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

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7. LATER SEICENTO HERMITAGES

Anchorite reality at Monte Virginio

When Farnese had the Camerino turned into a temporary hermitage within Rome, 'real' solitary monasteries were also founded. In 1614, Virginio Orsini (1575-1615), Duke of Bracciano, offered a tract of his land near Lake Bracciano to the Servite Order with the express intention founding a hermitage on the spot, dedicated to the Holy Virgin.1 It consisted of a tract of barren land on the slope of a hilltop, formerly called Monte Sassano or 'stony hill', near the village of Oriolo Romano. The donation was accepted in 1615 by Father Ricciolini, head of the Servite observance begun in 1593 at the monastery of Monte Senario; the gift was officially concluded in a notarial act of 10 January 1616, in which the site was renamed Monte Virginio in honour of the recently deceased Duke.2 Finding funding for buildings proved to be a more difficult task than obtaining the lands. In 1616 a loan of 1600 scudi was obtained from the monastery of Santa Cecilia in Rome, but this was only sufficient for provisional dwellings;3 during subsequent years, attempts to obtain enough money to construct a church, monastic buildings, chapels, and the sixteen hermitages as originally foreseen proved virtually impossible. After the death of Father Ricciolini in 1623, debts had grown to 6000 scudi and the project had to be renounced. By then, only two small hermitages and a chapel seem to have been built.

After the official restitution of the land in 1633 to the original owners, Virginio's son Paolo Giordano II Orsini donated the premises to the Discalced Carmelites of the Italian Congregation, again with the aim of establishing a hermitage.4 This second initiative was sustained particularly by the Duke's brother, Giovanni Battista di Gesù Maria, known secularly as Virginio Orsini (1600-1646).5 After rendering military services to the Papal States and the Venetian Republic, he decided to enter the Discalced Order in 1626 in search of a life dedicated to contemplation. He lamented the fact that the Roman province of the Discalced Carmelites did not have a place for spiritual retreat and started to collect funds for such an institution. Although he resigned his own hereditary claims, he reserved a part of it for a future hermitage and also obtained gifts from his sister in support of the plan. When the existing hermitage belonging to the Servite Order ran into financial problems, upon which the lands were returned to the Duke.

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2 On the eremitic movement at Monte Senario, see Ricciolini 1967; see also Montecassino 1876 and Dal Pino 1997, pp.573-577; for the donation of the land, see Sturm 2002, pp.31-32.
3 Sturm 2002, p.32.
Virginio proposed to cede it to the Discalced Carmelites instead. He would not see his ideal realised as he died in 1646.

The legal agreement between the Duke of Bracciano and the Discalced Order was finalised on 20 April 1648 with a contract and a map (fig.105), but the financial problems inherited from the Servites delayed the realisation of the new project for another three years. On 2 October 1651, cardinal Virginio Orsini (1615-1676), nephew of the deceased Carmelite friar, placed the first stone. As some sources suggest, the Carmelites retained parts of the buildings erected by the Servites. A copy of the 1648 measurement of the grounds stated 'hermitages built formerly by the Father hermits of Monte Senario' (fig.106). Between 1651 and 1675, the complex was however thoroughly changed in its aspect by interventions in the vegetation and the addition of new buildings.

The first and most important intervention was the foundation of a centrally placed coenobite structure. This complex was built according to guidelines set out by the Carmelite Order. A design was made for this building and sent for approval to the Discalced general in Rome - the legend reads 'Scale of 200 palmi according to our Constitutions', and the inscription above this plan stated 'Design of the Desert of Monte Virginio of the Discalced Carmelites of the Roman Province, approved by the Def[inito]r Gen[eral] 18 May 1649' (fig.107). These two captions suggest that the internal organisation had to respond to particular requirements as prescribed in the Carmelite Constitutions. The plan itself also indicated that this 'monastery' was different from the urban ones, in this case inspired upon the Carthusian abbey; each cell consisted of a chapel, study and cell, and had its own walled garden to provide maximum privacy and seclusion.

These individual units were grouped around a cloister, in the centre of which the church was situated. By means of four covered passageways, this church and the adjacent sacristy and oratory were connected to the surrounding ambulatory. A second cloister, with a fountain in the middle, was foreseen for the communal spaces, such as the library, refectory, hospice, and kitchens. This ideal was far too ambitious; only half the upper cloister was actually built, with the church, in a simplified version, forming the fourth and upper side of the square plan. The

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2 For this preceding hermitage offered to the Servite Order in 1614 by the Duke of Bracciano, see Recchia 1976, pp.9-18 and Dal Pino 1997, p.574.
3 A copy of this map is in ASR.Congr.Rel.Masc., Carmelitani Scalzi, S.Maria della Vittoria b.524.
4 This design is in AGOCD 86b.
5 On building type and religious meaning of the Carthusian abbey, see Die Kartause 1983, pp.29-37; see pp.51-81 on the relation between the Carthusian Rule and architectural form.
connecting corridors were abolished, and the fountain was placed in the centre of this cloister.10

Around 1670, the two smaller Servite hermitages were restored and enlarged.11 In this case an upper storey was built on top of an existing ground floor. A drawing (fig.108) shows the interior organisation of the building; it comprised two levels with utilitarian spaces and a chapel on the ground floor, and a kitchen with furnace, a bedroom and another chapel or study on the first floor. The study contained a niche in the wall where, according to the plan, a writing-desk should be positioned. The façade, approximately 8.5 meters high, was preceded by a porch, and on top a small bell was surmounted by a cross (fig.109). Other hermitages, such as the one dedicated to San Carlo Borromeo, were constructed according to the same basic plan. Funds for this building were made available by Fra Carlo Felice di Santa Teresa, and members of his family Slavata, in 1668: again private support proved crucial for the realisation of this institutional project.12

The entire premise was surrounded by a wall, to ensure silence and seclusion from the outside world, turning the hermitage into a paradisiacal garden. In a print dated 1668 (fig.111), the whole area was depicted as fenced off and completely covered with vegetation with neat paths and completed buildings. The closure of the wall, however, was protracted until 1674 at least, and some buildings had not even been begun by then: the garden took even longer to cultivate, as this only became possible with the construction of the aqueduct in 1669.13 Therefore, the print represented an ideal rather than reality when it was published. Accounts prove that large parts of the gardens were only realised during the eighteenth century. It took the Discalced Carmelites rather a long time to turn the hill into a habitable place. In its planning and organisation, Monte Virginio reflected a general seventeenth-century desire by the Discalced Carmelite Order to found hermitages; at the same time it was an exception to the rule, for it was built, inaugurated and functioning within less than two decades.

The Italian Discalced Congregation of Sant'Elia started planning eremitical convents around 1600, but encountered serious problems in the realisation of their plans, similar to those described in the history of Monte Virginio. In each case, the core problem was to be found in patronage and funding, often complicated by the issue of finding the right site.

Attempts undertaken in 1605-1606 by Dominique de Jesus-Maria (1559-1630), former prior of the Spanish Desierto de Bolarque and at that time superior-general of the Italian

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1 The fountain was constructed in 1669 when the aqueduct was concluded; see Sturm 2002, pp.168-169.
2 Extracts of the accounts in the Archivio di Monte Virginio were published in Sturm 2002, pp.175-178; for a description of the project of adding a storey to the old hermitages, see pp.81-82.
4 Sturm 2002, pp.63-64.
Discalced Congregation, failed for lack of funds. In 1615, the Discalced General Chapter held in Rome decided on the erection of a hermitage at Varazzo, near Genoa. By 1614, several pieces of land had been offered to the Carmelites by private patrons, but all of these premises were deemed unsuitable for a life of seclusion, so acquisition of a site by the Congregation itself was considered the best option. This was obtained in 1615 with the help of several individuals and the commune of Varazzo; the deserto dedicated to Giovanni Battista de Monte Dei was inaugurated on the feast of Our Lady of Carmel in 1618. In 1620, princess Doria, belonging to the ruling dynasty of Genoa, donated a large sum to support the functioning of the hermitage in the future.

A second Italian deserto was planned near the Lombard town of Varese, and again the support from seculars was crucial for its realisation. In this case, Ippolita Cicogni Crivella and members of the Sabiano family donated money and property for the foundation of this solitary convent. The first stone was laid in 1635, but the first Mass was read there only twenty years later, in 1655. A third hermitage in Calabria, at Massa Lubrense, for which preparatory action had been undertaken by 1616, took until 1682 before it could house monks. During these same decades the Roman province, notwithstanding the Constitutional decree that every province should dispose of its own hermitage, did not have a place for spiritual retreat. Plans had been made, but as in the former Italian examples, also here private support was indispensable but difficult to obtain.

The lack of a deserto was felt dearly by the Roman Discalced province. Prior to the 1630s, temporary solutions had been sought to resolve this need. The garden of the monastery of San Silvestro at Montecompatri, in the vicinity of Rome, was turned provisionally into a place for spiritual retreat directly after the complex had been donation to the Order in 1605. The main building was left the way it was and retained its original conventual character. In the garden behind it, on the slope of the hill, a little edifice was erected in 1606 for temporary spiritual retreats. It was called the Cappella del Castagno, dedicated to the Madonna, and consisted of a chapel with adjacent room; again it was thanks to the generosity of a private patron - Marquis de

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17 Acta Definitoria Generalis 1985, pp.28 and 71; see also Cecconi 1970.
18 Brambilla 1874, pp.159-160.
20 See for example the Constitutions fratrum Discalceatorum 1631, pp.98-105.
21 Fusciardi 1929, pp.67-103, Mignosi Tantillo 1990, pp.55-68.
Villenas - that it was possible to erect this retreat.²² However, architectural disposition and size precluded longer sojourns in this 'hermitage'.

In the end, the necessity to have a noviciate proved to be a more general problem for the Roman province, and Montecompatri’s function as provisional desertò was concluded. When in 1616 the general chapter again proposed the conversion of this convent into a hermitage this led to nothing; it remained a coenobitic convent.²³ Thus, when in the late 1620s Virgilio Orsini offered the possibility to adopt and transform the existing hermitage in Oriolo Romano into a Discalced Eremo, this was accepted. Its location within a day’s journey from Rome kept it accessible for the province, and at the same time its isolated location made it apt for its specific purposes.

