Landscape and the Visual Hermeneutics of Place, 1500–1700

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The Stratigraphy of Poetic Landscape at the Esquiline Villa

Sarah McPhee

At the end of his brief biography of Giovanni Battista Falda, published in 1701, Lazzaro Cotta includes a list of the Italian etcher’s principal works.\(^1\) At number XXI he writes, ‘Villa dell’Eminentissimo Cardinal Nerli, su gli Esquilini, per la qual opera hebbe più visite da Sua Emin. due gran medaglie d’oro, un’horologio, e cento Ducati’. (Villa of the most eminent Cardinal Nerli on the Esquiline for which work [the artist] received many visits from his eminence, two large gold medals, a clock, and one hundred ducats.)\(^2\)

Giovanni Battista Falda, who made the image of Nerli’s villa, was the finest topographical etcher in Rome in the seventeenth century. In the final years of his career he made etchings of the famous villas of papal Rome, among them the Quirinal Palace and gardens, the Villas Medici, Montalto, and Ludovisi. Referred to as ‘Gli Esperidi Romani’ (the Roman Hesperides), these views show the properties in plan/view and perspective [Figs. 12.1 and 12.2].\(^3\) They include precious information on fountains, plantings, and villa structures and are considered the culmination of Falda’s brief career. His great map of Rome was made at roughly the same time, and was published in 1676 [Fig. 12.3].\(^4\) Etched on twelve plates,
FIGURE 12.1 Giovanni Battista Falda, *View of the Papal Garden on the Quirinal Hill*. Etching, 23.5 × 41.27 cm. From *Li Giardini di Roma* (Rome, Giovanni Giacomo De Rossi: ca. 1676–1683). Collection of Vincent J. Buonanno (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Digital Production Services, Brown University Library, Providence, RI)


the map measures about $5 \times 5$ feet when assembled. In the eastern portion of Falda's map, directly above the Colosseum on the Esquiline Hill, Falda includes a bird's eye view of the triangular perimeter of Nerli's property [Fig. 12.4].

The land unfolds to the east of the Via Merulana between Santa Maria Maggiore and the Lateran, bounded by San Matteo in Merulana to the south and the church of S. Vito beside the Arch of Gallienus to the east. On the map,  

the area is inscribed: “GIARD[INO] DEL CARD[INAL] NERLI”. A villa structure with a walled garden is visible, set within a larger garden suggested by parterres, but not a lot more. The image of the villa that Falda made for Nerli, listed by his biographer, has been lost. It does not appear among Falda’s works in the Illustrated Bartsch or in any other compendium. What was this image Falda created and why was it worth multiple visits from the cardinal, two large gold medals, a clock, and one hundred ducats?

Cardinal Nerli is mentioned by name by Falda’s biographer, along with Cardinal Imperiali, Cardinal Camillo Massimo, and Queen Christina of Sweden. He appears in a portrait made by the Flemish painter Jacob Ferdinand Voet in 1673 [Fig. 12.5]. Nerli was born in 1636 and died in 1708 at the age of 72.6 Voet’s portrait shows him at age thirty-seven – the year he was made a cardinal. It is through the biography of this man, his inventory after death and above all the ekphrastic poetry that survives him that we are able to conjure his garden on the Esquiline Hill in Rome.

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5 Cotta, Museo novarese 293, 295.
FIGURE 12.5 Jacob Ferdinand Voet, *Cardinal Francesco Nerli (1636–1708)*, 1673. Oil on canvas, 130 × 92.5 cm. Dedication on the letter "A [...] E.mo et R.mo Sig. Cardinale Nerli/Roma"

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First, the man. Francesco Nerli was born in Rome into an aristocratic Florentine family. His uncle, Francesco senior, preceded him as a cardinal and his father was private treasurer to the pope. Francesco junior, as he was known, was made cardinal by Pope Clement X. He served the Altieri pope as nuncio to Poland, Germany and France, later becoming Secretary of State alongside Paluzzo Altieri.

