ARNOLD A. WITTE

THE ARTFUL HERMITAGE

The Palazzetto Farnese as a Counter-reformation diaeta
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THE PALAZZETTO FARNESE
AS A COUNTER-REFORMATION DIAETA

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### Contents

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ................................................................. pag. 7

**INTRODUCTION: LANFRANCO’S CAMERINO DEGLI EREMITI AND THE MEANING OF LANDSCAPE AROUND 1600** .............................................................................................................. » 9

1. TYPELOGY AND DECORATION OF THE PALAZZETTO ................................. » 23
   - Camerino and Palazzetto: a reconstruction ........................................ » 27
   - Decoration of the Palazzetto ................................................................... » 29
   - The giardino segreto as ‘theatre of nature’ ....................................... » 38
   - The typology of studioli ........................................................................ » 41
   - Pliny’s diaeta and its Cinquecento imitations ...................................... » 44
   - Studioli, gardens, and the genre of landscape-painting ....................... » 48
   - The transition from studio lo to galleria around 1600 ......................... » 51
   - The typology of the Palazzetto Farnese ............................................. » 52
   - The Camerino as part of the diaeta .................................................. » 54

2. THE CARDINAL’S RETREAT ..................................................................... » 57
   - Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola ............................................................. » 57
   - The Stanza della Solitudine ............................................................... » 59
   - The Stanza della Penitenza ............................................................... » 62
   - Rome: the Casa Professa-apartment ................................................ » 65
   - Iconography of the Cappellina Farnese ............................................ » 72
   - Ignatius’ exemplarity .......................................................................... » 78
   - Jesuit devotional retreats ................................................................. » 79
   - Caprarola: the Palazzina Farnese ...................................................... » 80
   - Grottaferrata: the Palazzo Abbaziale ................................................ » 84
   - Camaldoli: a private cell? ................................................................... » 85

3. LANDSCAPES FOR MEDITATION AND EDIFICATION .............................. » 89
   - Cardinals retreating: Sfondrato, Borromeo and Bellarmino ................. » 89
   - Bellarmino’s ‘Ladder of Nature’ ....................................................... » 99
   - The garden of Sant’Andrea al Quirinale ............................................. » 102
   - Scenes of martyrdom in San Vitale .................................................... » 108
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functions of the Sant’Andrea complex</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian Doctrine and the argument of nature</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgrimage and the visible world</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missionary theory and natural philosophy</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allegorical gardens in Seicento Rome</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Palazzetto as metaphorical Scala</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. THE IMAGINARY, THE REAL AND THE EXEMPLARY HERMIT</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images of hermits</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinquecento realities of solitary life</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The case of Fra Pelagio</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De-historicising the hermit</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itinerant hermits in and around Rome</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sant’Onofrio: the monk redressing as hermit</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephemeral landscapes and theatrical hermits</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giacinto da Casale in Piacenza</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casale’s grotto and the Camerino degli Eremiti</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. PATRONAGE, PROTECTORATE AND THE COUNTER-REFORMATION</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orazione e Morte</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arciconfraternita and its cardinal protectors</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Quarant’Ore and the Camerino</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sixteenth-century concepts of protectorate</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impending abolishment and renewal of the protectorate in 1606</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between regular reform and curial changes</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odoardo Farnese’s protectorates</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discalced Carmelites and the Propaganda Fide</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Camerino’s Eucharistic message</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saints, protectorates and paintings</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABBREVIATIONS</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDEX</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Fig. 1. Annibale Carracci, Christ in Glory with Saints, ca. 1600. Galleria Palatina, Florence. Photo: Polo Museale Fiorentino.
INTRODUCTION
LANFRANCO’S CAMERINO DEGLI EREMITI
AND THE MEANING OF LANDSCAPE AROUND 1600

On 21 December 1609, through his spokesman and personal secretary Alfonso Carandino, Cardinal Odoardo Farnese (1573-1626) proposed to the Archconfraternity of the Orazione e Morte in Rome that they cede him the use of one room in their building. Farnese held a special position in the sodality’s organisation as he was their protector; he was also their neighbour on the via Giulia as he owned the Casino, or as it was later called, Palazzetto, an annex to Palazzo Farnese built between 1601 and 1604 adjacent to the Church and oratory of the brotherhood.1