**Regulations and function of Discalced hermitages**

The interventions in the grounds of Monte Virgilio and all other Discalced hermitages show that these complexes reflected and fulfilled the requirements of contemplative prayer. This renewed importance attached to the act of prayer as part of the Carmelite regular life was a result of the Carmelite reforms after the Council of Trent, and the resulting separation of the Discalced from the Calced branch.²⁴ The Tridentine decrees had called for regular observance, meaning a strict interpretation of the first and original monastic Rule.²⁵ In the Carmelite context, however, several versions of the Rule existed, which complicated obedience to the Tridentine prescription. The supposed founder of the Carmelite community, the prophet Elijah, had left no written regulations, but through the unbroken line of superiors of the monastery on Mount Carmel he was supposed to have ‘inspired’ the set of Rules that were written down between 1206 and 1214 by Albert of

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²² Tucarii 1929, p.75: 'in mezzo alla selva ad esso adiacente fu edificato un Romitorio con annessa cappella, per comodo dei religiosi che volessero di quando menar vita eremitica. Il romitorio fu eretto a spese del Marchese de Villenas, ambasciatore di Spagna presso la S. Sede e nostro insigne benefattore ed amico, il quale donò quattrocento ducati a tale scopo. Il 25 ottobre 1606 D. Giuseppe Spagna, Ilitore del Card. Gallo Vescovo di Frascati, dava facoltà di poter celebrare la messa nella cappella del romitorio su di un altare portatile consacrato 'pro viso tamen quod ecclesia conventus debitis proprietate non fraudetur obsequies' come dice l’originale, che si conserva nel nostro archivio (tomo III, pag. 117). L’esistenza di un romitorio, oltre che da altri documenti ancora, si rileva dalla Storia Gen. le dell’Ordine (tomo I, cap. 46, p. 614) quale pero ne fosse la precisa ubicazione non risulta da alcun documento. Tuttavia più di qualche indizio farebbe credere che fosse situato sul monte a destra del prato che sta di fronte alla facciata della chiesa, dove si vedono, un po’ all’interno del bosco, una piccola cisterna ed altri pochi ruderi; ma fa meraviglia che del romitorio sia sparita ogni traccia.' See also Sturm 2002, pp.77-78, where only the Cappella itself is discussed.

²³ Acta Definitionis Generalis 1985, p.28, dd. 2 January 1566. ‘Roma. Propositorum habitus conventus hostis S. Sylvesteri in Tusculano [i.e. Montecompatri] ad vitam eremitam ibi servandam destinandus in Decretum affirmative cum omnibus suffragis.’


Vercelli, patriarch of Jerusalem. These 'first' regulations, defining the Order as a contemplative community, were officially approved by Pope Honorius III in 1226.26 A crucial change was introduced by Innocentius IV in 1247, forcing the Carmelites (by then transferred to Europe) to adopt a mendicant life and abolish perpetual prayer. The result was that the life of contemplation was replaced by a life of active defence of the Christian Faith through preaching 27

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this mendicant status was challenged a number of times by several Carmelite friars, but to no avail. In all writings arguing for the contemplative life as the first and most important obligation of the Carmelite Rule, this was defended with the biblical citation of Elijah 'I live in the Lord in whose countenance I stand' (1 Kings 17.1), which had been included in Vercelli's first written Rule.28 On this basis, Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) and John of the Cross (1542-1591), founders of the Spanish reform movement, formulated the contemplative ideal of the Discalced Order.29 Discalced life was focussed primarily on perpetual prayer, putting the monk in the Presence of God through meditation and contemplation.30

However, the existence and function of these special eremitic convents were not only the result of changes in the act of prayer or a contemplative turn in itself, but also reflected the active faith in the form of added responsibilities of the Discalced monks: the American and Asian mission. Soon after 1600, the Discalced started arguing about the reintroduction of pastoral activities with special attention to missionary activities in non-European countries. Theresa of Avila had herself sustained missionary duties as part of the Discalced life, which were however suppressed in 1585 by general Niccolò Doria di Gesu Maria.31 Paul V proposed to found a third congregation of Discalced Carmelites in addition to the existing Italian and Spanish Congregations, dedicated especially to missionary activities outside of Europe, and called Tomas de Jesus to Rome in 1608, and received confirmation of this new branch with the Bull Omne

27 Cicconetti 1973, pp 130-207.
28 See Cicconetti 1973, p.70-84 on the Rule of Vercelli. One of the main defenders of the contemplative turn of the Carmelite Order was the fifteenth-century Carmelite general Giovanni Soreth, for the discussion within the Carmelite Order on the mendicant versus the contemplative status, see Catena 1968.
30 On the importance of prayer in the first decades of the Discalced Order, see for example the Rules issued between 1567 and 1600, in Constitutiones 1968, where the practice of prayer is treated at length in every new version.
31 DIP vol.2, pp.524-602.
This papal decision caused complaints from members of the Discalced congregation and the plan was finally cancelled, but this did not end the missionary project altogether. With his departure to Flanders, where Tomas was sent by pope Paul V to found new monasteries, his practical involvement with the mission ended. However, he wrote the pamphlet entitled *Stimulus Missionum* to convince the members of the Italian Discalced Congregation to accept the missionary task, which was the leg-up for the veritably encyclopaedic *De procuranda salute omnium gentium* of 1613 (fig.53). Both treatises sustained the responsibility of the monks in the active defence of the Catholic faith in Asia and America, and thus implicitly threatened the contemplative ideal of the Discalced Carmelites.

Notwithstanding this urge to organise the mission, Tomas de Jesus was also deeply concerned about the effects of these pastoral activities upon the spirit of the Carmelite Order. He had been initially opposed to missionary activities as this went against the contemplative ideal, but after 1608 changed his mind. From then on, Tomas intended to integrate both the contemplative and the active by allocating time for both: he proposed to allow the monks one year of spiritual retreat in a deserto prior to being send abroad. The mendicant and the contemplative sides of the Carmelite Rule were in this way reconciled, without sacrificing either of the two principles. Tomas had already founded one deserto while living in Spain, in Bolarque (1592); he also tried to found one near Namur in Flanders, an attempt which faltered.

The main innovations in the situation of existing hermitages were the temporary sojourn in solitude and its educational character. In the preceding centuries a number of Orders, including the Carmelites, had founded solitary convents where professed monks would remain indefinitely. For example, the Carmelite convent of Le Selv e in the vicinity of Florence had functioned as a hermitage since its foundation in 1343; also the Franciscans and Augustinians had their specific locations for the eremitic life. In the new situation of the seventeenth century, the solitary sojourn was limited in time, and at the same time the anchorite ideal was made an integral part of Discalced Carmelite life, as opposed to the privileged situation in hermitages prior to that date.

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2 See Chapter 3, p.128.


4 Zimmerman 1927, p.46-51.

These innovative aspects asked for new and special regulations for deserti, which were included in the Constitutions of the Italian congregation of Discalced Carmelites in 1623. These regulations were re-approved in 1631. In 1669, regulations concerning liturgical schedule, layout of and conduct within the hermitage were published separately under the title Instructiones Eremitarum discalceatorum (fig.110), which reflected the growing importance of these kind of institutions. The general introduction to the 1631 edition gave the historical development of the Carmelite Order, explicitly linking the primitive Rule of Alberto Vercelli with the recent interpretations, and thereby providing a historical justification for these 'new' hermitages and the dedication of the Carmelite to contemplative prayer.

The rules stated that every province should have its own hermitage to provide spiritual retreat to all its members at regular intervals. The maximum number of monks in these hermitages was set at twenty. The first paragraph on hermitages stated that isolation from society for the complete dedication to devotional exercises was the purpose of these institutions, by means of the 'yoke of oratione', and acts of mortification and other pious works. Perpetual alternation of liturgical and mental prayer was to occupy the soul of the Carmelite during his stay in the hermitage. At least eight hours a day should be spent in the private cell, in the service of solitary prayer. It was stated that 'the goal of the eremitic life is the union of the soul with God, for the Divine liberation of which orationi and laudibus should be firmly held...'

To obtain this complete dedication to prayers, life in the hermitage followed a highly structured form. From the entry of the new hermit his reception by the community that guided him in procession to his cell and handing him the bastone, through the acts of silence, obedience and mortification, until the departure of the monk after his stay of at least one and at the maximum three years, everything was ritualised. A spiritual path was also planned, beginning with penitence to cleanse the soul, and ending with a solitary stay in a separate hermitage dedicated to the alternation of liturgical and mental prayer.

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17 Constitutiones fratrum Discalceatorum 1631, p.98: chapter IX: 'De Fremi Monasterij, ac eorum finis.'
18 Instructiones Eremiti 1669. Another edition appeared in Louvain in 1698, probably in conjunction with the institution of hermitages in Flanders.
20 Constitutiones fratrum Discalceatorum 1631, p.98: IX: De Fremi Monasterij, ac eorum finis. 2. Finis potissimum eremiticae Institutionis nostrae est ut Fratres in Fremis commorantes iugi orationis, precum, ac vigiliarum studio, assidua corporis mortificatione, alijsq; piis operibus omnibus fidelibus, totique Ecclesiae maxime prosim...
21 Recchia 1976, p.43.
22 Instructiones Eremiti 1669, p.31: 'Cum vitae Eremitice finis sit unio animae cum Deo, ad quam orationi, laudibusq. Divinis vacando tentendum est...'
Furthermore, a ban existed on written communication except for administrative reasons, and absolute silence (perenne silentium) was imposed on all. This strict ban on talking was only lifted at the feasts of Easter and Christmas. Isolation from the outside world was arrived at by closing off the terrain; no-one would be allowed inside without prior permission, and women were completely forbidden to enter at all times. Visitors were sometimes allowed on the premises, however, as the existence of the hospitium in Monte Virginio and regulations on this matter in the 1669 constitutions indicate. Entering the zone of solitary hermitages and the convent itself was however strictly forbidden; visitors were only allowed to access the church and the sacristy. All these precautions ought to result in the highest concentration on meditative exercises, so that exterior solitude would incite interior concentration.

According to these regulations, the plan of a hermitage should reflect the different levels of perfection in contemplative life. The complex was to consist of a central monastic building, which included the church and the refectory for regular gatherings once every fortnight. In the central building, those newly arrived would be trained in abstinence and discipline: after solid preparation they would be allowed to live in complete solitude in the smaller isolated dwellings for the rest of their sojourn in the deserto. But not even there was the Discalced Carmelite left to his own devices: the prior would pay weekly visits, and the daily liturgical order would be indicated by the ringing of bells, calling all to the choir or chapel at the same time. In short, Monte Virginio reflected in all its details the general requirements on spatial and architectural organisation of grounds and buildings formulated in the *Instructiones Eremi*.

**The mystical language of nature: Saint Theresa of Avila**

Apart from reflecting the historical situation of the Discalced Order in the early seventeenth century, the institution of hermitages was also a result of inspiration from the examples of their two founders, John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila. Both saints advocated the hermitage as the place most apt for frequent and almost uninterrupted prayer, and infused the surrounding countryside with allegorical and symbolic meaning. In doing so, they took up and combined Elijah’s two maxims taken from the Bible: ‘I stand before the Lord who lives’, and ‘Go up the Mount to see the Lord’.

Already in her youth, Saint Theresa of Avila had turned the garden of her parental house

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into a place to live out her ideal of being an anchorress. In later life, she had hermitages made in several of the places where she lived, to dedicate herself to prayer in solitude when time allowed. Most of these, however, were metaphorical, in the form of secluded rooms. She explicitly called them hermitages, however, as in a letter of February 1574 where she discussed the view over the river from one of these 'hermitages'. Although the place itself might not have been completely isolated, the proximity to nature did count for her, affording the desired effect of mental isolation.

For Theresa the quality of a monastic building relied heavily on the aesthetic qualities of its surrounding nature; on several occasions she was prone to refuse a site for its unsuitability in this respect. She wrote in 1576 regarding requirements for the foundation of a monastery: 'The site is a matter of such importance that it would be folly to merely look at the price. For the water and the view, I would gladly give elsewhere much more than the monastery itself has cost.' Four years later she required a visual representation of the gardens of a property she was considering acquiring: 'About the house that they want to sell you, it would be of great importance to my eyes to have it represented in views and a garden; that point is, in the end, very important for our kind of life.'

