

A Dream of Etruria:

The Sacro Bosco of Bomarzo and the Alternate Antiquity of Alto Lazio

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For my grandmothers,
who were always there for me

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Introduction, or Approaching the Mystery at Hand

The gardens of the late Italian Renaissance are generally viewed as living embodiments of period conceptions of beauty and orderliness, combining graceful classicizing statues, geometric boxwood parterres and extraordinary water features to create verdant oases that ravish the senses and transport the visitor to a realm of enchanting splendor and serenity. These sites, simultaneously intended as peaceful retreats and grand aristocratic showpieces, employ linear and symmetrical design to foster a sense of balanced well-being, while emphasizing clear routes and destinations through the tranquil setting, past a cavalcade of wonders fusing both Art and Nature. The example par excellence of natural environment shaped and tamed by the civilizing forces of human rationality and ingenuity, the archetypal Renaissance garden can be read as the ultimate application and combination of period interests and pursuits, fusing ancient imagery with artful *ingenium* to produce a site both orderly and extravagantly fantastic, where humanists, antiquarians and noblemen alike could retreat to an inspiring and revitalizing slice of Parnassus reborn.

Yet one landscape architectural project of the Cinquecento stands apart from its contemporaries, seemingly courting calculated grotesqueness, monstrosity and chaos, fully distanced from the paradigmatic beautiful garden that serves as a site of pleasure and tranquil repose. Located in the province of Viterbo, some ninety kilometers north of Rome, is the village of Bomarzo, home to one of the most unconventional and iconoclastic sites of the Renaissance, the Sacro Bosco of Vicino Orsini, nestled in the small valley just below the rustic community's *centro storico*. The Sacro Bosco dates from the mid- to late sixteenth century, and while many details of its construction are hazy or entirely lost to time—including the name or names of those responsible for its execution—it has easily generated more scholarly attention than any other

built environment of its era. While the dearth of concrete data concerning its construction has plagued academic examination of the Sacro Bosco with a host of wild assumptions and half-baked conjecture, the monstrous stone *bizzarrie* and surreal tableaux of the site seem to invite such peculiar interpretations. The park's strange and otherworldly qualities remove the visitor's experience of the Sacro Bosco so far from the realm of the ordinary and explicable that one feels compelled to unravel and engage with the many enigmas encountered among the trees. Despite the myriad scholarly examinations and attempts to 'tame' the Sacro Bosco, no definitive interpretation of it exists, leaving unanswered the most fundamental of questions: why was this bizarre site created, and to what end?

Exploring the Sacro Bosco

While the complex is commonly referred to as a garden, the appellation is technically a misnomer, as emphasis seems to have been placed not on the cultivation of shrubbery, simples or flowering plants, but on the perpetuation and embellishment of the region's dense and characteristic woodlands. The site may be more precisely defined as a *bosco*, a wooded space tangentially connected to or forming a partial periphery to the traditionally manicured and linear Renaissance *giardini all'italiana*.¹ *Boschi* were relatively common features of period landscape projects, their informal plantings and naturally wooded areas serving as a counterpart to the refined and artfully cultivated environments of the garden space proper, adjoining such celebrated sites as Villa Lante at Bagnaia, Villa Medici at Castello, and Villa Giulia in Rome. At Bomarzo, however, inscriptions within the park refer to the grounds as a "*sacro bosco*," or holy wood, indicating that the site was clearly intended to be perceived and experienced as some manner of charmed or transformed forest setting. Coupled with the lack of any attached, conventional *giardino all'italiana*, the park appears to have been deliberately fashioned as a free-

¹ MacDougall 1972, 42-32.

floating and prodigiously large *bosco*, unattached to any linear or ordering center, reaching beyond the traditionally appendicular role afforded to *boschi*.² This pursuit of and taste for undomesticated, preserved nature—albeit a paradoxically manmade fabrication of such—is echoed in the enigmatic creatures as well as the architectural and decorative features that populate the site, the majority of which are hewn from the living *tufu* that defines the local landscape, directly connecting the representational elements with the very flavor and integrity of the location itself. The foliage of the Sacro Bosco is equally linked to the particular local character of the surrounding environment, for while little documentation exists concerning the original flora and natural components, period drawings and records indicate that during the mid-to late Cinquecento through early Seicento, the *bosco* consisted of native trees and shrubs, effectively growing freely with minimal human interference or shaping.³ While it is unknown whether the profusion of moss and lichen that today blankets the sculptures was cultivated or suppressed during the *bosco*'s prime, its presence would not have been incongruous with the illusion of naturalness promoted by the site, as evident in its clustering of glades and thickets connected by winding trails that resist alignment with any prescribed axis or destination.