Odoardo Farnese (kneeling at the lower right in fig. 1) was a descendant from Paul III Farnese (reigned 1534-1549), son of Duke Alessandro Farnese (1545-1592) and Princess Maria of Portugal († 1577). Odoardo was second child, younger brother of Ranuccio Duke of Parma and Piacenza (1569-1622), and for this reason destined to become a cardinal. He received his education at the Roman court of his great-uncle Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (1520-1589), and thanks to his family’s powerful relations, he was created cardinal in 1591 at the age of 18 years. After some difficulties to obtain a reasonable amount of ecclesiastical benefices to provide the income necessary for a prelate of his standing, he established an court where the arts and learning flourished.2 His kinship with a pope and ducal family, and relations with almost all royal houses of Europe also made him a conspicuous figure in Roman society. Until 1622, when Odoardo became regent of Parma, he resided in the grandiose Palazzo Farnese in Rome (fig. 2), which he had had embellished among other things with Annibale Carracci’s famous Galleria Farnese.3

In response to the request by Cardinal Odoardo, first the members of the board of the confraternity, and six days later the entire congregation of the Orazione e Morte applauded the proposal and granted Farnese the requested room. The ‘Libro delli decreti’ recorded that ‘for reasons of his devotion’, two openings could be made in the walls of the room - one of them with shutters - with a view into the church and oratory. Two members of the confraternity were sent to the cardinal to thank him for the favour he granted the brotherhood by means of this request.4

1 The denomination of this part as Palazzetto stems from the early eighteenth century; Rossini 1725, p. 30 wrote ‘Nel Palazzetto detto il picciolo Farnese vicono alla Chiesa della Morte vi è un Camerino, detto del Romito...’ Seventeenth-century sources used the term ‘Casino’, but as Palazzetto has become the more common denominator for this part of the premises, this term will be used throughout this book.
Fig. 2: Façade of Palazzo Farnese, Rome. Photo: ICCD.

Subsequently, the general assembly appointed two members to draft and sign the contract with Farnese. In the written agreement, drawn up in January 1611 – more than a year later – the use of the space was granted to Cardinal Odoardo during his lifetime; the confraternity remained the legal owner of the room. It also recorded that the cardinal would grant the brotherhood a lump-sum-payment, the amount of which was left to his own magnanimity as nothing was stipulated in the contract. Moreover, Farnese had to erect a new building between his own garden behind the Palazzetto and the property of the brotherhood, to make up for the space they lost. After this first downpayment, yearly sums were given to the brotherhood in return for the stanza or camerino that would later, in the eighteenth century, be called Camerino degli Eremiti; the contract was in fact a leasehold.

Accounts and journals of the brotherhood indicate that Cardinal Farnese soon started works on remodeling the room, obviously vacated early in 1610 by the priest who was named in the contract as its former inhab-


See the Appendix. Earlier publications assumed that the contract was either drawn up on 13 June 1601 (Navenne 1921, p. 127 n. 2), or on 13 January 1601 (Uginet 1980, p. 90). The original contract is in ASN, Fondo Farnesiano 1346, fasc.37, ‘Concessio Card.lis Odoardi Farnesij a Ven. Arciconfraternitate Mortis et Orationis de Urbe fabricandi unum murum atque forandi in eo una fenestra prospiciente Intra Ecclesiam dictae Archiconfraternitatis’. A copy is in the ASVR, ASMOM 59, ‘Registro di testamenti e instrumenti’, fols.197v-198r. See Barry 1999, p. 196 and Witte 2000, esp. p. 426.

An access was constructed from the adjacent Palazzetto in the form of an elevated corridor, and the two windows were knocked through to the interior of the Church and Oratory of the brotherhood respectively. Subsequently, the painter Giovanni Lanfranco (1580-1642) was commissioned to fresco all four walls of the room with scenes of penitent saints and additionally provided nine oil-paintings on canvas with similar subjects for insertion in the wooden coffered ceiling.

