323.

76 Niccoli 1990, p.94.

77 Realllexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte 1933-present, vol.4, cols.1020-1023.
public, the combined symbols of mortification, detachment from this world and incessant prayer, were exclusive signs of hermits, whether saints or still alive. The popular image of the solitary religious held the middle between the mendicant monk, the itinerant preacher and the pilgrim.

**Sant’Onofrio: the monk redressing as hermit**

Tridentine rules led to a 'domestication' of the hermit in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but also to monastic observance to the pristine Rules. These two tendencies could conflict when the Order in question had been the product of an earlier eremitic movement: this would imply that the monks should return to the status of solitaries - which was impossible in reality. The monastic community of Sant’Onofrio in Rome is a clear example of this phenomenon. The anchorite life had been promoted by Pietro Gambacorta da Pisa, founder of the community, but the Hieronymite Rule later adopted by this group turned the group into a monastic community. To resolve the paradox which had arisen with the Tridentine call for observance, a fresco-cycle in the cloister of Sant’Onofrio presented the monastic sojourn as the necessary preliminary phase of eremitism.

The convent of Sant’Onofrio in Rome was built in the first half of the fifteenth century on the eastern slope of the Janiculum Hill for the Hieronymites of Pietro Gambacorta (fig.95). This Italian Congregation of the Hieronymite Order originated from a loose community of devout men around a Piemontese hermit, living in premises comprising the church of San Salvatore in Termis, in the centre of Rome. Notwithstanding this urban location, these devout, not being bound by an approved Rule, were considered hermits. In 1404 they were joined by Niccolo da Forca Palena who organised them into a monastic community, obtained approval of their Rule in 1446 and linked them to the Congregation of Pietro Gambacorta, and arranged a new convent on the Janiculum, just outside of the city. Between 1439 and 1449 the old church, now the Chapel of Sant’Onofrio to the right of the church, was built. This first settlement probably consisted of a loose conglomeration of buildings, still resembling hermitages. In the next half-century, when the monastic rule was introduced, this complex was remodelled into a real monastery, with an enlarged church, two cloisters, and communal refectory and dormitories. The history of this...
community reflects the changes and restrictions on anchorite life, reorganised to resemble or become a normal monastic community.

In accordance with the dedication of the church to Onuphrius, the lunettes of the cloister directly adjacent to the church were decorated with twenty-seven scenes that document his life (fig.96).\(^1\) Painters of this cycle were Vespasiano Strada and Claudio Ridolfi.\(^2\) The dating of these frescoes is between 1599 and 1601 on the basis of the inscription in the first lunette. This is confirmed by archival material recording payments for the scaffolding.\(^3\) A payment to Vespasiano Strada was recorded in April 1601, but only for the angels between the scenes.\(^4\)

The subject of the frescoes was, as the introductory inscription stated in Latin and Italian, the 'life, death and miracles' of the hermit Saint Onuphrius, a descendant of the Persian Kings who lived in the Egyptian desert for sixty years (fig.97).\(^5\) The following scenes depicted in chronological sequence the birth of the infant until the saint's death and burial in the desert. It began with the devil's suggestion that the child carried by the queen was illegitimate, the following trial by fire to test this assumption, and the Christian Baptism of the newborn, who was carried by his father to the monastery in the Egyptian desert to be raised and instructed by the monks (fig.98).

Only after this introductory section was the solitary life of Onuphrius in the desert depicted. This showed the saint being instructed in the eremitic life by Hermoeus and led to the grotto where he could live (fig.99), and where he was fed for the first thirty years by an angel bringing him loaves of bread, and subsequently by the fruits of a palm-tree. The last quarter of the cycle depicted how Onuphrius was found by the monk Paphnutius during his travels through the


\(^{2}\) For Strada see Thieme-Becker 1907-1950 vol.32, p.148, for Ridolfi see Thieme-Becker 1907-1950 vol.28, pp.312-313.

\(^{3}\) On the attribution of this cycle much has been written; Titi/Bottari 1763, p.29 suggested that Cesare d'Arpino co-operated in this cycle, or that Paul Bril was involved have been reluted; see Abromson 1981, pp.200-207 and Kuhn-Forte 1997, p.917. The suggestion made in 1638 by Celio that it had been 'Vespasiano dello Spagnuolo Romano' was followed by Baglione and Titi, and in recent publications, see Celio 1638 1967, p.43. Roettgen 1973, p.52 suggested that the first four scenes had not been done by d'Arpino but instead by Mario Ganassini; a suggestion that has until now not been accepted. For the payments see ASR, Ord.Rel.Masc. Gerolamini, Conv. di S.Onofrio, b.3197: 'Entrate e Uscite', fol. 211


\(^{5}\) S. Honuphrii Regis Persarum Filiī Qui annos sexaginta occultus mundo solus in vasta Aegypti solitudine latuit Vita mors miracula Picturix expressa anno iubilei MDC' `Restaur. 1682'. On Saint Onuphrius, see BS 1961-1970 vol 9, cols.1187-1280.
Egyptian desert. After having been told the story of the saints' life, Paphnutius took care of his burial, witnessed the divinely ordered destruction of Onuphrius' cave and well, and was told by an angel to go back to his monastery to disclose this edifying account to his fellow-monks (fig.100).