Indeed, as a direct result of these oblique, incidental paths with no apparent defined beginning or endpoint, it is particularly difficult to determine a single route that best characterizes the site or adheres to any possible programmatic or narrative reading with which the Sacro Bosco may have initially been imbued. The circuitous, meandering paths throughout the park form a web of small trails, which fail to indicate any particular order in which the wonders and terraces of the *bosco* are to be experienced, equivocating to such an degree that modern scholars continue to

² While Arnaldo Bruschi has argued that the lengthy expanse leading downhill from Palazzo Orsini—located on the western spur of Bomarzo's hilly *centro storico*—to the Sacro Bosco was once a rigorously ordered *giardino all'italiana*, no physical evidence or period documentation of such a garden can be found to substantiate his claims. Sabine Frommel has instead suggested that the sizeable plot was used during the Cinquecento as an agricultural *orto*. See Bruschi 1955, 13; S. Frommel 93.

³ Lazzaro 122.

debate and have ultimately failed to pinpoint the original points of entry and departure within the complex.⁴ The lack of a centralized axis—a defining feature of many contemporary gardens, including Villa Lante, Villa d’Este, and the Boboli Gardens—lends the *bosco* an amorphous shape, which in turn establishes a sense of uncertainty regarding the exact placement of the park’s perimeters, if indeed any were intended at all, as the grounds may have been conceived as a nebulous, enchanted glen meant for the visitor to seemingly discover ‘by accident.’ No definitive route exists through the *bosco*, just as it is impossible to see all of its *bizzarrie* without retracing one’s steps; the site seems to resist systemization, obliging the visitor to wander without direction or ultimate endpoint.

Starting at the highest point of the *bosco* is the *tempietto* (Figure 1), a small, classicizing pseudoperipteral temple that, despite its status as perhaps the most normative or pedestrian element in the park, reads as a conglomeration of varying architectural vocabularies, a fusion of the dome of Florence’s Santa Maria del Fiore with the archetypal form of an Ancient temple, as emblemized by the Temple of Portunus in Rome’s Forum Boarium. The deep tetrastyle portico features a uniquely barrel-vaulted ceiling that bears a pattern of rosettes and *fleurs-de-lis*, fusing the respective heraldic devices of patron Vicino Orsini and his wife, Giulia Farnese. The *tempietto* is framed on four sides by cippi bearing crude skull and crossbones reliefs, which seem to have inspired the belief that the structure is either a memorial to Giulia or houses her remains, hypotheses that while never definitively proven, have been widely disseminated in all manner of

⁴ While Darnall and Weil contend that the *bosco* was entered by way of a bridge close to the sculptural group of battling colossi, a number of scholars contend that the major point of access was at the most northern edge of the site near the *casa pendente*. (See Darnall and Weil 11; Bury 1985, 223; Quartermaine 74; Sheeler 111.) However, the proposed entrance near the *casa pendente* is one of the furthest removed corners of the park from Palazzo Orsini. Operating under the assumption that Vicino Orsini’s visitors descended from the *palazzo* for a sojourn in the *bosco*—instead of trekking across the grounds to reach the *palazzo*, as is the case at Villa d’Este—the southeastern end of the *bosco* would be the most plausible location for an entry point. See Map 1.

publications concerning the *bosco*.⁵ A handful of authors claim that the *tempietto* served a religious function, set aside for a company of priests to continually pray on the behalf of Giulia's immortal soul,⁶ yet the diminutive structure houses no altar, and no records exist indicating its use as a chapel. Visual emphasis and decorative detail are overwhelmingly placed on the exterior of the *tempietto*, as its interior is cramped and spartan, with little artistic embellishment save for the simple eight-pointed star rosettes that adorn the upper reaches of the dome (Figure 2). Just as the lack of space inside the *tempietto* points away from possible usage as a chapel, the lack of seating similarly implies that the structures was not intended as a relaxing garden pavilion.