In seventeenth-century inventories of Palazzo Farnese, this room was described as belonging to the Palazzetto, with reference to its location - 'Oratory that corresponds to the Morte'. In 1662, the room was partially dismantled, for which reason seventeenth century biographical sources on Lanfranco stated that he painted 'a room of the casino' - which stressed the link between the room and its access through the Palazzetto - or even 'some paintings in oil for certain ceilings of rooms for the same Palazzo Farnese in that part of the quarter towards strada Giulia where is the arch that leads from the Palazzo to the garden.' The latter part of this citation indicates that the Palazzetto formed the access from the Palazzo to Farnese's secret garden on the bank of the Tiber, and that at least from around mid-century, the room that Farnese rented from the brotherhood and which was located within their buildings, was considered part of the Farnese-property on the Via Giulia.

However, the lease-contract had specified that with the death of Cardinal Odoardo or his immediate heirs, the agreement would end. Until the eighteenth century, the leasehold with Odoardo was continued by his relatives, as did the payment of the rent. In 1731 Duke Antonio Farnese, the last male descendant of the family, died and the contract was terminated. A year later, the room was demolished when the brotherhood of the Orazione e Morte decided to erect a new church. From that time on, the iconographic theme of its decoration resulted in a descriptive name of the vanished space as the Camerino degli Eremiti, the chamber of the hermits.

Seventeenth-century biographers of Lanfranco were well informed about the pictorial embellishment of the Camerino, but they disagreed upon the exact dating of its execution. In Le vite de'pittori scultori et architetti moderni of 1672, Giovan Pietro Bellori mentioned that Lanfranco went to Rome following the death of Agostino Carracci in 1602 and was asked by Annibale Carracci to do the decoration in 'a room in the casino, at the Arch over the Strada Giulia, where he painted on all four walls various saints in Penitence; ... and not only on the walls but also on the ceiling he painted in oil small figurines of saints in the desert..." In his Vite de' Pittori Scultori Et Architetti of approximately 1678, the painters' biographer, Giovanni Battista Passeri, gave a different account:

Having started to work with the brush and not without some taste of a well founded style to the opinion of Carracci, he was given the commission for a number of panel-paintings in oil ... He painted in them several holy hermits living in solitary places ... By that time, he might have been 24 or 25 years old."

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7 Jestaz 1994, p. 138: 'Oratorio che risponde nella Morte'.
8 Bellori 1672/2000, p. 378: 'in una camera del casino'.
10 Receipts for rent paid between 1632 and 1634 attest to this continuation of the contract after 1626; see ASN.Fondo Farnesiano.b.1805.II; for the renewal of the contract in 1656 and again in 1662, see Navenne 1923 vol. 1, p. 127, n.2 and Uginet 1980, p. 90.
11 Rossini 1725, p. 30.
12 Belleri 1672/2000, p. 378: 'Morto Agostino [which occurred on March 2, 1602], e cresciuto Giovanni sopra l'età di venti anni, si condusse a Roma nella scuola di Annibale Carracci, il quale impiegololo nel palazzo Farnese in una camera del casino, all'arco di strada Giulia, coloritivi a fresco in tutte quattro le faccie, vari Santi Romiti in penitenza ... onde non solo nelle mura, ma anche nel palco dipinse ad olio figure piccole di Santi nell'heremo ...'
13 Passeri 1678/1995, p. 140: 'Havendo dato principio a far operare col pennello e non senza qualche gusto di maniera ben fondata col parere del Caracci gli furono dati a fare alcuni quadri ad olio ... Dipinse in quelli alcuni SS. Eremiti habitanti in luoghi solitari ... Allora Giovanni Lanfranco poteva essere d'età d'anni 24 o 25 ...'
Bellori implied that the Camerino was painted shortly after Lanfranco’s arrival in Rome, around 1602; Passeri’s information would lead to a dating of 1604-1605. The contract proved them wrong, as Lanfranco was not able to decorate the walls before the spring of 1611 because of his sojourn in Piacenza, and the payments made to him in 1616 and 1617 indicate that it was only several years later that the painter was hired to do the decoration.