Although these frescoes seemed to follow a predictable chronological account of Onuphrius' life, their order and content was not based on an established hagiographic tradition. The entry in the Acta Sanctorum of 12 June, published at the end of the seventeenth century, included three quite different versions, while the introduction by the editors negated outright the initial part on the saints' royal ancestry, birth and childhood, which was so prominently included in the frescoes. One reason for this vagueness might be found in the late arrival, at the end of the thirteenth century, of hagiographic accounts on Onuphrius in the West. The Legenda Aurea, the medieval standard for artists and writers until the seventeenth century, did not contain his life; not even Cavalcà's Vite de'Santi Padri offered the reader a life of this saint. No uniform version was arrived at in the early modern period, due to the variations in the Greek manuscripts and the different translations. Notwithstanding this variety, the episode of Onuphrius was always the main part of a frame-story, which had as its main character the monk Paphnutius, who travelled through the Egyptian desert in search of the best form of religious life. Onuphrius was only one of several hermits Paphnutius encountered along the way.

The hagiographies of Onuphrius that appeared in print during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to provide variations on the basic version, a number of which (especially the descent from the Persian kings) were integrated in the painted cycle in the Sant'Onofrio. However, one particular detail does not accord with any of the published accounts, and that is the representation of the young saint being nursed by a hind after the presentation of the child to the monks (fig.101). According to the known sources, this deer fed the baby during the trip through the desert until the arrival at the monastery, which means that the order of the frescoes in Sant'Onofrio contradicted these accounts, as well as being contrary to logic. There is however one source that contained this very order and this was a fifteenth-century

---

51 "Sed nihil est car gentient. Victor navo illis, at pulat, thesauro, cun voce lautum sit opus, audacter inicitaque confictum, quidquid de ortu & vita, ante ingressum in eremum, libello primo congritur." Onuphrius' hagiography was imported together with the Scala Paradisi by John Climacus; see Guerini 1993.  
52 Fagnoni 1996.  
53 Cassian praised Paphnutius as the progress from coenobitism to eremitism; see Rousseau 1978, p.179.  
54 Lives of Onuphrius were included in the publications of Lippomannus 1558 vol.6, fol.58r-6r, and other sixteenth-century collections such as Surias; examples of separately published hagiographies of Onuphrius from the seventeenth century are Regio 1604, Coppola 1643, and Raoli 1705.
This hand-written volume with the title *Vita mors miracula S' Honuphrij Regis Persarum Filii* has been composed in a Renaissance hand, but also shows early-seventeenth century interventions. The concordance between the inscription in the first lunette of the cloister and the title of this manuscript already points out their interdependence. In the text itself (written in Latin), a number of brackets indicating the beginning of each new episode exactly match the first four scenes of the painted cycle. In *Seicento* handwriting, letters were retraced in brown ink; alterations were introduced to heighten the legibility of the fifteenth-century text for seventeenth-century eyes.

On the narrative level, the manuscript diverged from the hagiographic tradition. Firstly, the account in the *Vita mors miracula* began immediately with the birth and miraculous childhood of Onuphrius, postponing the framing history of Paphnutius to the last third. In this way, the narration was given a straightforward chronological order in which the theme of the search for perfection was replaced by an exemplary account of the saint's life. Secondly, the manuscript version described how after the acceptance of the child by the abbot, the hind continued to feed the child with its milk - the very element that distinguished the fresco-cycle from all other known sources. This change of order was however not an arbitrary choice, as the author stated, because 'For this reason, the child ate not the meals of humans but almost yielded completely to the food of angels.' In other words, this scene heightened Onuphrius' ascetic and saintly status by stressing his abstinence from the common food of man already during his younger years.

Neither were the narrative differences with the other known hagiographies coincidental; they were introduced with a clear concept in mind. The added importance given to the introductory part, on Onuphrius' childhood and his first years in the monastery, can be explained by regarding the entire life of the saint as an exemplary process consisting of three steps. In the

---

1 A 1598 inventory of the library of Sant'Onofrio is in BAV.Lat.11292, fols.69r-75v; it only recorded printed editions, however, not manuscripts. The same goes for two inventories of the monastery’s library of 1784 and 1793, in BNC.Mss.Fondi Minori.S.Onofrio.292 and 29 respectively. The inclusion of the manuscript in this same BNC.Fondi Minori.S.Onofrio indicates that it formed part of the monastery’s holdings at the end of the nineteenth century. On the grounds of the striking coherence of this text with the fresco-cycle, it will be upheld here that it was already in S. Onofrio by 1599.
2 *Vita mors miracula...Quam Horatius Nardus inter Monast'. monumenta ad inventam in bibliotheca asservari C...*, in BNC.Mss.Fondi Minori.S.Onofrio 95.
3 *Vita mors miracula*, fol.3v.
4 *Vita mors miracula*, fol.3v: 'Puer quidem honofrius non humanis nutritus sed quasi angelicis pastus cunctis obiedes.'
first, the protagonist leaves his worldly possessions behind, to enter a monastery and dedicate his life to God. In the second, he is taught the means and ends of the regular life, consisting of prayers, obedience and the acquisition of virtues; the period of 'apprenticeship' with the hermit was a sequence to this. Finally the apex of spiritual life, the solitary part, is depicted, culminating in the soul leaving this world to join its Creator.  

This kind of compositional structure can be found in many Lives of the Fathers, but the manuscript as well as the frescoes at Sant'Onofrio simplified and highlighted these stages even more.  

The additions to the traditional story in the original Greek sources - childhood and monastic life - and alterations in the narrative - sequential instead of a frame - balanced the first two parts with the third, the sojourn in the desert. The new form adapted the source to the Catholic monastic concept, as well as to the ideals of ascetic prayer and mystical contemplation.