Adjacent to the *tempietto* is a circular viewing platform ringed with a post and lintel balustrade (Figures 3-4), which overlooks the lower levels of the *bosco*. At the center of the platform is a large toroid basin, which calls the function of the structure into question: was this some sort of fountain, or a perhaps a large planter intended to foreground a specific shrub or plant? The lower half of the platform offers up no further clues to the structure's purpose, and is ringed by four niches that while too small to serve as seating, are empty of any sculptural decoration. These shallow niches have invited comparison between the structure and the Meta Sudans of Ancient Rome, and while the possibility has been raised that the central basin served as the source of the *bosco*'s various fountains and water features, there is no physical evidence of water channels leading to or from the site.⁷

Descending a staircase directly to the left of the platform, one passes a sizeable figure of Cerberus, the presence of which suggests certain references to the Underworld, potentially implying a tongue-in-cheek inversion of serious themes, or the start of a Dantesque journey. The

⁵ These publications include, but are no means limited to Bosch 100; Bury 1985, 220; Guidoni 71; Calvesi 2000, 131; Borghese 69.

⁶ Bury 1985, 218.

⁷ Darnall and Weil, 63.

visitor enters a modest hippodrome space that is embraced by a primitive retaining wall embellished with large finials depicting monstrously over-lifesize pinecones and acorns (Figures 5-6). These massive seed casings are juxtaposed with diminutive statues of bears (Figures 7-8)—a visual pun on the family name Orsini—which in turn emphasize the lack of consistent proportionality running throughout the *bosco*. The retaining wall, positioned directly below the viewing platform, bears the following inscription, emphasizing the wondrous and singular nature of the *bosco*:

CEDAN ET MEMPHI ET OGNI ALTRA MARAVIGLIA
CH' HEBBE GIA IL MONDO AL PREGIO AL SACRO BOSCO
CHE SOL SE STESSO E NULL ALTRO SOMIGLIA⁸

Close to the inscription is a massive, rusticated bench surmounted by a large female form with arms outstretched, as if beckoning the visitor to sit in her crudely fashioned lap (Figure 9). At the other end of the terrace is a pair of similarly large chimeric creatures: a mermaid with a bifurcated tail (Figure 10), and a winged snake-tailed harpy (Figure 11), their bodies melding the nude female form with menacing and disquieting animal attributes. Between the two figures are positioned two stone lions, their teeth bared and eyes wild, posed as though vigilantly guarding their corner of the *bosco* (Figure 12). To the left of the mermaid is a figure—lying on the ground and seemingly broken—that has gone practically unnoticed within the field of Bomarziana, due in large part to its ruinous condition, which has largely obscured the statue's form and details (Figure 13). While the figure appears to be some manner of humanoid lying on its back, it is unclear whether this was the original placement of the statue, or if it was moved to this location during the restoration of the Sacro Bosco in the 1950's. Regardless, from what details may still be read, the figure appears to wear a laurel wreath about its head, and its legs appear to be

⁸ “Memphis and every other marvel that the world has held in praise yield to the Sacro Bosco, which resembles only itself and nothing else.” (Trans. Sheeler 108.) Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

covered in an abstracted pattern resembling hair, leading one to assume that the statue was most likely a satyr figure, a character that would not be incongruous with the Sacro Bosco's sylvan atmosphere and Arcadian undertones.

Descending one level further, the visitor encounters a stone bench built into an arched niche excavated from a larger, freestanding partition, its angle slightly askew as though sinking into the hill (Figure 14). The arch, decorated with heraldic Orsini roses, frames the inscription:

VOI CHE PEL MONDO GITE ERRANDO VAGHI
DI VEDER MARAVIGLIA ALTE ET STUPENDE
VENITE QUA, DOVE SON FACCIE HORRENDE
ELEFANTI, LEONI, ORSI, ORCHI ET DRAGHI⁹

Once again, the epigram lionizes the *bosco*, extolling its unique marvels, as well as implying that the site was designed for learned and worldly visitors who yearn for experiences beyond the ordinary. Continuing past the covered bench, one encounters a smattering of seemingly incongruous and unrelated elements, which include a massive stone amphora decorated with small grimacing faces that resemble antique *gorgoneia* (Figures 15-16), a badly damaged statue of a small and unidentified maned quadruped (Figure 17), and the half-buried fragments of what appears to be a pseudo-Etruscan *tomba a fossa* (Figure 18).