Bellori and Passeri were unaware of the fact that the room remained the property of the brotherhood and offered a view into its church and oratory, but instead suggested it was part of the Farnese premises. Bellori wrote it was ‘in Palazzo Farnese in a room of the casino’, and Passeri referred to several rooms in the part of the palace adjacent to the garden, implying that it was not one single space for which Lanfranco was commissioned to provide decoration. Their confusion can be explained by the fact that the decoration of the Camerino was demolished in 1662, less than fifty years after its completion, and the paintings were relocated elsewhere. First, Lanfranco’s oil-paintings - on canvas - were taken out of the coffered ceiling. In his description, Bellori mentioned that these works had been given a new place in other rooms of the Farnese-palace:

not only on the walls but also on the ceiling he painted in oil small figures of saints in the desert, which were not long ago removed and divided in small paintings for the rooms of the said palace.

A later remark in the margin of Passeri’s manuscript confirmed this, and their state of preservation was given as the reason for the removal and subsequent restoration by the painter Filippo Lauri. Passeri never saw the Camerino intact but only the paintings, while Bellori, on the other hand, might have had access to the room through his contacts with Christina of Sweden who lived in the palace in 1655 and 1658. Therefore, he correctly mentioned the presence of frescoes on the walls that Passeri had omitted. It is also possible that Bellori had been told so by Lanfranco himself, as he mentioned in his vita of the artist that he had known him personally.

Because the 1653 inventory of the palace still mentioned the decoration as completely intact, the partial dismantling of the Camerino must have been done in the subsequent five years; since the oilpaintings were mentioned in a list of objects to be sent to Parma in 1662, they must have been detached from their original setting by then. A puzzling fact is that shortly before the final demolition of the room in 1732, a description of the Camerino mentioned the paintings on canvas as in situ. In his report of the Palazzo Farnese made up that year, the representative of the Duke of Parma in Rome described the room’s decoration as completely intact. However, other sources support the assumption of a partial demolition of the room in the 1660s, and the sale of paintings with landscapes and hermits by Giovanni Lanfranco from the Farnese-collections in

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15 ASN Archivio Farnesiano 1805 I, ‘Spese per la corte di Odoardo Farnese’, fol.473r.: ‘e adi detto [25/1/1618] s[cudi] cento m[one]ta a Giovanni Lanfranco Pitore per resto di s[cudi] 350 ch’importa la Pittura fatta nel Camerino che risponde alla Chiesa della compag[ni]a della morte così accordato con S[ual Signo]ria Ill[ustrissi]ma ...’ These payments were published by Denunzio 2000, pp. 379-380. A dating before the end of 1617 has been proposed in Witte 2001a, p. 54; for Lanfranco’s 1611 sojourn in Piacenza, see Witte 1604-1605.14
17 Bellori 1672/2000, p. 378: ‘cresciuto Giovanni sopra l’età di vent’anni, si condusse a Roma nella scuola di Annibale Carracci, il quale impiegolo nel palazzo Farnese in una camera del casino, all’arco di Strada Giulia, coloritivi a fresco in tutte quattro le faccie vari Santi romiti in penitenza, essendo solito il cardinale Farnese ritirarsi in quella camera per sua divozione; onde non solo nelle mura ma anche nel palco dipinse ad olio figurine picciole di Santi nell’eremo, le quali non è molto tempo furono tolte e divise in quadretti per le camere del medesimo palazzo.’
18 Passeri 1678/1995, p. 140 n. 3: ‘Hs.N. (56r) Queste Historiette incomincivano (56v) a patire, e furono dal Marchese ... Residente dell’Altezza di Parma fatte restaurare dal Sig. Filippo Lauri e ridurre in Quadri per adornamento di certe stanzie di sopra, dove al presente si conservano.’ For Filippo Lauri see Thieme/Becker 1907-1950 vol. 22, pp. 457-458. Passeri’s information that the paintings were intended for a number of ceilings, i.e. more than one room, might have originated in this later situation.
Parma and Naples during the first years of the eighteenth century contradicts their presence in Rome in 1732. Lanfranco’s frescoes remained in place until the brotherhood of the Orazione e Morte ended the agreement in 1731 and decided to aggrandize their complex. The edifice of the church and its adjacent buildings were torn down to erect a new and grander edifice, designed by the architect Ferdinando Fuga.