All three steps were clearly illustrated in the cloister of Sant'Onofrio, one wall dedicated to each stage, and a fourth wall to conclude the story with Paphnutius' visit. The six scenes on the first wall narrated the miraculous birth and baptism until the arrival at the monastery; the second wall depicted the years of spiritual formation. The scenes in the monastery - the miracle of the bread. Onuphrius listening to the elder monks telling edifying stories - indicated the acquisition of virtues and ascetic practice. The stories of Elijah and John the Baptist which were part of his spiritual education (fig.98) inspired him to leave the monastery at night, following a illuminated column in the sky that guided him through the desert to the cave of the (possibly archetypal) hermit Hermicus, who would teach him the rules of solitary life. The third wall showed how, after this apprenticeship, Onuphrius was ready to live in the desert on his own and taste the divine fruits. The ultimate state, found on the same third wall, was that of the angel handing him the Host every Sunday.

After reaching this spiritual apex Paphnutius appeared on the scene, at the beginning of the fourth wall. He was told the edifying story of Onuphrius' life, buried him with the help of two...
lions, and was forced to return home after the death of Onuphrius, because the cave and the palm-tree were destroyed by divine intervention (fig. 100). Although he had found the perfect spiritual life, he had to return to his monastery to prepare himself for the solitary life. This last scene also explicated that Paphnutius was to spread this edifying and exemplary story among his fellow-monks, as an angel appearing to him pointed him the way home.

Both the text and the frescoes introduced a number of scenes that illustrated how Onuphrius had not simply been a solitary saint, but had to go through the necessary stages to become a hermit. This was also the message to the viewer: the anchorite is the apex of a road to spiritual perfection that can only be entered through the monastic gates. Hence, the monks living at that moment in Sant’Onofrio were not simply coenobitic dwellers, but aspired to a spiritual goal beyond this world. Concentration on the spiritual aspect also intended that the hermit was a state of mind: it was ultimately realised in the act of prayer. One could live in a monastery, and still reside in the desert.

When in 1595, the sick poet Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) fled the papal court to Sant’Onofrio to try and cure his mental and physical turbulence, he stated as his reason for doing so not simply the fresh and healthy air on the slope of the hill. In a letter, he stressed this place as a spiritual retreat suitable for preparing for his coming death:

> I had myself transferred to this monastery of Sant’Onofrio not only because of the air which is recommended by the doctors more than any other in Rome, but almost to begin my conversation with Heaven from this eminent place through conversation with these devout Fathers.

The geographic setting of the Sant’Onofrio, outside of the walls of Rome on the Janiculum Hill, mirrored the spiritual ideal of isolation and elevation. In 1600, Panciroli explicitly wrote in his description of the monastery that the location seemed to have been made by nature to resemble a hermitage. This external situation was a reflection of interior perfection: the decoration in the cloister made clear to the beholder that these monks lived in a context that recreated as far as possible the real anchorite life, but still retained within it the limitations set by the Tridentine

---

98 The detail of the lions digging the saint’s grave is a familiar motif in the Lives of desert-saints: it occurred for the first time in Athanasius’ *Life of Anthony Abbot* when Saint Paul the First Hermit was buried, and can also be found in the hagiography of Saint Mary of Egypt, and elsewhere.

99 Tasso 1855, vol.5 nr.1535, to Antonio Costantini, March 1595: ‘Mi sono fatto condurre in questo ministero di Sant’Onofrio, non solo perché l’aria è lodata da’ medici, piú che d’alcan’ altra parte di Roma, ma quasi per cominciare da questo luogo eminenti, e con la conversazione di questi divoti padri, la mia conversazione in cielo.’
Council and the Catholic ecclesiastic reforms. One could be a hermit in the mind, as long as the monastic context and ecclesiastical supervision were respected.

**Ephemeral landscapes and theatrical hermits**

Apart from being real or imaginary, hermits could also be impersonated - in the manner that characteristics of their appearance and lifestyle might be copied not only for spiritual reasons, but with other intentions as well. In the latter case, preachers to impress their audience used the exemplary function of the hermit. This was a more general phenomenon among Capuchins and Franciscans, than in the other Orders.\(^1\) This was caused by their double inspiration from Saint Francis: he had combined eremitic life with apostolic mission; and in imitation of him sixteenth- and seventeenth-century preachers appeared in public in the guise of hermits.

The Franciscan monk Bartolomeo Cambi da Salutio (1557-1617) was a famous preacher in his early years, and an important author of religious treatises in his later life.\(^1\) Like Bellarmino, Cambi wrote books on the practice of meditation and contemplation during his spiritual retreats, some of which were semi-permanent, lasting in some cases for a number of years. These were not only undertaken out of his own free will; troubles with the ecclesiastical authorities necessitated that he withdrew from society at least twice. Notwithstanding the forced character of his seclusion, his life in these circumstances was obviously modelled upon the anchorite life and for this and his books he became known among his contemporaries as 'il grande contemplativo'.