In Theresa's writings nature played a role on two symbolical levels. On the one hand, it functioned as a comparison to explain to the reader the stages of the mystical way of prayer. Because of a lack of terminology for this kind of subject, she reverted to images of nature close at hand and available to all her readers. Communication on mystical subjects requires metaphor as a vehicle for the simple reason that it discusses otherworldly things. Either the visible world plays the role of direct simile between the process of nature and the mystical road, or nature becomes a

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45 Peers 1951-1960 vol.1, pp.109-110, citing from the Vida: 'When I saw that it was impossible for me to go to any place where they would put me to death for God's sake, we decided to become hermits, and we used to build hermitages, as well as we could, in an orchard which we had at home.'
46 E. Allison Peers remarked in a footnote to the text in Theresa of Avila 1946 vol.1, p.270: 'Anxious to make the life of the Reform as similar as possible to that of the primitive Carmelites, St. Theresa had a number of hermitages made at St. Joseph's, Avila and her other foundations. At the time of her Beatification there were four of these in the garden of St. Joseph's and one within the convent itself. Today, also, there are four, but in the shape of divisions of a single building.'
47 Florisone 1956, p.17 cited from this letter: 'J'ai un hermitage d'où l'on voit la rivière et une cellule où, même de mon lit, je peux contempler ce spectacle, ce qui est très agréable pour moi.'
48 Florisone 1956, pp.18-22.
49 Florisone 1956, p.19, citing letter 99: 'Le site est un chose tellement importante pour une monastère que ce serait folie de regarder au prix. Pour l'eau et la vue, je donnerais très volontiers ailleurs beaucoup plus que n'a coûté ce monastère.'
50 Letter 324, cited after Florisone 1956, p.21: 'Quant à la maison qu'on veut vous vendre, c'est lui donner une grande valeur à mes yeux que de me la représenter avec des belles vues et un jardin; ce point est, en effet, très important pour notre genre de vie.'
metaphor or symbol. For Theresa, animals often stood for the soul striving to approximate its Creator: the eagle, according to biblical and medieval bestiaries, flew to the sun when it was going blind, to regain its sight; the silkworm would, after spinning its cocoon and living there in seclusion, turn into a moth and fly into the flame to be consumed there. All these flying animals represented the soul, which, after seeing God at the end of the mystical road, was ready to die before the world and live eternally.

The most important image used by Theresa in her writings was that of the garden, both in the form of a simile and in the form of a metaphor. In the former, the activities in the garden were analogies of the process of meditation. In the latter case, the garden was an analogy for the human soul, derived from the old metaphor of the *hortus conclusus.* Taking care of this garden thus stood for the care taken over one's own soul by means of prayer and devotional exercises. In Theresa's view, this 'gardening' was done only partially by the contemplative person, in preparation for the arrival of the Gardener. This was a combined reference to Christ appearing to Mary Magdalene and the image of Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane: while in the first he was the active gardener appearing to His disciples, in the second the garden was the setting for conversing with His Father. Prayer, as taught in the second episode, would turn the wild interior garden into the paradisiacal Garden, the *locus amoenus.* When properly done, the Gardener would honour this pleasant site with His visits, and come to live there, as in the first episode.

Apart from this imagery derived from biblical sources, Saint Theresa also alluded to real nature in her writings, but only with the greatest reticence. In the *Mansions* she called to mind natural phenomena and animals to explain the principle of God's omnipresence to the reader. In this context, she drew upon the same kind of natural-history works that the Jesuit used in the context of the garden at San Vitale. In the fourth Mansion, Theresa referred to the ant: 'I am sure, that the least of the animals of God, the small ant, for example, contains more marvels than our minds are able to understand.' These marvels would also function in the process of prayer, as she gave beginners experiencing difficulties the following advice:

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2 Strong 1978, pp 131-133.
4 This metaphor is most explicitly worked out in the *Life of Saint Theresa,* see Peers 1951-1960 vol.1, pp 122-124.
5 For the *hortus conclusus* and its influence on Theresa of Avila, see DS 1937-1994 vol.7.1 col 767, 772-773 and 775-776; for the influence of this concept on the visual arts and the depiction of landscape from the Middle Ages onwards, see Reau 1955-1959 vol.2.2, pp 100-102, Schiller 1966-1991 vol.4.2, pp. 207, Pochat 1971, pp 227-230 and Timmers 1978, pp 125-133.

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When, therefore, the aforementioned fire is not kindled in the will, and the Presence of God is not felt, we must needs seek it, since this is His Majesty's desire, as the Bride sought it in the Songs. Let us ask the creatures...35

Not only beginners, but also experts might perceive nature as a reflection of His Presence, or see the elements of this world as a reflection of God. Plants and animals were made by Him to praise Him, and this enticed the 'reader' of nature to do the same. Turning from the interior voyage to the outside world at the end of the Spiritual Castle, Theresa ended one of the final chapters of the seventh Mansion with words in which she evoked the reader as one of the creatures praising the omnipotence and omnipresence of the Creator.39

John of the Cross and the allegory of nature

Saint John of the Cross, assistant and friend of Theresa of Avila and, together with her, founder of the Discalced Carmelite Order, expanded the use of nature from a mere symbol to a proper place for prayer.60 This might be related to the fact that as a monk, he enjoyed more freedom than nuns who were supposed to live in clausura according to the Tridentine decrees. John in his Ascent of Mount Carmel thus recommended to his readers to go to the countryside to pray: 'The first kind is typified by the dispositions of land and place. In a natural way they incite prayer by the pleasant view of its variety, by the orientation of the land or the disposition of the trees or by the solitary quiet.61 He was also the first to institute a solitary monastery in Spain for the Discalced monks, the Calvario. Saint John considered the surroundings of this place as particularly apt for the act of contemplation, to understand the Creator by means of his creatures, as it offered silence and seclusion, as well as a wide range of natural beauties to take into consideration.62

35 Theresa of Avila 1946 vol.2, p.236 (Mansions IV.2).
37 Theresa of Avila 1946 vol.2, p.343 (Mansions VII.3).
39 Ascent of Mount Carmel Bk III ch.42.1, in John of the Cross 1982, p.529: 'La prima es algunas disposiciones de tierras y sitios, que con la agradable experiencia de sus diferencias, ahora es disposición de tierra, ahora de arboles, ahora de solitaria quietud, naturalmente despiertan la devocién.'
40 José de Jesus Maria 1638, pp.465-466: 'Era il deserto del Calvario molto a proposito per i spiriti contemplativi, & invitava alla contemplazione si per la comodita del sito, essendo molto solitario, come per la varietà delle cose, che si scoprirono con la vista rendendo quella solitudine più divota, come rapidi torrenti, monti, rupi, sassi, valli, & il fiume Guadalquivir, il quale passa circondando i fondamenti di quel secolio, sopra il qual è fondato il Monasterio; e tutte queste cose erano al nostro Venerabil Padre come una musica celeste, che lo receveva, come al Profeta Davide, per mezzo della considerazione del Creatore, che scopriva nelle creature, nel laqual cognizione il Signore lo illuminava tanto, come in altro luogo habbiamo veduto: Si che non solamente riceveva diletto spirituale vedendo la magnificenza di Dio, che si manifestava nelle sue creature, Harmonia, e mirabil consonanza, che si scopriva tra esse, & il loro Creatore, ma ancora salendo dalli effetti alla causa si augmentava molto in li la cognizionc, e l'amore di esso...
This admiration for nature as the image of God was also taught to others. John’s hagiography written in the 1620s described how he recommended and taught his disciples to use the natural surroundings of the Calvario by his own explicit example. The biography written shortly after his death recounted how he went along to impress the minds of his disciples with the imagery of mysticism:

And although he could enjoy from the window of his cell all the variety of these things [i.e. the landscape] and the consolation that they brought to his mind, nonetheless he led [the monks] a number of times through these mountains to some delightful well to enjoy this banquet even more to his taste, which his spirit found in the university of the creatures, and also to yield the souls of his religious to solitude. After having stirred and roused them with benefit and delight by means of some short spiritual discourse, serving them as a lecture and as the commencement of prayer, he distributed them over that mountain so that they could talk to God in solitude, and dispose themselves to receive the spiritual meal of divine infusion, and he likewise hid himself where he could do his own exercises. This was habitually done in place of the joint oratione during the evening. They later returned to the Convent not only recreated, but also passionate; having before them such a heroic example of all the virtues, they advanced in them in such a way, that the acquisitions they made there they could spend in all the rest of their lives, and which could be shared with others in the convents where they reside.64

In his writings, Saint John converted profane themes quite directly into religious comparisons. This imagery functions on the compositional as well as on detailed levels. His Spiritual Canticle has for these reasons been compared to a bucolic poem in which natural beauty frequently is admired.65

Creatore.’ See also Blommeerten Huls Waaijman 2000 for the concept of nature in relation to contemplation in John’s discussion of the Song of Songs.


65 Josu di Jesus Maria 1638, pp.466-467: ‘Il benche dalla finestra della sua Cella godesse della varietà di tutte le dette cose, e della consolatione, che apportavano al suo spirito, nondimeno alcune volte per godere più a suo gusto di questo convito, che il suo spirito trovava nella università delle creature, & anco per inclinarla alla solitudine gli animi de suoi Religiosi. Il conduciva per quei moiti verso qualche piacevol fonte, e dopo di averlo ravvivati, e rallegrati alquanto con frutto, e dilettò ciò qualche breve ragionamento spirituale, il quale potesse servirli di lettione per comminciare ad orare, li divideva fra quel monte, accoche in solitudine parlassero con Dio, e si disponecessero per ricevere la relazione spirituale della divina influenza. E ogni puramente si raccondeva dove potesse fare la parte sua: Questo accostumava in luogo dell’orazione comune della sera, e rimassemno poi al Convento non solamente ricercati, ma intervenitori: Et havendo innanzi a se un esemplare con heroico di tutte le virtu si avanzavano in quelle di maniera, che dell’acquisito, che ivi fecero, ebbero assai da spendere per loro in tutto il tempo della vita loro, e da parteciparne ad altri nella Conventi, dove residevano.’ See also Florisone 1956, p.28 on this episode, and Albisani 1998, pp.56-57 n.30, for this biography.

Creatures and plants reflected the beauty of God; they contained in themselves the Beloved, as Christ is often called in mystical language. Identification of the visual world with this concept can be found in the passages of the *Canticle* in which the soul wanders around searching for Christ:

My Beloved, the mountains.
Lonely wooded valleys,
Strange islands,
Resounding rivers.
The whistling of breezes in love

The tranquil night,
Close to the rising dawn.
Sounding rivers.
The banquet that refreshes and enamours. 

In this long poem on Divine love, the Beloved is not *like* nature. He is nature itself, quenching and inspiring the onlooker. Nature is the Face of God. It is this phenomenon - the omnipresence of God in the visible world - that functioned as an incitement to prayer, to love Him, and out of this love to go and search for Him.