Dismantled before 1662 and torn down in 1732, the original appearance of the Camerino degli Eremiti has been reconstructed in earlier publications with the help of archival material. The list of paintings sent to Parma in 1662 contains a number of canvases that once were part of the ceiling of the Camerino. Other inventories recorded Lanfranco’s paintings after their transport to Parma and Naples. During the following century most of these were lost or sold. Today only two of them are extant and held in the Museo Capodimonte in Naples where the Farnese collection was moved in the early eighteenth century. The subjects of these two paintings are Christ in the desert being served by Angels (fig. 3) and Mary Magdalene carried to heaven by angels (fig. 4).

In total, ten canvases, one more than the original nine, were identified by recent authors in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century inventories as originally belonging to the ceiling of the Camerino, on account of their relative size or their attribution to Lanfranco. Eight of these are undisputed. The canvases which certainly came from the Camerino, apart from the two mentioned above, depicted Saint Eustace facing the stag with the Cross between his antlers, Saint Benedict reading in his grotto while his companion sends down a basket, Saint Onuphrius in the desert kneeling before an angel bringing the Host, Saint Mary of Egypt receiving communion from a priest, and the Stigmatisation of Saint Francis. A last painting was a subject with a saint that could not be identified by later observers, and was simply called ‘landscape with a bearded hermit.’ This leaves one panel-painting unidentified, for which two possibilities have been suggested.

The two paintings on which opinions diverge are Saint Paul being carried to Third Heaven, and Saint Anthony of Padua preaching. Pictures with these two themes were mentioned in various eighteenth-century inventories of the Farnese-properties. The former painting should be dissociated from the series as its measurements do not match the standard format of the other canvasses; moreover, Saint Paul was not an anchorite saint. The latter painting, untraceable since the mid-eighteenth century, has been excluded on the grounds

23 Bernini 1985, pp. 354-356 for a number of paintings attributed to Lanfranco sold in the years between 1710 and 1721. For inventories of the Farnese collections, see Bertini 1987.


30 Bernini 1985, p. 354 excluded Saint Anthony and Saint Eustace from the series; his compilation has not been followed by others.

31 In the list of 1662, published by Salerno 1952, p. 191, n. 13, Bernini 1985, pp. 354-355, seven paintings were described: ‘6. Un quadro in tela con N.S. nel deserto et angeli che li portano il mangiare ... 18. Un quadro in tela con un paese Eustachio che li appare il Cervio con Crocefisso in mezzo le corone con il cavallo e tre cani ... 20. Un quadro in tela con S. Francesco che riceve le stimate e compagno con libro in mano ... 24. Un quadro in tela con S. Benedetto nella grotta con libro in mano compagno che manda giù un canestrino, et un demonio che tira una sassata, ... 32. Un quadro in tela con S. Maria Magdalen in estasi sostenuta da 3 Angelini ... 41. Un quadro in tela con paese e desertto con S. Honorofio in ginocchi con un Angelo che lo comunica ... 66. Un quadro in tela con paese, et aqua con S. Maria Egitaiaca et un altro santo che li porta la Communione...’


33 This painting was described in the inventory of the Palazzo del Giardino in Parma of 1708 as ‘S. Paolo rapito da tre angeli al terzo cielo’ (Bertini 1987, p. 201), and is now in Naples; see La scuola Emiliana 1994, p. 161; here the painting has been ascribed to Lorenzo Garbieri. Salerno 1952, p. 191 and Bernini 1985, pp. 354-356 included this painting, Schleier 1979, p. 12, Schleier 1983, p. 23 and La scuola Emiliana 1994, p. 161 did not.
of its iconography as Saint Anthony was not a proper hermit, although according to some hagiographies, he
did live as a recluse around 1222. 31 When the latter painting should indeed be included in the programme of
the Camerino notwithstanding its seemingly different theme, it raises questions about the general iconograph-
ic theme of the room and its traditional epithet.