Cambi’s sermons were so popular with the general public that the Inquisition and other authorities started to follow his tracks. After the incriminating discovery of a musical instrument in his cell, Cambi retreated for a while to repent. Subsequently, he started to appear at the pulpit with a large cross as a sign of penitence, which only increased public curiosity, and again caused suspicion among ecclesiastical officials.\(^1\) A second retreat to Fonte Colombo was undertaken in a grotto consisting of two spaces, one of which functioned as chapel and was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, while the other was called Paradisetto or ‘small Paradise’, and served as a place for his few moments of sleep and the more frequent acts of physical penitence. This grotto was only accessible by way of a rough ladder of oak-tree branches, heightening the effect of Cambi’s

---

\(^1\) Panchirolli 1600, p.639. 'Poi l’anno 1446 in Roma sopra di questo monte che parte del Gianicolo, come più sommendamente si dirà alla vicina Chiesa di S. Pietro in Montorio, e che dalla natura par fatto per un Freno...'

\(^1\) Niccoli 1990, p.99.


\(^1\) Treffers 1995. p.50.
isolation and remoteness from society. On the top of the mountain he also had a chapel constructed that was dedicated to Mary Magdalene, and where he could retreat even further from the inhabited world. There, and in general during the three years of his solitary sojourn, Cambi experienced regular raptures, which at a certain moment were evoked by the mere sight of the crucifix, or any other visual representation of a holy subject, such as prints of a saint.

It also was here that Bartolomeo’s prophetic gifts became apparent, and he discovered his ability to read hearts. This brought him once again into conflict with the Inquisition, leading to his final retreat to the convent of San Pietro in Montorio on the Janiculum Hill in Rome. Here, Cambi organised another hermitage, this time consisting of a chapel situated in the garden of the monastery that he only left to celebrate Mass in the conventual church. After his death, his body was buried in the Church of San Francesco a Ripa, further down the hill, first in the communal tomb and from 1620 in a separate grave (fig.102). The site of his grave was adorned with a marble plaque with inscription paid for by Odoardo Farnese, and preliminary hearings for a process of beatification were started.

In his appearance as preacher, Cambi had consciously utilised elements from the concept of the solitary saint: physical appearance, solitary life, fervent acts of meditation, and grottoes set in gardens or real nature. During his retreats to these hermitages, Cambi started to write devotional treatises on penitence and contemplation, in which these elements were promoted as elements of the ideal devotional life. Like his sermons, these books were written to disseminate the exercises of contemplation and prayer among the general public. The spiritual perfection he had reached by permanent seclusion and dedication to prayer, fasting and mortification made him, in the eyes of his contemporaries, an ideal spiritual guide, securing his success in oratory and writing alike. His most famous book, the Paradiso dei Contemplativi of 1607 led the soul of the reader to spiritual union with its Creator by means of a dialogue between the guardian angel and the soul. This conversation took place during an imaginary pilgrimage along the ‘road of contemplation’ to a city on top of a mountain, the latter a clear analogy for the Heavenly...
Jerusalem. Analagous with the material discussed in the previous chapter, real nature was presented by Cambi as a point of departure, visualising the concepts of beauty and order in this world, which reflected divine omnipotence, providence and love.

Cambi had many followers and admirers - not just from the roman upper classes, also among the clerics. Farnese was one of them. The foundation of the funeral monument in the San Francesco a Ripa by cardinal Odoardo, the dedication of the Paradiso dei Contemplativi to him, and contemporary accounts reporting their meetings clearly attest to the warm relations between the Franciscan monk and the cardinal. These contacts indicate that not only had Bellarmino's ideas as expressed in the Scala di salire of 1615 played a role in the concept of the Camerino degli Eremiti, but that these ideas had a much wider basis in the devotional reality of the early Seicento. Cambi's example of retreating to hermitages, the exemplary image of the hermit as the apex of spiritual perfection, and the spiritual road through this world to the next were followed by Farnese on a temporary basis in his own artificial desert. As Cambi's books had been composed during periods of divine inspiration in a hermitage, this was also the designated place to read them.

Giacinto da Casale in Piacenza

The image of the hermit and the concept of the temporary hermitage were further developed by another famous preacher in the early Seicento, Giacinto da Casale. In 1617, when Lanfranco was painting the Camerino degli Eremiti, this Capuchin Father, famous for his rhetorical abilities, preached the Quaresima in the city of Piacenza, part of the Farnese duchy, with great success. Indeed, Giacinto's popularity was so great that, according to the ample description of a supposed eye-witness that was published the following year (fig.103), the inhabitants of the city implored him to come back for the celebration of the Quaratn'Ore as well, when he had suggested this to

---

13 Cambi 1607, p.105: 'La prima via di caminare a questa contemplatione, è l'andare considerando tutte le cose create che si vedono, odono, odorano, gustano, & toccano, con questi senso esteriori di questo tuo corpo, & così ridurre ogni cosa in Dio, & di tutto laudarlo, benedirlo, & ringraziarlo sempre, & a questo modo ascende l'anima alla contemplatione di Dio.'
14 On the contacts between Cambi and Farnese see Sarri 1925, pp.94-95: 'L'ambasciatore Arrigoni, nella relazione alla Corte di Mantova dell'arrivo del P. Bartolommeo a Roma, riferiva che fra i prelati andati a visitare il Padre, fu notato l'illustre Mons. Farnese, 'cosa, egli scrive, che la dato materia di ragionare, parendo alla Corte che Sua Signoria illustissima gli sia inclinata molto.' Odoardo probably met with Cambi because of his brother's dedication to the preacher.
16 Casale's preaching in Piacenza is amply described in Marchetti 1617, and in Poggiali 1757-1766 vol.11, pp.6-9.
them. They might have heard about the many conversions he had worked in the city of Brescia\textsuperscript{112} - or in other Italian cities such as Venice, Bergamo and Rome - and wished that their own town also be re-christianised.\textsuperscript{113}