The diarist Francesco Valesio describes Nerli as a man of the finest manners and great literary accomplishment but notes that he was a hypochondriac with a very active imagination – ‘di genio fantastico’. Nerli was an amateur poet, an antiquarian, a collector of paintings, tapestries, medals, and optical instruments. He assembled an extensive library, and left his estate to the Ospedale dei Pazzi, a hospital for the demented. The inventory made after his death fills over four hundred pages in a volume in the Archivio di Stato and begins with his eleven horses, all listed individually, by name.

The Esquiline Villa was beloved by Nerli. Manuscript volumes of his own poetry survive with pages of verse dedicated to the villa. The print of the villa made by Giovanni Battista Falda was a prize among his possessions. According to the inventory, in a room full of maps – geographies of the world – Falda's image of the villa hung framed on the wall. The copper plate itself was kept nearby in a room overlooking the garden in a special box made of poplar wood; the notary recorded that it weighed twenty pounds. There were drawers filled with telescopes of varying lengths, and a balcony from which a cavaletto or tripod could be used to support them when sighting. The cardinal was

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9 Francesco Nerli's will can be found in Rome at the Archivio di S. Maria della Pietà (ASMP, sezione A, serie 20, unità 3); a copy of his inventory is also located there (ASMP, sezione A, serie 70, unità 3), as well as at the Archivio di Stato di Roma (ASR), Trenta Notai Capitolini, Ufficio 11, vol. 296, ff. 239r–276v.
10 ASR, Trenta Notai Capitolini, Ufficio 11, vol. 296, fol. 263v.
11 On the Nerli library see Trasselli, “Scritture e monumenti”.
12 ASR, Trenta Notai Capitolini, Ufficio 11, vol. 296, fol. 379r: ‘un quadro con disegno della villa in carta cornice d’orata longo palmi tre largo due e mezzo in circa’.
13 ASR, Trenta Notai Capitolini, Ufficio 11, vol. 296, fol. 398v: ‘una stampa di rame dove vi è Intagliata la pianta della Villa di S.E. ch. me. di peso libre venti usata dentro una scatola d’albuccio’.
14 ASR, Trenta Notai Capitolini, Ufficio 11, vol. 296, fol. 391r: ‘un cavaletto da occhialone di legno bianco con piede tornito’; f. 394v: ‘Un credenzone d’albuccio tinto a noce […] con dentro un occhialone coperto di carta pecora verde et oro […] altro occhialone coperto con la med.ma carta […] altro occhialoncino’.
interested in the revelations provided by lenses and seems to have trained his scopes on the garden.

A copy of Falda’s print, the sole example I am aware of, has recently come to light at the Getty Research Institute, among manuscripts surviving from the English Jesuit college, St. Stanislaus, Beaumont [Fig. 12.6]. The print is large and exquisitely detailed; it measures 19 ½ inches high by 27 inches wide. It is signed by Falda on a structure in the middle foreground and is dated 1677.

Falda’s print shows Nerli’s property as if seen from the bell tower of S. Maria Maggiore, the highest point within the walls of Rome. He suggests the plunging perspective afforded by looking straight downward from the bell tower into the foreground with the wedge-shaped property tilting upward toward the horizon and S. Giovanni in Laterano, allowing us, as we lift our eyes, to survey the whole villa landscape. As with his great map and garden views, we can stroll the allées with our eyes, pausing on fountains, pergolas, parterres, and orchards, aqueducts, temples and arches. In the seventeenth century, the Esquiline was dotted with patrician villas – the Altieri, Montalto, Palombara, Giustiniani, Orsini, but it was also littered with the vestiges of the ancient world. The temple of Minerva Medica is visible in the distance along the Aurelian walls. Nearer by, along the left side of the print, is a fragment of the Acqua Claudia and the hulking remains of the Castellum of the Acqua Marcia where the Trophies of Marius were found. At the edge of the villa proper stands