But the subjects of Lanfranco’s frescoes in the Camerino were obviously deemed suitable as decoration for
the new church of Santa Maria dell’Orazione e Morte, as all four were taken down and re-applied to the walls
of the new building. 32 One was later destroyed, and another is hidden behind the present organ. One of the
two visible frescoes depicts Saints Paul the First Hermit and Saint Anthony Abbot praying together while a
raven brings them a loaf of bread (fig. 5); the other depicts Saint Simeon Stylite visited by a snake climbing
up his column (fig. 6). The fresco behind the organ, of which only details can be seen (figs. 7-10) has been
identified on account of the visible details as Saint Bruno (visible in fig. 8) discovered by Count Ruggero (fig.
9) while out with his hunting-party (fig. 10). 33 The fourth fresco has never been described and was destroyed

32 Hager 1964, p. 60, doc.IV.
33 Schleier 1964, p. 10.
Fig. 4. Giovanni Lanfranco, Saint Mary Magdalen rising up to heaven, ca. 1616. Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Naples. Photo: Luciano Pedicini.
Fig. 5. Giovanni Lanfranco, Saints Paul the First Hermit and Anthony Abbot, ca. 1616. Santa Maria dell’Orazione e Morte, Rome. Photo: Arte Fotografica, Rome.
Fig. 6. Giovanni Lanfranco, Saint Simeon Stylite, ca. 1616. Santa Maria dell’Orazione e Morte, Rome. Photo: Arte Fotografica, Rome.
Fig. 7. Giovanni Lanfranco, Saint Bruno visited by Count Roger, ca. 1616. Santa Maria dell'Orazione e Morte, Rome. Photo: Erich Schleier.

Fig. 8. Giovanni Lanfranco, Saint Bruno visited by Count Roger, ca. 1616. Detail of Saint Bruno. Santa Maria dell'Orazione e Morte, Rome. Photo: Erich Schleier.

Fig. 9. Giovanni Lanfranco, Saint Bruno visited by Count Roger, ca. 1616. Detail of Count Roger. Santa Maria dell'Orazione e Morte, Rome. Photo: Erich Schleier.

Fig. 10. Giovanni Lanfranco, Saint Bruno visited by Count Roger, ca. 1616. Detail of the hunting party. Santa Maria dell'Orazione e Morte, Rome. Photo: Erich Schleier.
in 1909-1910 when a doorway was opened in the supporting wall. It can be assumed that, for reasons of symmetry, it was also of horizontal format.

How did these four frescoes and nine panels fit into the original space? As the inventories and descriptions indicated, Lanfranco’s decoration consisted of frescoes on the four walls, probably one scene on each side surrounded by ornamental borders in fresco. This structure resembled the decoration of the Cappella dei Santi Fondatori in Grottaferrata, painted by Domenichino in 1610 (fig. 11), or the Oratorio di Sant’Andrea next to San Gregorio al Celio, a commission in which Lanfranco was involved in 1609. The ceiling of the Camerino consisted of a wooden structure, probably gilded, in which the nine paintings were inserted, with the Christ served by Angels (fig. 3) in the middle, and the other paintings arranged around it in rows of three.

The Camerino was thus owned by the Confraternity of the Orazione e Morte, and part of its decoration was at least in a later stage considered suitable for the embellishment of their new church. This means that, on the one hand, the religious iconography of the Camerino’s decoration can be explained through the spatial and optical relation with the adjacent church and oratory. Whether these saints were really all hermits remains, however, an unresolved matter. Neither Passeri nor Bellori used this epithet in exactly this way, and the hypothetical reconstruction at least suggests the presence of one saint that cannot properly be called a hermit.

On the other hand, the room was accessible from, and was considered a part of the Palazzetto Farnese, which contained painted landscapes with mythological subjects by a number of painters from the Carracci academy. In fact, Lanfranco’s biographers described the room as belonging to the Palazzetto, without noting a difference between its religious theme and the supposedly secular iconography of the rest of the building. Yet, in both contemporary descriptions and modern art-historical literature, the Palazzetto, including the Camerino, has been considered one of the decisive moments in the development of the genre of landscape. It was the site where Annibale Carracci and a number of his pupils showed their ability in this genre, and it was in this respect formative for the later developments. And since landscape painting has often been considered in modern art-historical literature as a genre developing from, and showing a predominantly secular world-view, this implies a paradoxical relation of the Camerino with the rest of the Palazzetto. It is this paradox resulting from modern concepts that is the theme of this book, and the issue that will constitute the background of the iconographical interpretation of the Camerino degli Eremiti as part of the Palazzetto Farnese.