By then, Giacinto had already proved to them the effectiveness of his sermons; during the Lenten period his words and example had turned the Piacentini into zealous devout, walking barefoot through the streets in order to pay for their sins, punishing their flesh by means of flagellation, or with weighty chains impeding their steps and hurting their ankles and feet. Many of them carried heavy crosses on their shoulders or had crowns of thorns on their heads, making the city look like a new Jerusalem with hundreds of Christ look-alikes. No-one was able to hold back their tears at the sight of this, cleaning their souls, as the flow of blood cleansed the streets of the many sins which they had previously witnessed.\textsuperscript{114}

This forthright display of religious zeal moved even the most hesitant spectators. Nobles started to dress in sackcloth as a sign of humility and offered their riches to Giacinto to be redistributed to the poor. The report mentioned that even the hardest hearts were weakened by this call for spiritual renewal; not even the Devil himself might be able to withstand this miraculous preacher. To exemplify this, the author of the account drew on the comparison with the solitary saints who had successfully combatted Satan:

And I would really rather call them rather Devil than man, who were not moved at the appearance in the pulpit of this face so devout and emaciated, that he seemed one of those ancient hermits who came from the desert, or the woods; who would not have changed his mind upon seeing this pious scene, upon the weakening of hearts, and so frightful detestations of sin, upon criticising the vices, and the menace of rigorous castigation by God; who, finally, would not be healed by hearing this clear, sonorous and penetrating voice, upon those real and meaningful words, upon this stream of eloquence, this fulminating tone, upon those vivid reasons, which convinced each and every intellect.

\textsuperscript{112} This was described in the booklet entitled \textit{Le penitenze di Brescia et i frutti ammirabili operati da Dio Nostro Signore in quella Città. Per le Prediche, e Sermoni fatti la Settimana Santa all'Oratione delle Quarant'ore} in quella Cathedral l'anno 1615. Dal reverendo Padre Fra Giacinto da Casale Predicatore Capuccino. Dedicata alli Serenissimi di Baviera. Milano 1615.

\textsuperscript{113} A number of accounts and sources on Giacinto da Casale's preaching can be found in \textit{I Frati Cappuccini} 1988 vol.2, pp.477-480 on his success in Rimini in 1618, p.485 for an account of 1615 in Brescia, and pp.499-503 on his preaching in Venice in 1614.

\textsuperscript{114} A long description of this is given in Marchetti 1617, fols.3v-4r.
vested in the zeal of God, animated by the ardour of the Holy Spirit... 

The above description clearly pointed out that Fra Giacinto worked upon his audience not only by means of words but just as much through his appearance. The anchorite characteristics transmitted to his audience the penitential kind of life that these figures were supposed to lead, and by means of which they were victorious over the Devil and his temptations. This example was to be followed by the citizens of Piacenza, who, as indicated above, appeared in sackcloth and barefoot as an external sign of their inward conversion and penitence. Penitence by means of flagellation was not to be done in public, however, as this was considered discreet. Penance applied to the members of the lower and middle classes was done in the choir of the church, and young nobles could gather together three times a week in a salone of the Episcopal palace, where they would 'discipline' themselves after a short edifying talk by Casale. In other words, each social group was offered a suitable 'retreat' for the act of penitence, in accordance with decorum.

When the decision was made that Giacinto would remain in Piacenza for the celebration of the Quarant'Ore, he urged all citizens to prepare themselves spiritually for this occasion by means of the Sacraments of Confession and Communion, because 'in a very clear mirror the rays of Divine Grace would impress themselves the most.' For Piacenza to divert the wrath of God, like a second Ninive, it would be required to show outward signs of its pious intentions; the way in which the devout would come to the Adoration of the Host would not be prescribed, but should be inspired by the Holy Ghost and by all means express sobriety and modesty. The perfect form expressed the deepest humility: thus, many nobles appeared dressed in sackcloth, in imitation of the preacher and his own example, the hermit.

Apart from these admonitions to individuals, Casale spurred the citizens into action for the necessary preparations for the ceremony of the Quarant'Ore. Brotherhoods would organise...
processions going to and from the church at fixed hours. For each of those groups the friar would hold a sermon to inspire the necessary zeal in the audience that was kneeling in front of the ciborium with the consecrated Eucharist, the Body of Christ. The setting of this reliquary would moreover be decorated at the expense of the canons of the cathedral, and constructed with some haste. Obviously, shortcomings in quality did not affect efficacy.

The nave of the church was hung with dark draperies along the walls to heighten the visual impact of the apparatus itself that was located on the side of the entrance, opposite the altar. The chronicle suggested the all-pervasive impression of the ephemeral display within the environment of the church. In comparison with other known apparati for the Forty-Hours prayer in Rome, the use and significance of biblical landscape in Piacenza might be called a strikingly new invention. The eye-witness account discussed the relation between its appearance and function at length:

It was a devout, beautiful and very noble apparato: but that which counts the most, was that it envisaged materially that which it should express spiritually. Thus, in all the breadth and width of the nave of the lower part were certain mountains and hills, above which the castle of Bethlehem could be discovered on the one side and that of Nazareth on the other; furthermore in the middle, which was left free immediately above the Altar, the city of Jerusalem was found, where it seemed that Heaven was united with the earth, and God descended to unite Himself piously with us. This Glory was so beautifully situated in perspective, that for the splendour of the hidden lights, which were more than a thousand, the artistry, as well as for its proportions, it resembled the Heavenly Reign itself. Gradually one discovered within the Heavens the distinct choirs of Angels, the Seraphs, the Cherubs, etcetera. Penultimate ... were the Angels with the Sacred mysteries of the Passion. And in the last ... together with other angels, on the right hand side the Glorious Saint Carlo [Borromeo], and on the other side the seraphic Saint Francis, lifesize, turned in the act of adoration towards the Holy Sacrament. The King of Heaven was displayed in the midst of all the heavens, with great majesty, held up by two Angels

118 Marchetti 1617, fol.6v: 'la diligenza di vinti Cavalieri principali, Marchesi, Conti, e Gentiluomini della Citta, quali (senti dal Padre) vestiti di sacco...'
119 Such assistance by lesser brotherhoods in the celebration, rather than taking up the entire organisation, was also usual in other occasions: see Black 1989, p.99.
120 I Frati Cappuccini 1988 vol.2, pp.185-186 reports about the re-use of the ephemeral theatre made in Rimini in 1615; these were probably related to the memory of this important event in the history of Piacenza, and the reverence that the Piacentini kept for Giacinto at least until 1621; see Poggiali 1757-1766 vol.11, pp.7-9.
above a small painting, of which one could not discover where it was fastened, they showed it [the Host] holding it up in the air, and sustaining it with the utmost reverence in their hands, in the act of handing it over to us, and inviting us to run towards Him, and be secure of His divine Mercy. In the lower part, where the city of Jerusalem ended, was the Altar ... all together it represented Mount Tabor during the Transfiguration of the Lord, and where the earth matched the Heavens, it demonstrated a most serene face of Paradise.122

In other words, the apparato showed an extensive landscape with three cities placed in a triangle: on the lower side that of Bethlehem and Nazareth, the sites of Christ's life on earth, and above it that of the Heavenly Jerusalem, where he went after his Resurrection. Inbetween, the image of His death on the Cross, the Host, functioned as centre and link between them.

This evocation of the theatrical ensemble not merely evoked the overwhelming effect upon the beholder, but it also stressed that the viewer was supposed to become involved in the action by the very effectiveness of the design. He was invited to enter the landscape with their eyes and thoughts, in order to become a witness to the Transfiguration of the Lord - which was an argument for the defence of the Dogma of the Transubstantiation of the Eucharist. In that landscape, angels advanced towards the beholder with the intention of handing it over to him. The beholder should not wait to receive it, however, but should 'run towards it' - in other words, enter the landscape with eyes and mind.

By this act of spiritual conversion expressed in painting and sculpture, the Piacentini

122 See Weil 1974, Imorde 1997, pp.89-109, and Fagiolo dell'Arco 1997, for comparative material on the Roman stage-designs for the Quarant'Ore in the seventeenth century; see especially, Fagiolo dell'Arco 1997, pp.101-102 for the use of natural settings in church, which only came about around the middle of the seventeenth century.
123 Marchetti 1617, fol.?r: 'In tanto il Capitolo de'Signori Canonici del Duomo, con prontezza, e liberalita singolare, a sue spese, e di moto proprio haveva nel fine della Chiesa, alla porta maggiore, in prospettiva del Choro fatto fabbricare un spazioso palco con sontuoso apparato, ove havessi da collocarsi il Santissimo Sacramento, e trattenersi da una parte il Padre Predicatore per far i Sermoni, e dall'altra la musica. Era divoto, vago, e nobilissimo l'apparato; ma quel che più importa, situato in modo tale, che a punto materialmente figurava, quel che spiritualmente seguir doveva. Era dunque in tutta l'ampiezza, e larghezza della nave parte inferiore con certe montagne, e colline, sopra delle quali si scoprivano il Castello di Betlemme da una parte, e dall'altra quello di Nazarette; nel mezzo poi, che restava immediata sopra l'Altare, si scopriva la Città di Giuesalemme, onde pareva, che il Cielo fosse unito con la terra, e Dio discendesse ad unirsi pietosamente con noi. Questa Gloria era in si bella prospettiva situata, che, e per i splendori de luminos nascosti, che più di mille erano, e per l'arte, e proporzione, rassemblava l'istesso Cielo Empireo. Gradatamente no'Celi si scoprivano i Chori Angelici distinti, i Serafini, i Cherubini, &c. Nel penultimo ... stavano gli Angeli con i santisimi misterj della passione E nell'ultimo ... insieme con alt'Angeli, dalla parte destra il Glorioso S. Carlo, e dalla sinistra il Serafico Padre San Francesco, grandi al naturale, che in atto d'adoratione erano rivolti verso il Santissimo Sacramento. Stava il Re del Cielo esposto nel mezzo de quei Celi tutti, con gran maestà, sostenuto da due Angelini, che sopra d'un quadrettino, che non si scopriva punto, ove fosse appoggiato, mostravano di tenerlo in aria, e di sostenarlo con grandissima riverenza nelle lor mani, in atto di purgerlo a noi, e d'invitarci a correr a lui, e farci arditi, e sicuri della sua divina misericordia: A basso poi, ove terminava la Città di Giuesalemme...
would behold the real world as the spot where the body of Christ had been transfigured into its Divine appearance, and at the same time perceiving it as Paradise located at the intersection of the real and the Heavenly world. The Host was placed here to stress its function as intermediate between heaven and earth, the link between Christ and the Church. His donation to the devout, and as proof of his double Presence. Or, stated otherwise, the landscape turned into Paradise by intervention of the Host coming down from Heaven, granting spiritual enlightenment to the receptive audience as well.