**Nature within the hermitage**

In both Theresa’s and John’s writings, the inadequacy of language was solved by using the alphabet of nature that God himself had created; as a result, they invested the real world with mystical images. The prescriptions regarding hermitages in the Discalced Constitutions explicitly referred to nature: according to the paragraph on the hermitages in the Constitutions of 1631, trees should be planted not only for reasons of agricultural activities, but also with religious functions in mind:

Inside the *clausura* of the hermitage, if there are no plants nor trees, two or three centuries of maintenance are required, or the work of the Donors will not have been sufficient; however, the Prior should take care to plant each year some trees, so that the place will be more lovely, and apt for *oratione*. 

From this advice the fact that the gardens of hermitages were consciously designed to excite the devotional reading of nature can be ascertained. The *Deserto* of Monte Virginio was a case in point. The transformations made to the grounds between 1651 and the end of the seventeenth

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7 Tavard 1988, p.156.
8 Blommeijen Huys Waaifman 2000.
9 *Constitutiones* 1631, p.105: 'Intra Fremi clausaram, neque agri, neque arbores sint, quibus colendis duorum, vel trium secularium, vel Donatorum labor non sufficit; Prior autem quisque annis singulis sylvestres arbores plantat facit, ut locus amemor. & oratione aptior fiat.'
century are traceable through a number of accounts and maps. The effect of these interventions was that horrid nature was turned into a cultivated garden, although the presentation of the hermitage in a print of 1668 (fig. 111) was probably more the ideal than the reality at that time.

Prior to the changes introduced by the Servites and Carmelites, the hill was familiarly called ‘Monte Sassano’, or stony hill, suggesting that it was barren land unfit for agriculture. Improvement was made possible by the construction of an aqueduct in 1669. Subsequently, to the left of the hill vegetable gardens were laid out for olive trees and vineyards (see fig. 106). Part of the terrain was used for the production of grain. Each of the dwellings in the central coenobitic structure and the smaller hermitages also had their own gardens, including a vegetable garden. By the planning of these utilitarian grounds, the deserto as a whole and the individual monks became largely independent of food supplies from outside, another guarantee for relative seclusion.

Apart from nutrition, green spaces were also adapted for the practice of prayer, sometimes with a clear reference to Biblical symbolism. Trees were planted in small wooded areas, and along the paths laid out in the grounds, connecting the various edifices. These elements were considered incitements to devotional thought; the road that led from the central coenobitic dwelling to the new hermitage of Monte Calvario on the top of the hill was called ‘Viale della Contemplazione’. Wandering up this path, the thoughts of the monks could wander over nature as a symbol and a sign of God. At the same time, the climb up the steep hill now became a means of following the Passion of Christ. Along the path, nine ediculae were erected with the stations of the Cross, to form a miniature Sacro Monte. Halfway, a ‘Scena d’acque’ was planned, expressing the idea of the Cross as the ‘fons vitae’, the lifegiving water of Christ. This conscious evocation of the biblical world was set forth inside the new hermitage with a number of chapels dedicated to the Stations; behind the complex an olive grove was planted to invoke the Garden of Olives. In other words, nature became the setting for devotional exercises where the writings of Theresa and Saint John would be studied, and one of its subjects as well.

The aim of the physical hermitage was to teach the monk a devotional exercise that would continue to function outside the walls of the hermitage. Natural surroundings within the

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1. Sturm 2002, p. 175, citing ACM, Cart. 34: ‘Per opere a fare le forme dell’acqua per l’acqua p-le 6.’
4. See Sturm 2002, p. 48
7. Sturm 2002, pp. 82-85, 92.
hermitage helped the Discalced Carmelite to find metaphors for their own relationship with God, and investing nature with religious symbolism would turn it into the image nearest to hand in each and every situation. With this turn, the eremo became a state of mind, which could help the monk to continue his spiritual obligations even while far away from the convent in non-European countries. In the end, the Carmelite monk should create in his mind the counterpart to the solitary place in which he lived, to be dedicated completely to the devotional practice he had been taught - the simile of the Garden that Theresa had used for the human soul. Nature would then reflect in the real world the spiritual path that the regular was to undertake in his own soul, and it was for this reason that it played such a dominant part in Carmelite hermitages.

Private hermitages for cardinals

Around the 1640s, an autonomous romitorio was designed and built for Cardinal Francesco Barberini (1597-1679).76 Nothing remains of it today, except for a number of drawings made at the end of the seventeenth century. The architect of the hermitage was Francesco Borromini, and its location was the Cardinal's vigna on the slope of Monte Mario, the hill north of the Vatican.77 Indications for the dating of this project can be found in the accounts on the acquisition of the terrain, the nucleus of which was bought in 1639 and subsequently enlarged.78 Soon afterwards, Borromini must have received the commission to design a casino, consisting of three levels, which constituted an autonomous edifice with kitchen, bedroom, study and chapel (fig.112).79 Its interior organisation was very close to that of the Discalced hermitages and just as independent from its surroundings: in contrast, however, it probably only served for shorter sojourns.80

One of the most conspicuous commissioners of spiritual retreats in the form of hermitages, on a scale that was comparable to or even greater than that of Odoardo Farnese earlier in the century, was cardinal Flavio I Chigi (1631-1693; see fig. 118).81 During his lifetime

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78 Accounts for the acquisition of the vigna and subsequent works are in BAV, Archivio Barberini 176, 'Conto de Denari pagati nella Compra della vigna a Monte Mario, e di spese fattevi dal Card. Francesco Barberini l'Anno 1639'.
79 Wolfe 2000, p.83 dated the construction to 1639-1641; Sturm 2002, p.106 assumed that the building was only completely finished by 1751.
80 Sturm 2002, pp.106-107 compared the Barberini-hermitage on Monte Mario to the individual romitorii in Monte Virgine and suggested direct influences from Borromini on the presumed architect of the Carmelite hermitages. Interestingly, Francesco Barberini also showed a predilection for landscapes with hermits, he commissioned between 1630 and 1636 a number of seventeen works with this subject from the (Flemish) painter Giovanni Francione; see Aronberg Lavin 1975, pp.17, 82-82 and 246.
he managed to construct three *romitorii* - as the term generally used by then denoted them - of them different in form, but with the same concept: the temporary dedication to contemplation, in real or artificially natural surroundings. This function can be deduced from way these spaces were furnished and decorated.

The first of those ephemeral hermitages was situated in Rome, in a corner of the Chigi villa near Quattro Fontane. The grounds situated at the corner of the present Via Depretis and Via Nazionale were bought in 1660 by Don Mario Chigi, who donated it to his son Flavio in 1664, who added other grounds to it in 1669.\(^2\) The project to embellish this garden with several fountains and terraces around a central *casino* had been initiated by 1668, as the architect Carlo Fontana was paid for his designs that year.\(^3\) In the same year a first reception - described as 'festa gastronomico musicale' - was staged there for the Roman nobility in honour of the family of the reigning pope Clement IX Rospigliosi (1667-1669): a number of prints and descriptions were made to commemorate the event (fig. 113).\(^4\)

None of these images depicted the *romitorio* itself, as it was situated at the back of the grounds, and consisted of nothing more than a walled-in part of the gardens planted with laurels and an oak tree. One of its walls was decorated with a frescoed scene of a solitary religious figure. This painting has been attributed to Giuseppe Chiari on the basis of a payment to him in 1675, for the execution of a Venus and a 'hermit'.\(^5\) From this source can be deduced that on the opposite wall the lascivious goddess was represented. This painted decoration, in combination with *giochi d'acqua* or sprinklers installed in the pavement in front of the Venus, seems to have meant to teach visitors a moral lesson.\(^6\) In the *Viaggio curioso de'Palazzi e Ville più notabili di Roma* of 1683, the abstinence of the hermit was contrasted with the attraction of the beautiful woman: too great an interest in the latter was punished with unexpected spurts of water, to teach the visitor a lesson of moral restraint:

The well arranged and well painted hermitage, which teaches temperance in the beauties

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of this world. On the other side one sees the figure of a beautiful woman, where the too eager will find themselves deceived by jets of water.

Although at first sight this might suggest a playful but rather meaningless use of the theme, other projects indicate that Flavio I Chigi must have considered more seriously the anchorite ideal as worthy of imitation. The palace on Piazza Santi Apostoli where the cardinal lived from 1661 onwards, the present Palazzo Odescalchi (fig.114), contained a small hermitage directly connected to his private apartment, located in the mezzanine of the building. It was relatively small, measuring 3.35 by 6.25 meters, which is slightly less than the 4 by 8 meters of the Camerino degli Eremiti. It overlooked the elevated walled garden at the back of the palace, and enjoyed the quiet and calm necessary for the dedication to prayer and contemplation (probably room C 16 on the plan in fig.115).

The walls of Chigi’s hermitage - made of timber - were hung with painted landscapes populated with hermits, and the furniture consisted of two tables, a prie-dieu and a turn-box. The latter functioned as a means through which the victuals of the hermit were furnished, obviously a reference to restricted nutrition as part of mortification, but also a sign of the utmost separation from human society. From the presence of this device it can be gauged that Cardinal Chigi intended to spend more than the occasional hour there, as he might need food after some time. Exactly which artists were responsible for the invention and execution of this project is not known; payments were made to several artists who specialised in landscape-painting, such as Francesco Mola in 1663. The hermitage was probably decorated by the painter Vincenzo Coralli with a team of assistants. Coralli was exclusively active in the service of Flavio Chigi.

77 On the water tricks, and the planning of water-conduits in this garden around 1674, see Coffin 1991, p.138.
78 Cited after Golzio 1939 p.190: ‘L’Eremo ben disposto, e ben dipinto, che insegna la temperanza nelle delizie di questo mondo. Dall’altra parte si vede una figura di vag a Donna, che i troppo arditi si trovano ingannati dalla furia di acqua.’
80 Tessin 2002b, p.314 wrote about a fire in the back part of the palace which had occurred shortly before his visit to it: ‘Dieses gantze palais ist vom Cav. Bernin gebaut worden, undt ist dass hinter theil vor ein jaer gantz abgebrandt fast gewesen, an der stelle, wo anitzo der reiche meubel ist.’ This fire must also have destroyed the romitorio, as Tessin makes no mention of it in his description of the palace. An account of 1687 for the restoration of a number of rooms sustains this; see Golzio 1939, p.78: ‘in ristaurare il suo Palazzo incontri S. Apostoli quale si guasto a causa dell’incendio’.
81 See Waddy 1990, p.313 and idem in Ambiente Barocco 1999, pp.31 and 37 n.79. As Waddy points out, the exact location of the hermitage is difficult to ascertain; the puzzling fact is that the stanza of Palazzo Chigi-Odescalchi in BAV Arch.Chigi 516, made up in 1669, refers to both a ‘stanza detto il Romitorio’ on fols.11r and 49r, located near to the ‘scala lamaca’, a fuggia and above the stables, and thus probably at the rear of the building, and a room described as ‘stanzino del Romitorio’ on fols.15r and 73r-v, which was close to the guardaroba, on the piano nobile. Where thus the hermitage should be located remains unsolved; it might have been close to the stanza, maybe even connected by interior stairs. The stanza was decorated with wooden wainscoting; stanzino was more properly furnished, with an ‘Ingegnocchiatore di noce venata ...’ a table, and again a complete wainscoting in wood. For the original designs by Fontana for the palazzo Chigi-Odescalchi, see BAV Chigi P.A.II.10, fols.611-62r.