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15 The print is part of an album containing roughly 85 prints and 12 drawings today in the Getty Research Institute Special Collections, ID/Accession Number 92-A79 893445*. The catalogue notes indicate that the volume was once the property of S. Stanislao dei Polacchi in Rome. This information is mistaken. The identification seems to have been based on the book plate, which identifies the volume as ‘E Bibl. Coll. Sti. Stanislai, Beaumont’. In fact, St. Stanislaus College, Beaumont was a Catholic public school founded in 1861 and located in Old Windsor, Berkshire, England, in buildings that had once been a part of a Beaumont family estate. The school was dedicated to the Jesuit Saint Stanislaus Kostka and not to Poland’s patron saint, Stanislaus Szczepanowski of Krakow for whom the church in Rome is named. My thanks to Louise Rice for reminding me of the two Saints Stanislaus. On the college see: The History of St. Stanislaus’ College, Beaumont: A Record of Fifty Years, 1861–1911 (Old Windsor: 1911; and Caparrini B.R., “The Relations of Beaumont College (Old Windsor, England) with the British Monarchy (1861–1938)”, The Catholic Historical Review 98.4 (2012) 723–725. For the collection and sale of books from Catholic religious houses in the British Isles to libraries in the United States see: Kiessling N.K., “James Molloy and Sales of Recusant Books to the United States”, The Catholic Historical Review 102.3 (2016) 545–580. The print was first published by Molino, “Il cardinale Francesco Nerli” 152, fig. 8, in the context of an article on Nerli as collector. Molino does not consider the print per se, nor does she comment on its provenance.

16 Novelli I. (ed.), Atlante di Roma, trans. C. Hefer – D. Kerr (Venice: 1991) 110, gives the ground-level elevation of S. Maria Maggiore as 54.09 meters, and numerous guidebooks provide a height of 75 meters for the campanile (Rome’s tallest). My thanks to John Pinto for this information.
the Arch of Gallienus, hard by the ancient church of S. Vito. Falda places Nerli’s villa in the immediate foreground of the print, the *cordonata* leading to its entrance at dead center and on axis with the cardinal’s arms above. While ancient monuments form an arc at left, cradling the north side of the property, a ruler-straight Via Merulana bisects the right half of the print, defining the western edge of the garden and leading the viewer from Santa Maria Maggiore to S. Giovanni in Laterano. Two thirds of the way along this route the tiny church of San Matteo in Merulana appears, set back from the road. The church defined the southern limit of Nerli’s wedge-shaped property. San Matteo was one of the ancient titular churches of Rome and Nerli was its cardinal protector. Falda anchors the image with densely drawn trees in the immediate foreground set high above the land. Among them, at left, aristocratic hunters load muskets, hold falcons, rest in the shade, and examine the view while calling to hounds; at right, more modest folk survey the fields, sketch the prospect, and set off with spades to work below.

Nerli acquired the property in the 1670s and spent the next thirty years cultivating and adorning it. With time the villa became increasingly identified with the cardinal and the layers or stratigraphy of this landscape were revealed in both word and image.

The villa is celebrated in a poem, published in 1704, that is so specific in its allusions, both to the cardinal and his garden, that it is clear that the poet, Giovanni Battista Ancona de Amadori, knew Nerli well and seems to have had Falda’s etching of the garden before him as he wrote. The poet invites the reader to conjure a mental image of the land, embellishing Falda’s landscape and placing it in the realm of history and myth.

The poem takes the form of an ode and is entitled: “La Flora Esquilina villa amenissima dell’Eminentissimo e Reverendissimo Sig. Cardinale Francesco Nerli” (The Esquiline Flora, the most pleasant villa of the most eminent and reverend Cardinal Nerli). As Amadori notes on the opening page, the land over which Nerli’s garden spread was contiguous with the famous gardens that belonged, in antiquity, to Caius Maecenas, that friend of Caesar Augustus who lends his name, even today, to patronage, especially of literature and the arts.