The concept of uniting the material world with Heaven was also stressed in the liturgical and oratorical events. After the Eucharistic Mass - at which Giacinto appeared with a rope around his neck and a crown of thorns on his head, signs of penitence and mortification - the Host was carried in procession to its allocated place in the ephemeral apparatus, and the Adoration started with a sermon by Fra Giacinto. His appearance was, as in the earlier occasion of the Quaresima, calculated to be at least as impressive as his words. One detail had intentionally been left out of the above description of the apparatus, which suggests that it was intended to create an effect of surprise for the viewer as well as for the reader. The account of the start of the Adoration related that

on the right side a beautiful and devout music began, and when this was ended, the Father left from the left side, where, in between some slopes of the above mentioned scenery, was a lifelike horrid grotto, with a Crucifix in his hands. Casale's appearance resembled contemporary paintings of hermits and drew upon the familiar iconography of the cave in the landscape and the hermit with the crucifix. Indeed, the perception of the chronicler was that the Father now appeared to be more an Angel than a human being, and the heaven-sent quality of his sermon was no doubt increased by this visual trick. The fact that this Capuchin seemed to live in a cave made his admonitions about the forth-coming end of the world and the advice on a better spiritual life the more authoritative to his audience, as much as his anchorite image during the preparatory sermons of the Quaresima inspired his audience to acts of penitence and prayer.

era l'Altare. [...] tutto insieme rassegnava il monte labor nella Trasfigurazione del Signore, ove la terra accordata col Cielo, mostrò una serenissima faccia di Paradiso.'

Marchetti 1617, fol.7v: ‘Il giorno delle Palm dunque su le 21. Hore, levò Monsignor Illustissimo dalla Capella solita il Santissimo Sacramento, e seguito prima dal Padre Predicatore scalzo, con grossa fune al collo, coronato di spine in testa, & una grà Croce in mano (vivo ritratto di mortificazione, e di penitèza)...’

Marchetti 1617, fol.7v: ‘dalla parte destra s'incomincio una bella, & devota musica. laqual finita usci il Padre dalla banda sinistra, o'era al vivo, tra certi dirupi aspri, un'horrida grotta, nell'habitò sudetto, con un Crucifisso in mano,‘

Marchetti 1617, fol.7v: ‘con aspetto più Angelico, che umano...‘
As the account of these miraculous weeks in the history of Piacenza claimed, this impression was consciously developed by Casale, and derived from the Capuchin Order to which he belonged. Their simple brown habit, the sandals in which they walked, and the rigid prescriptions on food, morals and devotional exercises were inspired by the image of the solitary Saint Francis. As has been discussed before, the general public took these characteristics as constituents of the hermit’s image, especially in conjunction with the setting created for the Quarant’Ore in Piacenza. In this ephemeral setting, landscape was recreated as the place for penitence, the act which would turn the hostile natural surroundings into a new Paradise. The hermit present in it spoke to the people, admonishing them to do the same: turn the world into a reflection of its creator, and recreate through the act of prayer this valley of tears into a spiritual Paradise.

**Casale’s grotto and the Camerino degli Eremiti**

Cardinal Odoardo Farnese was aware of this episode in Piacenza, its preacher and the ephemeral landscape, and for this reason it can be assumed that the concept of the Camerino degli Eremiti, decorated in the very year of the Piacentine event, was related to it. Firstly, he was cardinal protector of the Capuchin Order to which Casale belonged, and the troubles into which the monk ran during these same years must have been communicated to the cardinal. Other preachers of the same Order, such as Mattia Bellintani da Salò, were held in great esteem by Cardinal Odoardo and protected by him. Secondly, Odoardo’s brother Ranuccio was Duke of Piacenza, and for that reason will have been informed of the impact of Casale upon its citizens; apart from this administrative connection, the Duke and his wife Margherita Aldobrandini had a special veneration for Casale and built a new convent for the Capuchins in Fontevivo. Marchetti’s description even mentioned the prior approval of the event by the Duke as expressed by sending soldiers to Piacenza to organise the crowds of people in the town. After his brother’s death in 1621, Odoardo became regent of the duchy and might have seen the structure built for the

---

126 Helyot 1721 vol.7, ils.13, 14.
127 Farnese is called protector of the Capuchin Order in a letter of 1623 from general Michele da Bologna to the cardinal, in ASP.Cart.Farnesiano e Borbonico Esterno, b.419. For the troubles, often with political overtones, into which Casale ran as preacher, see L’Irato Cappuccini, 1988 vol.2, pp.496-503 and Campagnola 1969, p.84.
130 Marchetti 1617, fol.6v: ‘& accioche per la continua calca di gente, ei gran concorso del popolo, non succedesse male alcuno; otto giorni inanzi haveva Sua Altezza Sorellissima, con molto zelo ordinato, che nella piazza del Duomo stesse un corpo di guardia di trecento soldati co[n]finuamente.’

242
occasion, as it might very well have been preserved in the cathedral. Thirdly, the publication of the eye-witnesses' account was dedicated to cardinal Odoardo by the publisher (fig.104). The ephemeral grotto built in the cathedral of Piacenza early in 1617 was most probably an important source of inspiration for the Camerino degli Eremiti, either through the written account of it, or possibly by means of the apparato itself.