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and was a specialist in the genre of landscape. The last and most conspicuous hermitage for Cardinal Flavio was not found in Rome, but in the Cardinals' native Sienese countryside: instead of largely consisting of artificially natural settings as did the preceding two, it was placed within a real, but nonetheless planned and organised countryside. Near the Tuscan village of Ancaiano, the Chigi family had possessed a small villa with *casino* since the mid-seventeenth century, the nucleus of which was acquired by Flavio's father, Don Mario Chigi. Around 1676, during Flavio's cardinalate, a project was started to enlarge, unify and embellish the property. This was not concluded until the first decades of the eighteenth century. The co-ordinating architect was again Carlo Fontana.

The original *casino* of the villa, largely left untouched, was located between two hilltops that were unified by Fontana into one grand design (fig.116). One summit became the location of a large statue of Hercules by the sculptor Mazzuoli; the other one was crowned by a small building (fig.117). The façade of this latter structure contained a large patriarchal cross with two crossbeams. Inserted at the ends of these three beams were medallions showing the figures of Christ and the four Evangelists. Its outside decoration, near-contemporary descriptions and post-mortem inventory of the possessions of Flavio Chigi, prove that this building functioned as a real hermitage. In the concept of the garden, it was the religious counterpart to the Hercules figure, which should be interpreted here as a symbol of Virtue. What makes this particular hermitage in Cetinale especially interesting is both the context created around it, and its internal disposition. The two hundred steps leading to the summit of the hill (at the base flanked by the triple *monti* or 'mountains' from the Chigi-stemma) clearly referred to the metaphor of spiritual ascent of the soul to heaven. This was not the only intervention turning the landscape into a metaphor for the spiritual pilgrimage. After inheriting the villa from his uncle Flavio, Bonaventura Chigi Zondadari added a garden in the form of a 'Thebaid' to this

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2 See Golzo 1939, pp.13 and 70. Di Castro 1999, p.227 suggested that the painter of these landscapes was Vincenzo Coralli, who worked almost exclusively as artistic entrepreneur for Flavio I Chigi, with a predominance of projects involving landscape-painting; see also Mignosi Tantillo 2000, p.341 on the cooperation between Giovanni Paolo Schor and Coralli. Whether he was the same as Francesco Coralli, mentioned in more or less the same role, remains unclear; see *Allgemeines Kunstler-Lexikon* 1992-present vol 21, p.137. For the patronage of Coralli by Flavio I Chigi, see Golzi-1939, where it is frequently mentioned in payments for Palazzo at Piazza SS Apostoli and the garden at the Quattro Fontane.


4 On the statue, see Angelini Montanari 1998, pp.236-238, for a contemporary biography on Giuseppe Mazzuoli, see Pascoli 1992, p.931-935.

villa, in which the concept of the hermitage was extended to incorporate the rest of the park. The
oration held at Flavio’s funeral however suggests that the plan for this *bosco*, comparable to a
*sacra monte*, had already been devised before his death in 1693, begun around 1680, and
completed by his heirs. 96

This religious theme-park contained a number of diverse motifs, constituting a spiritual
route through nature. 97 At the entrance stood an arch with the painted figures of Elijah and Saints
Paul, Anthony Abbot, Mary Magdalene, Francis, and others famous examples of solitary life. An
inscription on the same arch derived from Saint Jerome referred to these saints as ‘Christ’s
flowers’ in the desert, leading the thoughts of the wanderer from the real to the spiritual garden. 98
Then followed a lingering path with statues of praying monks along the way and chapels with
frescoed scenes from the life of Christ. At the other end of the path through this *Sacro Bosco*, a
number of monsters were executed in sculpture, representing the customary temptations that
tormented the real hermit. 99 Thus, at the entrance the visitor would at first have indicated to him
the historical predecessors of the solitary life, then the Life of Christ, which inspired them and
their devotions. The statues showed the ‘modern’ form of the spiritual life in the form of solitary
monks, and the path ended with the test that only the firm believers, who had put their faith in
Christ, would be able to surpass.

The Cetinale hermitage seems to have been more than a mere showcase or ‘courty
hermitage’. The inventories written in 1692 and in 1705-1706 mentioned the spaces and
furnishings of the hermitage, pointing it out as a location for devotional pastimes. The order of
the rooms described in both inventories enlisted a ‘Church, sacristy, room on the ground-floor of
the hermitage, the room above on the left-hand side of [is] E[iminencc], the room of the Hermit,
the room of the *Palchetto* [presumably a terrace from which a view over the park and countryside
could be admired] 100 above, kitchen. 101

Just as the *Sacro Bosco* resembled the *Sacro Monte* in Monte Virginio, the organisation of
the edifice showed a striking similarity with the smaller hermitages built in exactly the same

96 Bach-Nielsen 1997, pp.119-120; see Angelini Montanari 1998, pp.226, 246 for the reference to the funeral oration
p.246 n.335 and 336 referred to some details of the Tebaide as already being visitable in September 1681, when
Cosimo III de’ Medici came and admired the Villa Cetinale.
97 For a discussion of the Tebaide at Cetinale, see Bach-Nielsen 1997, pp.119-122.
100 *Giorni* vol.12, pp.388-389.
101 BAV. Arch. Chigi 700, fol.286r: ‘Chiesa, Sagrestia, Stanza a Pianterreno del Romitorio, Stanza di sopra mano
manca di S. E., Stanza del Romito, Stanza del Palchetto di sopra, cucina.’
period in the Carmelite desert (compare fig. 108). The presence of a bed and two mattresses in his private room suggest that it was possible for the cardinal to stay for more than a few spare hours. In the chapel of the hermitage, all the necessary utensils for Mass were present (in 1686 liturgical utensils for the 'chiesa del Romitorio' were acquired), while a number of prie-dieu's, several crosses and religious books in other rooms point to the religious aim of the entire building.

The mention of the 'room of the Hermit' in the inventory also suggests that a solitary religious looked after the church and was able to stay overnight, to keep it prepared for the liturgical demands of the cardinal, similar to the tasks delegated to independent hermits at the end of the seventeenth century in Tivoli. In fact, Chigi sustained such solitary religious in the campagna of Siena. Between 1672 and 1687, several payments were made in natura by the enterprise of the Villa to a hermit in the 'romitorio of Motrano', situated close to Cetinale, for masses celebrated in honour of Saint Macarius. Similar payments to a 'hermit' in the Villa of Cetinale are not traceable in these account-books, but it is possible that cardinal Chigi asked the hermit of Motrano, or else monks of a religious Order to take care of the hermitage's chapel on a temporary basis.

But there is also the possibility that an anchorite was permanently affiliated to Cetinale. Chigi's position as protector of the Vallombrosiani and the Minimi of San Francesco di Paola, both of them dedicated to the solitary and contemplative life, might have facilitated such special arrangements. Nineteenth-century sources even suggest that the hermitage was inhabited by as many as twelve monks who took care of the sick, officiated weekly in the church of Sant'Eustachio near the Villa itself, and assisted the inhabitants in the surroundings of the

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1 BAV, Arch. Chigi 700, fol. 28r, described the contents of the room of Flavio Chigi as such: 'Un letto, con Banchi, e Tavole da letto d'Albuccio, con due materazzi di lana fina, con due traversiere, e tre cuscini. Un Lavolino d'Albuccio con sue scanze trastra sopra da libri. Una trabacia de tela bianca, con suo velo, sei Bandinelle, quattro guarda colonne, coperta, e tornaletto, con francette de filo bianco.'

2 BAV, Arch. Chigi 1818, payments made in 1686: 'Fattura d'un Armario, e diversi utensili sacri per la Chiesa del romitorio d'ottobre, 1686.'

3 BAV, Arch. Chigi 1818, for example on fol. 27r: 'Girarono 3 H a p p r i e s o r i a i P. Romito di Motrano al Quad. 1674 e 1675 pagati da Pietro Cerini. Lavoro in detto, Pode al quale furono al Quad. 1-3.' Similar payments continued until the end of the accountbook, in 1687, except for a break in 1685. From 1686 onwards, alms for Capuchins and Discalced Carmelites are also listed under the heading Chiesa e Devotiss.

The mention in the Diario Scurose of Gigli vol. 2, p. 215 of Chigi: 'fondandovi [in Cetinale] un romitaggio e ordine di romiti.' seems to suggest that there was a group of regular hermits affiliated to Cetinale; see Angela Montanari 1997, p. 246 n. 335.

4 Ciocconi 1677 vol. 4, p. 727 and Cardella 1792-1797 vol. 7, p. 121.
In the seventeenth century, however, the use of the hermitage will have been restricted to the owners of the villa, to procure them the isolation and rest to concentrate on their devotional practices.

**Hermits in high society**

Around the same time as the projects undertaken by cardinal Flavio I Chigi, other hermitages were commissioned by noble roman families, and constructed in the privacy of their palaces. In many respects, these hermitages in the palaces of roman noble families resembled the projects of Flavio Chigi; their functions seem however to have been slightly different. Three will be discussed here; one in the palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, one in palazzo Altieri, and one in palazzo Colonna.

The present palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi was inhabited at the end of the seventeenth century by the Mancini family, and then rented out in the late 1680s to Giovanni Battista Rospigliosi and Maria Camilla Pallavicini; in 1704 their relatives finally bought it. According to the inventories of 1708 and 1710, this edifice contained a *romitorio*. The furniture of this room, situated in a mezzanine on the second floor of the palace, consisted of a *prie-dieu*, chairs, a bed and table, designed to look as if they were constructed out of rustic tree-stumps or hewn out of the rocks, and painted fabrics were applied to the walls to simulate woodland-surroundings. One adjacent room contained a collection of landscape-paintings evoking outdoor-scenery and a second room was furnished with book-cases, suggesting that this small apartment was a place for study of the arts, letters and devotion. In this context, the hermitage offered the place for spiritual exercises similar to the private retreats made for Farnese and Chigi. However, in this case the users were female members of the family; according to the descriptions, the room was first at the disposal of the Duchess Maria Camilla Pallavicini Rospigliosi, and after 1710 was refurbished for her daughter Maria Candida, by the painter Monsu Leandro. Whether this hermitage was expressly made for Maria Camilla herself remains uncertain without further information on the dating and attribution of the original project. It might very well have been constructed during the

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107 Bach-Nielsen 1997, p.117. "In return for books, the necessary furniture and provisions, they performed various kinds of monastic, charitable work; they nursed the sick, comforted the dying, and once a week celebrated mass in the chapel of the villa below."


109 Di Castro Pedrocchi Waddy 1999, p.227 describes the room on account of these two inventories of 1704 and 1710.
inhabitation of the palace by the Mancini-family, who, as will be discussed below, had a family preference for the anchorite theme. In that case, the romitorio should be dated to around 1670.