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17 I am currently preparing an article on the history of the Nerli garden.
19 Ibidem pg. “La Flora Esquilina contigua à gli antichi, e famosi orti di Mecenate”.
A detail from Rodolfo Lanciani’s *Forma Urbis Romae*, spells out the relationship, locating Nerli’s villa with red letters at center: ‘Orto Cesi D’Acquasparta poi Nerli poi Villa Caserta’, and the ‘Horti Maecenatis’, or ‘Villa of Maecenas’ with black letters below [Fig. 12.7].

The poem is dedicated to the ashes of Queen Christina of Sweden, who died in 1689. Christina was famous above all for abdicating the Protestant throne of Sweden, converting to Catholicism, and moving, in 1655, to Rome. There she was known for the scientific and literary academies she founded, interests shared with Nerli and Amadori. During her lifetime, Falda had also worked for Queen Christina, making prints. In his dedicatory introduction, Amadori specifically refers to Christina as his Clio – his muse of history – and invokes the association of the cardinal and the queen and their shared interest in poetry. As the artist and antiquarian Pietro Santi Bartoli recorded, it was on Nerli’s property that nine statues were unearthed, among them four muses that made their way into the Queen’s collection [Fig. 12.8]. Today, with later
The stratigraphy of poetic landscape at the Esquiline Villa.

eighteenth-century restorations they are on view at the Prado. The ground beneath the villa was thus the realm of the muses both literally and figuratively; and sets the tone for the ten-page poem that follows in which Amadori weaves back and forth from the ancient world to the Christian, invoking the long and illustrious history of the place. Although the poem is dedicated to the dead queen, its hero is the poet's friend, Cardinal Nerli.

Amadori begins by comparing the villa to the wider world. It is in competition with the heavens. It is the wide compass of the globe, distilled in Nerli's earthly paradise. Moving back in time, excavating a layer, we are told that here in Maecenas's gardens was the tower where disgraceful Nero, accompanied by the sound of the lyre, watched with a happy eye while Rome was transformed into smoking fire. In fact, the Esquiline gardens of Maecenas were nearby the golden house of Nero, and Suetonius describes the emperor 'viewing the conflagration from the tower of Maecenas and exulting, as he said, in “the beauty of the flames”'. In his reconstruction of the ancient city, published in 1561, Pirro Ligorio includes the multi-level tower of Maecenas, prominently labeled, in close proximity to the site of Nerli's villa [Fig. 12.9].

Having established the macrocosm and the microcosm of the landscape, Amadori adds a clever reference both to the land and to the etcher who has depicted it. He writes:

Quivi la Falda amena
Estolle à grande Eroe vasto Recinto,
Che in odorosa Scena
D’Esperia accoglie ogni bel pregio auvinto.

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27 Ibidem 10: ‘Hor là, dove la fronte/Ergea superba eccelsa Torre à l’Etra,/In cui d’incendio à l’Onte/Arder l’Ilia Latina al suon di Cetra/Scorgea con lieto Ciglio,/Nel fero sguardo arretta,/Fin che non vide in quel fatal periglio,/Fatta Rogo fumante arder già doma/Da Fiamma Coronata estinta Roma’.


29 Ancona de Amadori, *La Flora Esquilina* 11.
Fig. 12.8 Francesco Aquila, Clio, 1704. Etching. From *Raccolta di statue antiche e moderne* (Rome, Domenico De Rossi: 1734), plate cxii. Bibliotheca Hertziana – Max-Planck-Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Rome, Do 105-3040/a gr raro public domain. Image © Bibliotheca Hertziana
Figure 12.9 Pirro Ligorio, Tower of Maecenas. Woodcut. From *Effigies antiquae Romae ex vestigis aedificiorum ruinis testimonio veterum auctorum fide: numismatum monumentis, aeneis, plumbaeis, saxeis, tiglinisque* (Rome, Apud Caroli Losi: 1773 [orig. Michele and Francesco Tramezzino, 1561]), plate 2. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, G6714 .R7 L53 1773 FOLIO

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‘Here the pleasant Falda,’ in Italian a layer or stratum of land, ‘celebrates for the great hero the vast enclosure that in perfumed scene of Hesperides welcomes every good value’.