How should the decoration, location and function of the Camerino degli Eremiti be understood, and what was its meaning for the patron, Odoardo Farnese, and the brotherhood of the Orazione e Morte? According to the contract, both parties saw the agreement as a profitable one, but it remains unclear just what they


expected. Was it only a financial agreement, or was there more at stake? And how would the function of the Camerino serve these aims? Another issue is the exact iconographical meaning of Lanfranco’s decoration. In general, the oeuvre of the painter is predominantly religious, with only a few exceptions. What position does the Camerino have in this context? Did indeed the cardinal order landscapes, as has been assumed by some authors, as he preferred secular subjects, and had hermit saints included in them to justify this choice, as an excuse? This seems highly improbable, given the contract of 1611 and the exact architectural situation of the Camerino. Just how Lanfranco’s paintings and the elements of landscape and hermits can be related to both the brotherhood and the cardinal, and can also be related to the rest of the Palazzetto, is the main focus of this study.

Starting from the Camerino, these questions will also touch upon the Palazzetto as a whole – late seventeenth-century descriptions of this addition to the main palace regarded it as an important stage in the development of the the genre of landscape painting. Thus, all issues that are raised by Lanfranco’s decoration also affect the interpretation of the rest of the building, and even the general art-historical issues of landscape painting and artistic patronage. Art-historical theories about collecting, perception and meaning of landscapes are tested against the still dominant assumption of secularisation as the main impetus of the genre by focussing on the Palazzetto and Camerino as a coherent ensemble.

Considered as a collection of paintings, the decoration of the Palazzetto demonstrates strange discontinuities in style and content that challenge both the difference between Italian and Northern landscapes, and the shift from religious to secular subject themes. The criterion of style – as defined in present-day art-historical terms as an individual preference – obviously did not apply to Farnese’s tastes. Also the supposed incompatibility of secular versus religious interpretations of the genre of landscape is called into question by the disposition of mythological, religious and other themes in the Palazzetto. Obviously, Cardinal Odoardo Farnese saw no objection in combining seemingly diverse subgenres and styles of landscape painting within the decoration of this apartment. As a result of his supposed predilection for worldly themes in painting, he has been described as an art collector to whom his position as cardinal was of no influence on his preferences in art, or rather, as a cardinal who desired to exchange his cardinals’ hat for a worldly position as duke of Parma and Piacenza, or even as king of England. His seeming indifference to style, however, contradicts the assumption that he collected art for the sake of art only, and it is also contradicted by the contemporary descriptions that noted no such dychotomy between secular and religious, or northern European versus Italian painting.

Both the contemporary reception and the relatively short period of construction and decoration of the new wing suggest otherwise. For this reason, the Camerino degli Eremiti is considered in the present study as an integral part of the Palazzetto Farnese, as which it was described by Passeri, Bellori and later authors. Architecture, function and decoration of this new wing are considered as aspects of a coherent program – not necessarily explicated in writing – for a complex that served the patron’s interests. This also included the garden. This combination of study, picture gallery, garden of antiques and sample-garden raise the question, what kind of building type the Palazzetto actually was, and how Lanfranco’s Camerino fitted into that context. Before the decoration of the Camerino can be understood in the context of the Palazzetto, its precise architectural typology should be sorted out.

The function of retreat that was mentioned by Passeri, which refers to the relation of the Camerino with the church of the Orazione e Morte, is the next point of reference from which the Camerino and Palazzetto will be considered. The Palazzetto can be compared to other retreats or apartments that Odoardo Farnese disposed of in and around Rome, which all gave onto churches or convents. This leads to the question whether Odoardo Farnese was singular in this respect, or if this was a more general phenomenon in Counter-reformation Rome.