More insight into this cultural and artistic phenomenon can be obtained by means of two further hermitages in Rome, located in the Colonna and Altieri palaces respectively. The interior of both rooms was constructed with ephemeral materials - painted draperies and wood - and their fragility has left nothing but descriptions and drawings of its interiors. The romitorio in Palazzo Altieri (fig. 119) was designed by one of Bernini’s assistants, Johann Paul Schor (1615-1674), a furniture-maker and interior decorator of German origin. The Colonna room was also been attributed to him in an eighteenth-century guidebook, which is further supported by the similarity in concept and realisation to the Altieri project. Schor was also paid for works in the Palazzo Chigi in 1662 and 1667, which suggests his influence also in the case of this hermitage, discussed above, which probably functioned as inspiration for the other two examples.

During his visit to Rome in 1687-1688, the Swedish architect Nocodemus Tessin the Younger (1654-1728) visited the hermitages in the Palazzo Colonna and in Palazzo Altieri, both only recently finished. Sometime between 1670 and his death in 1674, Schor executed a romitorio in a two-room apartment in a mezzanine of the Altieri palace: it had a cave-like appearance, which according to Tessin evoked in the visitor a 'bizarre and pleasing' impression: he even used the word affreuse several times to describe its psychological effect on the beholder. The drawing made to record this room underlined its visual extravagance (fig. 120), and documented the furniture. It contained a bed, a number of chairs, a fountain between the windows, and a mirror, all in the guise of raw materials such as pieces of rock and tree-trunks, but actually made out of wood covered with fabrics painted to look like stone or straw; the walls and ceiling were irregular and covered by painted plants. The ceiling was, according to Tessin,


The payments to Schor for works in the Palazzo Chigi are published in Golci 1939, pp.70 and 73.

Tessin 2002b, p.318: ‘Von hier wurden wir hinunter geführt, undt passirten erstens unten durch ein zimmer so mit büsten erinnert wahr undt kahmen so in einem andern, dain wie eine romitoria sehr bizzare undt auffallig von Gian Paolo Tedesco wahr ausgesetzt.’ The project of enlarging the palace was begun in 1670 and Schor died in 1674. For the edifice and its successive phases see Schiavo 1963, p.52-70.

Tessin 2002b, p.318: ‘das sämtliche gewölb, undt die wände wahr allers gantz irrregular undt affreux representiret, undt auf gewissen gerusten von dinnen hölzern mit eenwandt überkleidet, undt so mit gelbbranne farbe übertrückt, undt gehobt an dnen stehen, undt daherr währen die fenster währen auf der einen seiten gantz unten beim flor undt mit gegitter vor, an der anderen seiten währen sie höher hinauf, einer wegen hinter den klippen undt nach einem Spiegel im feissen darin, in der eeken stunde wie ein aparter pfeiler von der klippen, dass man kunde herumbeghen ... vorne zwischen den fenesten wahr eine fontaine zwischen kleine klippen, dass wett wahr

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here and there spanned by steel wires with leaves and roses cut out of tin at various places...\textsuperscript{115}

Notwithstanding its ephemeral cave-like character, the Altieri hermitage contained an array of rich materials, such as a mirror actually made out of rock-crystal mounted on gold, and surrounded by diamonds and sapphires - its value was estimated by Tessin at the enormous amount of 60,000 scudi. With a keen eye he also noted that the fabrics used for the walls and furniture were satins and silks of the highest quality.\textsuperscript{116} It was probably because of its very preciousness and costliness that in 1725 this hermitage or grotta still existed.\textsuperscript{117}

The second commission to Johann Paul Schor for a hermitage, part of a three-room mezzanine-apartment in the middle wing of Palazzo Colonna, represented the same idea with slight variations in form; it offered the visitor an equal display of sumptuous wealth.\textsuperscript{118} This hermitage was also part of a small apartment, which also contained a room decorated with mythological scenes showing Apollo and Diana, the four seasons, and fruits, and the second room had at the centre of its ceiling the 'triumphing Truth' surrounded by the 'four Monarchies', and herms as decoration on the walls. In 1668-1669, the painter Giovanni Maria Mariani was recompensed for his work in these rooms.\textsuperscript{119} The hermitage itself was also under way in 1668, as in that year the intagliatore Francesco Bergamo was paid for his work in the romitorio. He delivered 'six stools carved as rocks and trunks [decorated] with leaves and animals, and a small
table and prayer-stool and a day-bed with cloth painted with the same kind of work. According to Tessin's description, these pieces of furniture were covered in fine fabrics looking like humble materials such as straw. The one difference with the Altieri grotto consisted in the paintings used in the Colonna example, which formed small openings in the rocky walls and represented different kinds of animals and shepherds. These are also visible in the drawing made for Tessin to document this *romitorio* (fig. 121).

By their style of decoration, the Rospigliosi, Colonna and Altieri hermitages displayed concepts quite similar to the Camerino degli Eremiti and the various Chigi *romitorii*. All consisted of a small number of rooms contained in one apartment, and all had the same kind of furniture. The (day-)bed, the chairs, and the prayer-stool were stock-elements of such rooms. This seems to indicate that the function of these apartments as places for retreat was also comparable. The main difference between the hermitages for cardinals and the later *romitorii* lay in the secluded character of the decoration of the latter which instead of looking out onto a real or feigned landscape, largely blocked communication with the outdoors by the choice for cave-like walls, and small openings - whether barred windows or paintings. As mentioned before, the paintings in the Colonna-*romitorio* did not contain hermit-saints, as would be expected in the case of the other hermitages for cardinals, but showed pastoral imagery. In other words, the hermits had disappeared from a number of these hermitages.

Another factor is that in both the Altieri and Colonna *romitorii* alien elements, deduced from the traditional attributes of the hermit, were introduced. Mirrors, plain beds, and a number of chairs pointed more towards a life of sociability than towards harsh penitence and the frequent practice of prayer. Should these private 'hermitages' for secular patrons than be interpreted as deprived of their original function and meaning, and early examples of the courtly hermitage as a

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1 These payments are in the Archivio Colonna, Libro maestro I, B. 28, fols. 146, 150, 163; see Strunck 2000 for the decoration of Palazzo Colonna and these payments to Mariani and Bergamo. I am indebted to Christina Strunck for so kindly sharing with me this information on the *romitorio* Colonna.

2 Archivio Colonna, L A . 39, payment of 150 scudi to Francesco Bergamo, 1668: 'per haver fatto l'intaglio del romitorio che sono sei sgabelli intagliati a scogli et a tronchi con foglie et animali con un tavolino et un inginocchiatore et una lettiera con il telaro finto con detto lavoro'.

3 Tessin 2002a, pp.94-95: 'Au Palais du grand Connestable Colonna à Rome l'on voyoit encor un parcel sujet dans l'Intresolle, mais moins spacieus; on le nommoit aussi un Fremitage, ou toute la Voute ressembloit à une roche, perce en certains endroits: le jour y entroit aussi fort irrégulièrement, mais avec tout cela, quoiqu'ce lieu la avoit quelque chose d'affreux, il ne faissoit pas d'estre fort agréable par rapport a sa fraicheur. Du lit et de Colonnes il seta parle dans la troisieme Partie. Tessin 2002a, p.251: "MIFremitage de l'Intresolle, au Palais du Connestable Colonna, cy dessus mentionnez, le lit paroistre est fait dela roche mesme de l'Fremitage, dont on luy aujoyt aussi donne la couleur, et la couverture paroistre est faute de parle".'

4 Tessin 2002b, pp.311-312 : 'In den mezzahaltzen unten wahr eine alcove wie eine eremitage gemahlet, mit eitel grossen felsen über dem ganzen gewelb, undt darzweischen lie et dar einstichten, dass bett herumb wahr von holz
 Locations and users of romitorii

Not only were the artistic concepts of the Colonna and Altieri hermitages very similar due to the probable intervention of Schor in both of them, but the social context of these commissions also formed a coherent network. In late seventeenth-century Rome, the Chigi, Altieri, and Colonna families belonged to the highest social echelons of the city. Moreover, the correspondence of Maria Mancini Colonna (1639-1716) documented the intimate contacts between Flavio Chigi, Giulio Rospigliosi and the Altieri and Colonna families. In fact, Maria Mancini, niece of cardinal Mazarin, was married to the Grand Constable or Contestabile Colonna, and was a regular guest of cardinal Chigi - who was their neighbour on the opposite side of Piazza Santi Apostoli. The Altieri and Colonna families were united by the marriage between Egidio Colonna and Tarquinia Altieri, and after her death, with Altiera Altieri.123 And finally, Cardinal Paluzzo Albertoni Altieri remained in life-long contact with Flavio Chigi, both in the context of the papal Curia and in more familiar situations.124 These bonds were also displayed by means of festivities: the 1668 reception in the villa Chigi at Quattro Fontane, mentioned above, was staged for members of the Rospigliosi family to celebrate the election the previous year of Giulio Rospigliosi to the papal See (fig.113).125 Giulio Rospigliosi himself was, before and even during his papacy, popular as a playwright, producing theatrical texts that were staged in the Colonna and Altieri palaces during Carnival or religious festivities.126

These contacts probably led to visits to the respective hermitages. Maria Mancini Colonna was received and entertained by Cardinal Flavio Chigi at his Sienese properties in 1668, shortly before the hermitage was added to the villa of Cetinale.127 Mancini could at some time have seen the hermitage in the present palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, which her family owned until the sale to the Rospigliosi in 1704, who before acquiring the building had rented it for some time. The Altieri had peripherally been involved with hermitages: when they bought the town of Oriolo Romano from the Orsini family in 1671, this included the Carmelite hermitage of Monte Virginio.128 But the first person to have anything resembling a hermitage was Cardinal Flavio Chigi: the romitorio in his Roman palace probably dated from the middle or late 1660s, and thus...
predated the others. It might very well be assumed that the cardinals' examples influenced members of the noble families, at least on the typological level of these hermitages.

For which members of the noble families were these hermitages intended? A Roman noble palace was habitually inhabited by numerous members of a family; each person or couple had his, her or their own apartment within the larger building. This meant that these hermitages had their particular users. Palazzo Altieri was around 1670 inhabited by the cardinal nipote of Pope Clement X. Palazzo Albertoni Altieri, who lived on one side of the building; his brother Gaspare Altieri lived with his wife Laura Caterina in the other half.¹" It was for her that the romitorio must have been intended; Tessin specifically mentioned that the solitary room was accessed directly through the audience room of the Princess.²² This also accords with the lack of specific religious furniture, which one would have surely expected in the retreat of a cardinal.

When the Colonna romitorio was decorated between 1668 and 1674, cardinal Girolamo I (1604-1666) had already died. The cardinal's nephew, Conte stabile Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna (1637-1689; fig.123), had his apartments on the south-western part of the edifice, on the right hand side in the middle tract, close to where his wife Maria Mancini had her rooms (see the plan on fig.122). Lorenzo Onofrio had frequently commissioned Schor to design stage-settings for theatrical happenings during the 1660s; in 1663 he also ordered a state bed from Schor for Maria Mancini Colonna, for the presentation of the newly-born Colonna heir to the public.³³ After this happy event, however, Maria Mancini set a bad example early in 1672 by fleeing from her husband to France, to Louis XIV whose mistress she had been before her marriage to Colonna in 1661. Her departure to France (where she was presumably not even received by Louis XIV) led to political troubles between the Pope and the French king, and to a public outcry against her behaviour. Later that same year, she returned from France back to her husband in Rome.³⁴ For whom had the hermitage in Palazzo Colonna been furnished?