The hero of the poem is Nerli and the ‘pleasant Falda’ is a double entendre playing on the name of the etcher and the perfumed Hesperides or mythical garden he has rendered for us here. Falda includes his name and the date on the wall of a small garden structure at the base of the image, and further to the right a self-portrait of the etcher at work [Fig. 12.10].

The poet goes on:

Veggio in ampio sentier, trà erboso incarco
Frondoso Areopago ergersi in Arco. 30

I see in the wide path with its grassy entourage Leafy Areopagus rising in an arch.

30 Ibidem 11.
The Areopagus, a famous rock outcropping in Athens, appears frequently in the poetry of Nerli and Amadori and seems to refer metaphorically to the property as a whole and here, specifically, to the arch of Gallienus anchoring the northern edge of the garden. Gallienus was a third-century Roman emperor. According to the Historia Augusta, he served as an archon or magistrate in Greece, and wanted to be included among the members of the Areopagus, which also referred to the Athenian council of magistrates that met there. Amadori’s ‘Leafy Areopagus rising in an arch’ would seem to be the ruined portal in the ancient Severan walls of Rome, later an arch named for Gallienus.

On the third page of the poem, we meet our guide. And here I paraphrase: From the shady recess a man appeared of magisterial beauty. His great knowledge and honest merit shining on his forehead. He beckons to the poet and speaks:

If the beautiful, august enclosure of Francesco calls you with noble desire to see it, come with me and I will point out to you the wonders of this earthly paradise.

I am Maecenas, [and] even if I have succumbed to the frozen cold of death, I linger here in spirit, and even from the tomb I admire the values of the hero.

Nerli is the hero of the poem and our guide the ancient Maecenas.

The stanza goes on:

If the just God throws me into the blind horror of the Stygian caverns, still my heart longs, among the eternal flames, to rest for a few moments from my damnation, in these blessed shades.

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31 For Nerli’s own poetry on the Esquiline villa see Biblioteca Vittorio Emanuele (BVE), Rome, ms. Sess. 497. In poem 117 (f. 126), he refers to his land as an ‘august Areopagus’ (Nel Areopago augusto […]), and in poem 96 (f. 105r), he writes: ‘Qui di Galieno, anzi di Vito l’arco/E del Tempio Esquilin’ l’inchita mole,/E in Merulana il titol, ch’io rimarco’. (Here is the arch of Gallienus, or Vito/and the illustrious pile of the Esquiline Temple [Minerva Medica]/And in Merulana the title, that I observe.)


33 Ancona de Amadori, La Flora Esquilina 11: ‘Se di Francesco il bel Recinto augusto/Nobil desio à vagheggiar ti chiama?/Meco ne vieni, e additerotti appieno,/Stupori immensi in questo Cielo ameno./Mecenate son’io,/Benche di Morte al freddo gel socomba,/Vago è lo spirito mio/Pregi ammirar d’Eroi fin da la Tomba’.

34 Ibidem 11. ‘Trà le Stigie Caverne/Se il giusto Dio, nel cieco Orror mi piomba,/Pure anela il mio Cor trà fiamme Eterne/D’haver tregua talor qualche momento/In queste Ombre beate al rio tormento’.
Maecenas, long dead, still lingers on his lands, admiring his Christian descendant Nerli and longing to worship the Just God. Maecenas laments the fact that to him the great mystery of the Trinity was unknown and he goes on to observe in a further reference to prints and printing:

Hor qui vedrai sovente  
Il pio Signor per queste Vie fiorite  
Ad erudir la Mente  
Solitario stampare Orme romite.\(^{35}\)

Now here you will often see  
The pious signer [Nerli] on these flowering roads  
To educate his mind  
Alone, imprinting his solitary footsteps.