The three elements combined in the Piacenza apparato - the Quarant'Ore, the landscape, and the hermit - all coincided with the themes of decoration in the Camerino as constructed for Cardinal Odoardo. Firstly, Saint Paul the first Hermit and Saint Anthony Abbot receiving the heavenly Bread, Benedict in his cave, and Saint Mary Magdalene pointed towards the Eucharist; and in the centre of the ceiling, Christ himself turned earthly bread into His Body after his retreat into the Desert and the Temptation of the Devil. As in Piacenza cathedral, in the Roman Camerino the Saviour himself was centrally positioned as mediator between Heaven and earth, and in the double form of His human and Eucharistic guise. These two levels coincided, when the brotherhood of the Orazione e Morte staged the monthly Quarant'Ore. The image of the Saviour in Lanfranco's decoration was then enhanced by with His real presence on the altar.

Secondly, in concordance with the description of the Piacenza theatre, the natural setting in the Camerino helped Farnese to transport his mind from this world to the next. Analogous to the road of meditation described by Bellarmino in his Scala di salire, the natural setting in Piacenza was devised as a real location that should be transgressed mentally by the beholder, in the form of a spiritual pilgrimage. But where Bellarmino had refrained from presenting the ultimate goal, the Triune God, in the form of a tangible or even visible simile, Giacinto da Casale placed the Host centrally as destination of the voyage, where the soul of the devout would be transformed. It was the double nature of the Body of Christ as present in the Eucharist which helped turn the world into the semblance of Paradise, the recreation of the Valley of tears after the Fall of Man into the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Thirdly, the hermit in Casale's landscape took on added significance in comparison with

---

131 I Frati Cappuccini 1988 vol.2, p.485. indicates that such ephemeral structures were indeed often preserved and reused: '1619, 24 marzo. Fu in mezzo alla rotonda del duomo vecchio fatta l'esposizione del Venerabile per le Quarantore, dal Padre fra Paolo Maria d'Asti cappuccino predicatore famoso, all'istessa maniera che fe pur il padre fra Giacinto Natta l'anno 1615; e con l'istesso richissimo e nobilissimo apparato, facendo esso pure li sermoni a tutte l'ore...'

Bellarmino's use of the figure in his *Scala di Sapienza*: where the latter took the type as an example that personified the apex of contemplation, the former turned it into a person directed towards and advising his audience. The hermit was, for his very perfection, also the perfect teacher. In doing so, Casale obviously drew on the image of the anchorite as a prophetic and spiritual advisor. He also elaborated upon literary sources, for example in Richeome's *Le pelerin de Loreto*. In an aside to the main argument of Richeome's manual, a hermit told the three travellers a story of a city situated in the midst of the earth and its counterpart in Heaven, as a comparison of the choice between the two roads of life. Casale, Cambi da Salutio and many others exploited this double image of the hermit as spiritual advisor and living example in their writings and in their public appearances, and in the context of the Camerino degli Eremiti the hermits functioned not only as images of the destination, but as incentives of the road to take.

On a fourth and last level, Casale and Cambi toyed with the relation between the real and the imaginary: they were not factual, but simulated hermits. Although they posed as solitaries, they still belonged to monastic orders. As has been argued above, in the sixteenth century the anchorite had become an ideal at odds with contemporary reality. While the solitary religious figure was held in general esteem for reason of his ultimate choice of leaving this world in preparation for the next by the complete dedication to prayer, the result of this retreat was often antisocial, and in glaring contrast to the Tridentine regulations on supervision. While at Sant'Onofrio the cycle of paintings was used to resolve this paradox by postponing the anchorite stage to an almost unattainable future, the hermitages set up by Casale, and to a lesser extent also by Cambi, were structures intended for limited periods of retreat.

The decoration of the Camerino degli Eremiti transformed these retreats into a temporary practice lasting no more than a number of hours and done at convenient moments. Such limited duration necessitated a maximum of effectiveness, which was attained by Lanfranco's artistic ingenuity. To paraphrase the words used by Passeri, upon entering the Camerino, Farnese would be temporarily shifted into another reality. There, he would be able to imitate the example of the hermits in attaining spiritual perfection, by turning this world into an image of celestial Paradise. By looking at the landscapes, he was mentally transported to these places, finding himself in ultimate seclusion that offered him the perfect place for the practice of meditation.

The theme of the *Quaranti Ore* fitted into this context for the same reason: it presented the

---

114 Richeome 1628 vol.2, pp.325-327; earlier examples of hermits explaining the choices in life occurred for example in *Gli Assolani* by Pietro Bembo and the *Orlando Furioso* by Ariosto. On the imagery of the two roads in painting.
Divine not only in the form of nature, but also directly in the guise of the consecrated Host. The Camerino degli Eremiti presented the Eucharistic presence as the second focus for the part-time solitary, and the recipient of his prayers. Lanfranco's decoration directed the contemplative person along the road of allegory, consisting of several stages, towards a visibly attainable aim, the physical presence of God on this earth and the ultimate conversion of the soul in its Creator. The goal was thus fixed from the start. By means of ephemeral evocation, the pitfalls of eremitic reality were avoided while the positive aspects could be preserved and imitated. In the Palazzetto Farnese, one room was especially created to direct the mind and thoughts of the beholder to an approved devotional practice by means of ingenious artifice. Through the application of art, the hermit was domesticated and the hermitage had become a part of urban dwellings.

see Falkenburg 1988.