Although Tessin did not indicate how or through which rooms he entered the Colonna-hermitage, the location of the apartment in the middle wing of the palace makes it clear that it belonged to the apartment of Lorenzo Onofrio (fig.122). After all, he was named after Saint

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¹ For the involvement of the Altieri with Monte Virginio, see Sturm 2002, p.63.
³ Tessin 2002b, p.318: 'Von hier kahme man wieder oben in der Prinzessin audienz- kammer, worinnen ess mit tapptern meubliert wahr.'
⁴ For Colonna as patron of Schor, see Tamburini 1997, esp. pp.57, 182-183; the state bed was illustrated in a print, see Fusconi 1985, p.159; Tamburini 1997, p.53-54 and Ambiente Barocco 1999, p.140, pl.21; Tessin 2002b, p.315 described this bed at length.
Onuphrius, and he had a predilection for privacy and seclusion even before the departure of Maria Mancini to France. In other words, a preference for escaping society, albeit for diverse reasons, can be observed in his life and patronage. The secluded character and rich display of the Colonna and Altieri hermitages perfectly suited this function and requirements: it protected members of high-society families from social display by suggesting them a convenient shelter from the outside world.

**Noble anchorites and anchoresses**

Concurrent with the growing popularity of the noble hermitage, the literature for this type of reader also developed in new directions. Especially for members of the higher classes, seventeenth century authors produced works that popularised the ideal of the hermit while stressing the aspect of seclusion. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the possibility of living as a hermit in real life was severely limited or almost impossible, and the example of the ancient hermits was thus adapted - or stripped - to fit the reality of this particular group of secular readers. As a result, the element of prayer was severely reduced in these books, and the practice of social and religious virtues was expanded.

Examples of this popularisation of the anchorite qualities of life appeared from the 1620s onwards, and a gradual turn from the regular to the secular reader can be observed in these books. Between 1621 and 1625, Paolo Bozzi published his two volume *Tebalie Sacra*, which used hermits to exemplify a number of important virtues for all sorts of readers.\(^{13}\) Although he coined his public as 'especially the regulars', the introduction and contents opened the possibility for all devout persons to take the lessons in the *Tebalie* to heart. Its text did not offer any guidelines for prayer, but consisted of a story about a number of hermits gathering in the desert to discuss the Christian Virtues guiding their lives.

Another example of such a book was the *Eroine della Solitudine Sacra ovvero Vite d'alcune pii illustre Romite*, written by the Dominican Father Girolamo Ercolani.\(^{13}\) A first impression of 1654 was followed by many later editions, attesting to its popularity. The book, in quarto, was divided into two volumes and illustrated with engravings, representing the appropriate saint at the beginning of each chapter. Already these exterior characteristics indicate, that Ercolani's intended audience were women of the higher classes. This is supported by the persons to whom the dedicatory letters were directed, and by the arguments that Ercolani used to

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\(^{13}\) Bozzi 1621-1625.

\(^{13}\) Girolamo Ercolani O.P. (1618-1668) wrote another book on the model behavior of women, *La regola delle vedove sacre* of 1663.
bring home his message of virtue and restraint. Moreover, all the saints discussed were female, who probably had few worldly ornaments - as Ercolani expressed it - but therefore were virtuous and pious, and the most worthy position for a woman was that of the widow or virgin.

The dedication of the 1664 edition of the *Eroine della Solitudine* to Marieta Contarini described her native city of Venice as a metropolis of vices, in the midst of which she was able to lead a penitent life that was more severe than in the desert of Egypt thanks to her incessant retreat from this depraved urban society. The following introduction explained that the reader should derive from these edifying examples the virtues to guide her own life. With an interesting parallel between his words and the accompanying prints, Ercolani says the following about the female virtues, counting the very act of retreat as one of the main qualities:

I wanted to signal these pages with only images of Women: because I have really admired and bowed to the glory of that sex: who although credited as being of glass, I find them constructed of steel, or rather with strokes of the hammer, more solid than diamond itself: to the confusion of us men, who are defeated by women in piety, and in the virtues, as much as we defeat them in wickedness and in vices. I have satisfied myself in only portraying Solitary [women], to make this clear: that the retreat is the most noble ornament [frieze] of a woman.

In what follows, Ercolani sketched out the life of female hermits, most of whom were of noble descent, but who gave up their worldly positions for a life in the service of Christ; and by renouncing their worldly ornaments, they neared heaven. Most elements in his stories thus appealed to noblewomen, and guided them towards the seclusion of the *romitorio*, either physically, or in their social attitude. Notwithstanding these clear intentions of the author, the 1688 edition of this book was dedicated to Giovanni Carlo Visconti, which suggests that later publishers though the contents also fit for male readers. Obviously they too might profit from the examples of virtue and social restraint.

Yet another book, the *Santa Solitudine Ovvero Soliloquii dell'anima Intorno a quelle verità Cristiane, che più dell'altr'e vagliono per allestir l'anime all'ossequio di Dio* by the French Jesuit

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135 Ercolani 1664, 'dedication': 'per appunto posso chiamare Venezia, col mezzo d'un singolare ritiratezza, praticare le più infopitie, e insottil soildidini dell'Egitto'.
136 Ercolani 1664, unpaginated introduction [*asterisks signal unreadable words as a result of paper-damage]: '*n ho voluto segnare questi miei fogli ** imagini, che di Donne; perché vera** ho sempre ammirato, & inchinato le glorie di questo sesso; che benche porti il nome d'esser d'vetro, lo trovo in fatti di tempera d'acciaio, anzi a colpi di martello, più saldo dello stesso Diamante: a confusione di noi altri uomini, che tanto ci lasciamo vincere dalle Donne nella pietà, e nelle virtù, quanto le avanziamo nell'empietà, e ne vizzi. Mi sono compiaciuto solo de ritratte delle Solitarie, per dar a divedere, che la ritiratezza è il più nobil fregio d'une Dama.'

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Pierre Marie, published in an Italian translation in 1658, contained an introduction to the secular reader which set out the main requirements for this acquisition of virtue: chastity, mortification, patience and humility.\textsuperscript{137} In contrast to the former examples, however, this book did not contain a selection of edifying stories on female or male solitary saints, but discussed simple methods for acquiring the four main qualities. The title and the proposed strategies were, however, most fitting for the context of the noble hermitage: the devotions were simple, short and mild, and thus accessible to the dilettante public engaging in religious improvement.

Pierre Marie's book was well received in Roman noble circles, thanks to its dedication by the Italian printer to Anna Maria Mazarin, prioress of the monastery of Santa Maria in Campo Marzio and niece of cardinal Jules Mazarin.\textsuperscript{138} Until her death in 1669, Anna Maria played a pivotal role in the Mazarin and Mancini families, and held a salon where Maria Mancini Colonna, Anna Maria's niece, came to visit, just like many other members of the Roman high society in late seventeenth-century Rome.\textsuperscript{139} Anna Maria was, moreover, famous for her contacts with zealous monks and nuns and her own religious life. Through her, Pierre Marie's \textit{Santa Solitudine} will therefore have found a most ready reception in these noble circles.

Another popularisation of the hermit-theme for the noble laity was offered by Francesco Antonio Dolcetti in his \textit{Vite de'padri, ovvero istoria eremita delle vite, e detti degli antichi solitarii} of 1679, which was another collection of eremitic lives.\textsuperscript{140} He mixed the two genres: that of instructive examples and uncomplicated practices. The introduction was aimed at readers looking for diversion, being led by the author towards moral edification. This reference to the genre of the chivalric novel, and the choice to dedicate this book to Cecilia Acquaviva Gaetana d’Aragona, reveals that again women were a conspicuous part of his intended public.\textsuperscript{141} Dolcetti suggested however to a more general readership the following.

But if it pleases you in novels and in other vain books to see represented new and unusual things, or bravura, the valour and strength of a \textit{Cavaliere}, or pitched battles and siege of cities, or the political finesses, and inventions and strategies and surprises and unexpected

\textsuperscript{137} For Pierre Marie (1589-1645) and the editions of the \textit{Sainte Solitude} see Sommervogel 1960 vol.5, cols.575-577; the French original of this book appeared in 1636, with many reprints until at least 1675; apart from the Italian translation of 1658, a Dutch version was published in 1657.
\textsuperscript{138} See Dethan 1981, pp.30-32 for a short biography of Anna Maria Mazarin.
\textsuperscript{139} Dethan 1981, p.42. Queen Christina of Sweden and others were known to have frequented Anna Maria.
\textsuperscript{140} In 1700, a second edition appeared of this book in Rome, under the title \textit{Istoria degli eremi solitarii cioe Vite, e successi memorabili de vs. padri eremitii e di sante vergini ... In questa impressione corretta, ordinata, notabilmente accresciuta, e restituita alli suoi veri autori.}
\textsuperscript{141} During the Catholic Reformation there was a polemic about the moral threat of the chivalric romance, offering only diversion and no education; see Fumaroli 1985.
assaults, or finally the amorous stories; all these elements can be found in this work. You will see souls so fortified by divine Grace, moved into open and professed war against themselves, to conquer in themselves the vanity of this world, and the powers of the Inferno. And will not our enemies use those finesse, and cunning to distract us from this noble undertaking? Those surprises and attacks do not tempt? With those strategies they do not try to mislead us? But those inflamed by divine Love ... and enlightened and invigorated by it, withstand with admirable strength these assaults, discover the things insidious, chase away the set-up conspiracies, and inflict irreparable damage to all their phalanxes ... Put thus in those things your diversion, and I hope that you take this enticement, divine Grace being superabundant with you, that often you will be so able with these means to attract to it the souls, and you will enter in the Evangelic net, and you will open up in yourself the way to the Spirit, that will illuminate you, inspire you, and which will elevate you to obtain this glorious end, for which God has created you.142

From both the books and the decorations of the noble hermitages, it can be gauged that they served a different aim than the *romitorii* of cardinals; the act of social restraint and the practice of virtues had taken the place of prayer and contemplation. Instead of turning the inhabitant of the solitary space into an anchorite by means of word and image, the visitor would come there to play a role in an appropriate and elaborate setting.

**Hermits on the Roman stage**

By the end of the seventeenth century, impersonating the contemplative anchorite in a private *romitorio* had been superseded by historical developments, especially by the negative image that the movement of Quietism had lent to incessant prayer.143 The excesses indulged in by monks and nuns, under the guise of spiritual unity with God, forced the Catholic authorities to take

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142 Dolcetti 1679, fol.2r-v: "Perché se piace metteranni, e in altri libri vani il vedervi rappresentate cose nuove, & insolite, o la bravura, il valore, e la forza d'un Cavaliere, o le battaglie campali, o gli asediij delle Citta, o le finezze politiche, o le invenzioni, e le stratagemme, o le sorprese, e gli attacchi improvvisi, o finalmente gli amori; tutte queste cose si trovaranno in quest'Opera. Vi vedrete anime così fortificate dalla gratia divina, mossero aperta, e professata guerra a se stessi, per vincere in se stessi la vanità del Mondo, e le potenze d'Inferno. E quali finezze, & astuzie non usarono i nemici per distrarli dalla generosa impresa? quali sorprese, & attacchi non tentarono? con quali stratagemme non cercarono d'inquietare? Ma esse inflamate del Divino amore ... e da quello illustrate & invigorite, con maravigliosa forza [sic] resistevano a gli assalti, sopprimivano l'insidie, dissipavano le macchiate congiurate, e davano tutte irreparabili a tutte le loro falangi ... In questi dunque ponete il vostro dilettio, & io spero che presi a quest'esca, soprabbonbando con voi la Divina gratia, che spesse stiate si vale di questi mezzi per tirare a se le anime, entraretene nelle rete Evangelica, & aprirte in voi la strada allo spirito, che vi illumini, vi infiammi, e vi innalzi a ottener quel beato fine, per il quale Dio v'ha creati".