A nearby cluster of monumental figures contribute to this scheme of overarching incongruity, juxtaposing a number of the *bosco*'s more well-known sculptural groups. Closest to the faux-tomb is a colossal seated female figure, half-nude from the waist up, with a vase balanced atop her head (Figures 19-20). Her thick, heavy legs destabilize visual balance of the piece, just as the group of mischievous winged *putti* clustered around her back complicate and derail attempts at a straightforward iconographic reading. Nearby stands the massive figure of an elephant, a

⁹ "You who have traveled the world wishing to see appealing and stupendous marvels, come here, where there are horrendous faces, elephants, lions, bears, ogres and dragons."

rider and crenellated war tower atop its back, a fallen soldier dressed in archaizing armor cradled gently in the beast's trunk (Figure 21). While the elephant now lacks tusks, two deep incisions between its trunk and cheeks indicate that some type of long-gone components—real ivory tusks perhaps?—were attached to the statue. Directly adjacent to the elephant is a sculptural group depicting a lion and lioness locked in combat with a winged dragon (Figure 22), who appears to have captured their cub in its tightly wound tail. While the lions emit an air of ferociousness, savagely biting their opponent, a look of surprised mirth is frozen on the dragon's face, simultaneously adding a degree of levity to the scene at hand, while also contributing to the certain level of dissonance that permeates the *bosco*, through the repeat pairing of the threatening with the amusing.

The most iconic of the site's figures, however, also inhabits this terrace: a large, monstrous face—usually referred to an *orco* or Hell Mouth—with flared nostrils and blunted, protruding teeth that appears to surface from the forest floor, its mouth agape as if frozen mid-roar (Figure 23). The mouth itself, however, is large enough for a visitor of substantial height to walk through, and opens onto a small rock-cut grotto furnished with stone table and chairs, seemingly creating a place of repose within the cranium of the horrific visage (Figure 24). The grotto also functions as an echo chamber, amplifying the noises produced by the visitor, and funneling them out through the creature's mouth, activating and personifying the *orco* by literally providing him a voice. This atmosphere of absurdity and buoyant mirth is made clear in the inscription that rings the doorway/mouth of the grotto, as it reads: “LASCIA TE OGNI PENSIERO VOI CH'ENTRATE,” a parodical and lighthearted reworking of a line from Dante's *Divina Commedia* describing the entrance to Hell. Yet this Hell Mouth, promoting a carefree mood and seemingly laughing along with the viewer, overturns and lampoons its menacing and fearsome

antecedents, inviting the viewer into a pleasant sanctuary instead of condemning one to eternal, fiery damnation. The piece plays on this monstrous juxtaposition, reveling in the absurd contradiction of form and content, while also slipping a sly wink to the scholar able to appreciate the grotesque's wry demonstration of witty erudition.

Upon exiting the creature's mouth, the viewer proceeds down a slight embankment, to an additional, albeit smaller, hippodrome flanked by vases (Figure 25) which frame a seated, bearded male figure closely resembling both period and Ancient Roman depictions of river gods (Figure 26). The bearded figure presides over a deep, semicircular basin which, while now empty, was most likely once the site of a cascading water feature. The vases that border the hippodrome and frame the basin bear a number of inscriptions in varying states of preservation.

One vase reads:

NOTTE E GIORNO
NOI SIAMO VIGILI E PRONTI
A GUARDAR D'OGNI INGIURIA
QUESTA FONTE¹⁰

A nearby vase carries the partial inscription of "NOTTE E GIORNO," but any letters that may have followed are now lost and illegible, leaving it unknown whether any subsequent text 'responded' to or simply duplicated the related epigram. While an additional vase also makes mention of the fountain, key passages are missing from the inscription, only heightening the hippodrome's atmosphere of ambiguity:

FONTE NON FU
NON PLU.....TIA
TRA SELVE CHIN GUARDIA SIA
DELLE PIU STRANE BELVE¹¹

¹⁰ "Night and day we are vigilant and ready to guard the fountain from any injury."

Following a path next to the vase, the visitor passes an immense disembodied face that appears almost lupine with its pointed snout, sharp teeth and furry ruff (Figure 27), seemingly rising up from the stone next to the basin, its deeply set eyes trained upon the river god figure. Upon rounding a sharp bend in the path, the visitor comes upon a stocky, reclining female nude, her arms splayed wide, with fingers clutching the stone fabric that surrounds her, as though deep in a dream state (Figure 28). Watching over her sleeping form is a small stone greyhound, its eyes fixed not on its companion, but outward toward the viewer.