The ‘orme romite’ or hermit’s footsteps of Francesco refer to his namesake, Saint Francis, who often withdrew to his romitorio or hermitage. Falda shows us the cardinal treading his garden path and imprinting the soil [Fig. 12.11].

\(^{35}\) Ibidem 12.
Maecenas has realized that there is but one God and that he who is denied this knowledge is in pain.

The poet goes on describing the garden: the wavy sapphire of water springing from fountains with murmuring sound, the beautiful golden apples set among grassy banks, flowering armies, perfumed pomp, bushes enameled with roses. Nerli has refrained from adding ancient statues to his paths, the poet tells us, for he prefers his treasures not to be without their leaves. Instead he has shimmering fish in silvery water and ‘if you can pull your thoughts from the flowers before you, you can look at the ruined remains of ancient Rome’.

E se toglie il pensier da i fior, ch'hà inanzi
Mira di Roma i lacerati Avanzi.\textsuperscript{36}

But the poem heats up as we enter the villa itself, with a last reference to Falda and to print.

Mà dentro al Regio Tetto
Novi stupori alto splendor comparte.

But inside the royal roof [the villa]
further splendid amazements are shared.

Ecco l'Orbe ristretto,
Ch'Egli contempla effigiato in carte.\textsuperscript{37}

Here [Nerli] contemplates the world in miniature
‘Effigiato in carte’, portrayed on paper.

In rooms overlooking the garden, he studies Europe and ‘the spacious paths through it’. He follows the river Vistola in Poland, and the river Onde descending the Alps, the Istro or lower Danube, and the Seine. From there they flow on to the Tiber and ‘one sees them change to the color purple [as they enter Rome] with the beautiful sudor, or sweat, of Faith’.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{36} Ibidem 14.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibidem: ‘indi Sul Tebro vede/Cambiargli in Ostro i bei sudor la Fede’.
There are rooms of portraits ‘hanging majesties, animated shades’ of august monarchs and crowned popes, and tapestries in profusion.\textsuperscript{39}

The poet writes of Nerli’s ancestors found in the tapestries:

Babylonian silks
the wonder of Assyrian threads sent from Asia
shine more happily there
among silken treasures, [with] acts to be admired
Of his undefeated lineage.\textsuperscript{40}

We are told to:

Look at the great ancestors in warlike bands
Advancing in the field of battle with [enemy] armies in defeat.
Whence along the beautiful Arno high trophies are erected to them,
And here their ornaments Eternity impresses.\textsuperscript{41}

In topographical echo of Suetonius, writing on the Esquiline, he speaks of the golden roof of Nero’s house, of the turning ceiling open to the spheres, gilded tricks and soft cushions sewn with pearls. But ‘our hero does not emulate the Tyrrants, he reposés, rather than on feathers, at the foot of the crucified god’.\textsuperscript{42}

Nerli is not allowed his meditation, for the poet tells us that the ancient Gods have homicidal intentions and have been plotting his early demise.

Fame’s trumpet sounds and Clotho appears with her cruel and untrustworthy stare. One of the three Fates, it is Clotho who spins the thread of the life of a man, deciding when he is born and when he dies. She has plucked at the familial threads of the tapestries and is transforming Nerli’s from gold to a beautiful vermilion. A pitched struggle ensues, twisted portents, sanguinous events. The face of Jesus appears, but Clotho will not fly away. Obstinate in her massacre, she threads her arrow, pulls back her bow.
The poet intones:

Look at the mortal ordeal
Astonish the Tiber, and freeze the waves
And to the horrid fear
With dreadful voices the banks scream
The pale Vatican cries, trembles, agitated and confounded
Only the heavens exult with strange wreaths
The pitiless God prepares his grand palm
That he sends to the world, and gives in return to the heavens that soul.\[43\]

All seems to be lost, Clotho is intent on sending her fatal dart. The Tiber torments itself, the sun turns its rays to watch. But an old man with wings appears.