143 For Quietism and the process against its most important representative Molinos, see Hepp 1875, esp. pp.260ff.; Petrocchi 1948, and *LMP* 19/4-1997, vol.3, cols.1160-1173. Around mid-century, quietism was also related to the phenomenon of the *hermitage*; see Bendiscioli 1964, p.20.
action, and in 1690 the spiritual movement was finally forbidden. By then, prayer and contemplation had become contaminated terms. Some qualities of the hermit might still be imitated, but copying the example in real life was dissuaded, as it would lead to diabolical temptations. From the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, the hermit on the stage often began to incorporate vices instead of virtues as characteristics. The audience was now confronted with the idea that rigorous abstinence could lead inexperienced anchorites astray, to lose their soul. In the ultimate consequence, the hermit was considered the devil in disguise.

The character of such a possessed hermit was described in the musical opera Sant'Alessio, staged in 1631 and subsequent years by the Barberini on the occasion of Carnival, and at receptions of important ambassadors or nobles. Its music was composed by Stefano Landi. The libretto was from the hand of Giulio Rospigliosi, later pope Clement IX, who favoured the theme of hermits also in all his other plays, with the same intentions. In this case, the 'urban' anchorite Alessio (of Roman patrician descent) was tempted by the devil in the form of a hermit, but refused to believe the lies he was told by this false prophet, upon which the latter disappeared. The real hermit, Alessio, could then continue his spiritual pilgrimage in solitude under the stairs to his family's palace, until after his death his soul was carried up to heaven by angels who discovered his real identity to his family.

Another major success on the stage for Rospigliosi was the musical play entitled La comica del Cielo o la Baldassarre of 1668; the musical accompaniment was composed in this case by Antonio Maria Abbatini, and the stage-design was made by Bernini and an équipe of other artists, among whom was probably also Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi. The main character of the play, the comic actress Baldassarre, repented her former life on the stage and decided to retreat into a cave to live as an anchorite; from there she was taken up to Heaven by the Virgin. In the first act of the play, during her theatrical appearance as Clorinda in the


146 This play is preserved in manuscript in BAV.Vat.Lat.13538, Poesie Morali, e Profane Composte dall'Emo, Sig'Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi di gloriosa memoria Clemente IX, vol.1, pp.328-445. See Canevazzi 1900, pp.145-185, Tamburini 1997, pp.58, 282 and Michelassi in I Teatri del Paradiso 2000, pp.70-72. Canevazzi suggested that the original play was Spanish, adapted by Rospigliosi into Italian. For Antonio Maria Abbatini (c.1597-c.1679), who composed the music, see DIB 1960-present, vol.1, p.30-32 and Ciliberti 1986; for the theatrical designs by Bernini, Grimaldi and others, see Iaviz 1980 vol.1, p.149, Tamburini 1997, p.282 n.344 (who on the basis of accounts ascribed the design of the 1668 staging to Bernini, Schor and Mattia de Rossi); Ariuli Matteucci 2002, pp.76-77.
Germasone Liberata (staged as a play within a play, and a theatre in a theatre), she heard a voice reminding her of the vanity of life, and as a result she decided to leave this world for the search of another, higher goal. At the end of this act, the spectators of this ‘theatre within a theatre’ praised her decision, and it was announced to the real spectators that ‘the comedy is finished’, to indicate that the serious part now began.

In act two, Baldassarra retreated into a cave in the desert, and was visited by her former lover Alverò and a companion, Biscotto, to attempted to persuade her to return to the stage. They caught Baldassarra reading in a book that taught her that all worldly things are vain. Biscotto and his lover Lisa were so impressed by Baldassarra’s example, that they decided to become hermits themselves; but Alverò on the other hand despaired about the loss of her love for him. When he ran off with the intention to commit suicide, Baldassarra’s way out was blocked in that very moment by a large stone rolling before the entrance of her cave.

The end of the second act contained a number of intrigues in which Biscotto as a costumed hermit came to repent for his devilish infatuation, and decided to become a real solitary, which was doubled by an appearance of the devil himself, turning the horrid desert into a garden of pleasures. However, his aim to lead Baldassarra away from her original aim by means of this image failed. Finally, in the third act, the personification of Penitence appeared - not coincidentally again in the guise of a hermit - to Baldassarra. It was through this figure that redemption was being offered, while Baldassarra represented the incorporation of this Virtue. Singing a duet, they expressed the belief that this road opened the way to eternal life, after which Baldassarra returned to her cave.

The play ended with the other characters finding Baldassarra in her grotto, having exchanged this life for the next; the duet in the preceding scene was thus a death-scene in disguise, and the end of the spiritual pilgrimage for Baldassarra.

After an initial spectacle with real actors, a puppet version of the Comica del Cielo was put on stage in Palazzo Ludovisi - then the residence of the Rospigliosi family - on a number of consecutive days during Carnival of 1668, and seen by a great number of Roman citizens. Evidently, Bernini designed the set of this event together with Johann Paul Schor, although...
whether this was for one or both versions remains unclear.  However that may have been organised, the play, the music and the visual artistry impressed itself so much on the mind of a young girl that she longed herself to experience the reality of the hermitage. The diary of a Venetian representative at the Roman court explained what happened as a result of the performance:

The young lady who fled from the House of Signora Donna Caterina was found alone in Castelnuovo dressed as a man, inspired to become a hermit in imitation of Santa Baldassarre, whose life was represented a number of times in Palazzo Rospigliosi this Carnival.

The tone of this account clearly implied the incredulous reaction to the event; it suggested that the young girl was considered ignorant, as everyone knew that becoming a hermit had little to do with living alone in the woods. Being a hermit, for the seventeenth-century general public, was a state of mind preferably recreated in the safe context of the monastery, the private palace or the villa. In all cases, art was the means to create the setting, which inserted the devout into horrid nature without so much as leaving the premises - or having having to submit to clerical supervision. Moreover, the general public was not to follow the life of extreme penitence, but incorporate the moral lesson presented thereby into their daily life in a moderate form. For the general public, the hermitage was a place to dwell, combining diversion with instruction on the Christian virtues. Strict contemplation, for which the predecessors of these romitorii had been intended, was strongly dissuaded, and the first step towards the decorative hermitage had been taken.

In the Seicento, the cultural phenomenon of the hermitage followed diverging courses under the influence of historical circumstances. The real hermitage for the solitary dweller had disappeared under the pressure of papal authorities, and three alternatives were developed. The first was the place where real monks dedicated their time to prayer and contemplation, under the

\[^{254}\text{Canevazzi 1900, p.146-147 cited from the Avvisi di Roma, where Bernini's design was mentioned in relation to the theatrical version staged in palazzo Ludovisi. Tamburini 1997, p.282 n.345 mentioned the payments to Schor and De Rossi in 1668 for a staging in Palazzo Rospigliosi; according to these accounts, Grimaldi was only in charge of the costumes. Pascoli 1992, pp.109, 115 n.15 refers to the scenographic designs made by Giovan Francesco Grimaldi in exactly the same period, rivaling with Bernini for commissions from Chigi: 'Inventó per li nipoti di S.S. Alexander VII molte macchine per le belle commedie, che facevan rappresentare, ma non andarono in iscena, perché si servirono poi del Bernini.'}\]
\[^{255}\text{On the design for this play, see Fusconi 1985, pp.169-170, 179.}\]
\[^{256}\text{Ademollo 1969, p.105, citing from the diary of Ferdinando Raggi (ms. in ASGenova, Lettere ministri, raz.33): 'La donzella che fuggì di Casa la Signora Donna Caterina si è trovata in Castelnuovo sola vestita da uomo.}\]
strict guidance of superiors and regulations. Carmelite deserti were the most conspicuous examples of these monastic institutions, intended to revive the ideal of the early Christian saints in a new form. The architecture, planning and functioning of these hermitages were adjusted to the religious aims. While the monks in such a 'desert' would be completely isolated for a longer period of time, their surroundings, daily rhythm and occupations all obeyed preconceived ideas. The risk of error had by these means been annihilated: no tales of heresy were connected to these cultivated deserts.

In the middle of the scale, the cardinal's hermitage prolonged the concept of the Camerino degli Iremitori. This had been conceived as a place for temporary immersion in devotional exercises, preferably under the guidance or supervision of monks. The examples in the Chigi palace in Rome, but especially at the Villa Cetinale near Siena, indicate that natural setting and isolation had remained key elements of this sort of hermitage. For this kind of occupant, landscape painting and gardens continued to be invested with the meanings Bellarmino had so successfully described in his Scala di salire.

At the farther end of the scale, the third type of hermitage or romitorio had become a role-play for the higher classes, in which particular virtues of modesty, restraint and penitence were located. Here, the act of prayer was probably dissuaded for fear of digressions, such as occurred during the latter half of the seventeenth century within the Quietist movement. With the disappearance of contemplation from the public sphere, the role of nature as incitement to it decreased in importance. In the later seventeenth century, the grotto and the ideal of social isolation became the leading concept behind the romitorio intended for the layman. Bernini, Schor and Coralli transformed this ideal into private rooms for noble patrons, with the help of ephemeral materials. The anchorite, and indeed the hermitage, became a social play for which art and imagination furnished the set-pieces and the properties, and in which the owner would be the main character. The ideal and the real had become separated by art.

Unless one was bound by religious vows, real life and the hermitage had finally been
allocated their own place, without the possibility of crossing the boundaries. In the prologue to Rospigliosi's *Baldassarra*, the figure of Thalia, muse and personification of the theatre, fittingly stated that the stage was only remaining place where the desert could really be turned into a garden for the soul:

[Baldassarra] changed the scenes in woods,
the theatre into the desert,
loosened her tresses, naked the foot on the heat, the cold,
preserved against the Inferno her heart unconquered,
an emulation on earth, and then companion in Heaven,
of Mary of Magdala and of Egypt.

and formerly also known as Villa Baldacchina or Maldacchina) probably contained a hermitage dating from the late seventeenth century; see Belli Barsali Branchetti 1975, pp.77 and 299-301.

'Cited after Canevazzi 1900, p.150: 'Baldassarra'] cangiò le scene in boschi, i teatri in deserti, scioltò il crin, nudo il piede al caldo, al gelo; serbo contro l'Inferno il core invitto, emula in terra, e poi compagna in cielo della Maria di Magdala e di Egitto."