Stop, he says, cruel Cloto, what are you doing?
I am Time, and I regulate the days of the grand hero and his fatal hour
[

Look at the contorted path of the golden thread, its incomplete ornaments
Cloto cannot truncate with her wishes
The illustrious works and worthy deeds [our hero] has before him
Sovereign Fate wishes him to accomplish more
[

So go be cruel far from us [Cloto]
Act against plebian threads, not against those of heroes.\[44\]

Clotho hurries off to shadowy exile and the roses return to the cheeks of Francesco.

In the final stanza Maecenas sends the reader on his way, ceding to Apollo with his eternal cycle of movement, the honor of unveiling greater

\[43\] Ibidem 17: ‘Mira il mortal Cimento,/Stupido il Tebro, e ne gelaron l'Onde,/E al orrido spavento/Di funesti ululati urlan le Sponde,/Pallido il Vaticano/Piange, freme agitato, e si confonde;/Solo il Cielo n'esulta, e Serto strano./Prepara al empio Nume à sua gran Palma,/Ch'invola al Mondo, e dona al Ciel quell'Alma’.

\[44\] Ibidem: ‘Ferma, disse, crudel Cloto/che fai?/Il Tempo io son,/che al grande Eroe immortale/Regolo i giorni, e l'Ora sua fatale./Folle sù l'aureo stame/Mira i rotorti, e non compiti fregi;/Non può Cloto à sue brame/L'Opre troncar d'illustri Fatti egregi;/Ei dal Fato sovrano/Più lustri avanzà à immortalar suoi Pregi;/Hor tu confusa in Suol remoto, e strano/Vanne ad incrudelir lunghi da Noi/Contro Stami plebei, e non d'Eroi’.
amazements, observing that: 'They say his flight is rapid; he dissolves among flowering trees'. Meanwhile, Maecenas, the suffering pagan, longs: 'So that I with a sigh, stunned and alone, turn to that horror that is invading and exclaim: Could I but have a shadow [be a shade] among these laurels'.

In the summer of 1704 Francesco Nerli nearly died of a terrible illness. Among his own poems is one on returning to the Esquiline villa while still suffering. Nerli writes that his languid state is ‘viva morte’ or ‘living death’ and wishes the thread of his life to be cut short. When he was restored to health, the pope appointed Nerli Archpriest of the Basilica of Saint Peters and Prefect of the Congregation of the Fabbrica. Amadori’s poem was published shortly thereafter.

The broad recognition the poem received and the centrality of its metaphors to the literary and intellectual circles of which Nerli was a part are evident in his patronage in later years. Among the maps published by Giovanni Giacomo De Rossi in his *Mercurio Geografico* are two dedicated to Nerli, copies of which hung on the villa walls. One shows the lands belonging to St. Peter’s, another the Kingdom of Navarre [Fig. 12.12]. In the dedication of the map of Navarre, the publisher, De Rossi, praises the accomplishments of the cardinal in the Republic of Letters, his reverence, wisdom, and piety, calling him ‘Mecenate più sincero dell’antico’ (Maecenas most sincere of antiquity) [Fig. 12.13].

Nerli’s earthly paradise was visited by princes, popes, and queens. The cardinal himself chose to be buried in his titular church, S. Matteo in Merulana, at the edge of his garden. While Falda died a year after he made this print, the poet Amadori immortalized both his friend the cardinal and the earthly paradise of his *Falda amena* in verse.

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46 Ibidem: ‘Ond’Io con un sospir, stupido, e solo;/Rivolto esclamo à quell’Orror, che ingombra,/Potessi io haver frà questi Allori un’Ombra’.
47 Tabacchi, “Nerli, Francesco, iunior”.
48 BVE, ms. Sess. 437, f. 152r: ‘Vorrei fosser lor fila ancor più corte, / Ch’il mio languido stato è viva morte’.


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