Several feet from the reclining figure is a shallow, oval-shaped basin, which at one point in time was clearly a fountain, with water gushing from the mouth of a grotesque male face situated directly above the pool (Figure 29). Continuing onward from the dry fountain, the visitor encounters another of the forms relatively undiscussed in the field of Bomarziana: a large stone tower carved from a massive *tufo* boulder, its lower half largely inchoate volcanic stone, while its upper reaches are embellished with an irregular pattern of stones to create a brick-like façade (Figure 30). Beneath the tower's eastern side is a small cave hollowed out of the rock, and while not large or welcoming enough to serve as proper grottoes or pavilions, the space is decidedly manmade, implying that a deliberately organic and dilapidated appearance was the desired effect. Across from this excavated cavern is a long stone bench from which individual seats were carved, directly facing the tower and bookended by a pair of badly eroded decorative flourishes, one of which appears to resemble a reclining human figure (Figure 31).

Continuing southward along the trail, the visitor approaches a colossal sculptural group from the rear, that upon first glance appears to be a nude male figure standing near a heap of classicizing armor. Yet as the visitor approaches the front of the composition, it becomes clear that the muscular colossus is holding another figure upside down, seeming to tear his victim in

¹¹ “The fountain was not... between forests that guard the strangest beasts.”

half as he rends the smaller figure's legs apart (Figure 32). The sculptural group is accompanied by two inscriptions (Figure 33), the first of which is clearly legible and reads:

SE RODI ALTIER GIA FU DEL SUO COLOSSO
 PUR DI QUEST IL MIO BOSCO ANCHO SI GLORIA
 E PER PIU NON POTER FO QUANT IO POSSO¹²

The second is badly damaged, with only a few words still visible:

...IER GIGANTE
 ... SCEMPIO
 ... ANGLANTE

Staying consistent with the theme of *meravigliosità* expressed in the *bosco*'s other inscriptions, the epigrams draw comparisons between the Sacro Bosco and the canonical Wonders of the World, while also tying the site to the patron's tastes, ambitions and creative faculties. The path forks in front of the battling colossi, and following the easternmost route downhill, the visitor enters a clearing that abuts a small waterfall and stream (Figure 34), adjacent to which a monstrous, fanged piscine mouth arises, appearing to both engulf and imbibe the rushing watercourse (Figure 35). Positioned near the stream rests a gigantic stone tortoise surmounted by a small, robed *ninfa* figure whose drapery whirls about her slender frame; her face and hands, now missing, once held an *aulos*-like trumpet, as depicted in several Seicento drawings of the site (Figures 36-38). While the sculptural group has been identified by some art historians as a representation of Fame, and still others have declared it a visualization of the motto '*Festina Lente*,'¹³ this juxtaposition of an oversized tortoise with a petite, trumpeting *ninfa* appears to be a unique emblem created specifically for the *bosco*.

¹² "If Rhodes was elevated by its Colossus, so by this one my woods is glorified, for I have done no more than I can do."

¹³ See Sheeler 54; Darnall and Weil 15-20; Lazzaro 140; Coffin 110, Calvesi, 2009, 153-155.

The center of the clearing is occupied by a circular basin upon which perches a tilted figure of Pegasus, which may have originally been accompanied by statues of the Muses and Greco-Roman deities as depicted in a seventeenth-century drawing by Giovanni Guerra (Figures 39-40). While the basin is now dry, it clearly once functioned as a fountain, as evinced by several drainage channels. Guerra's drawing shows the fountain ringed by a number of now-absent figures, including the Muses, and statues identified as Jupiter, Mercury, Bacchus and Apollo, all of which were missing from Bartholomeus Breenbergh's drawing of the fountain dating from the mid-1620's (Figure 41). No tangible traces of these figures remain other than nine rectangular bases along the rim of the fountain, and given Guerra's depiction of ten figures instead of nine, questions regarding the veracity of his engraving naturally arise. It is possible, however, that the statues were removed and reused in another location after the decline of the Orsini family, or were perhaps made of a more ephemeral material not intended to withstand the test of time and the elements.

Near the fountain, leading out of the clearing, are two peculiar forms: the first being a broken column atop a wide, circular base (Figure 42)—Dotson likens the piece to a “gigantic (and very archaic) Tuscan capital detached from the column”¹⁴—and the second a bas-relief of a tree trunk, its roots partially exposed and branches shorn off (Figure 43). Continuing onward, the visitor is confronted by two recumbent lion statues, which, while relatively diminutive in scale, flank the path, their front paws resting protectively on stone orbs in a manner similar to that of the Medici lions in Florence's Loggia dei Lanzi (Figure 44). From the lions, the path expands, bordered on each side by ornate benches that follow a scalloping pattern, capped on each end by a mermaid-like female figure, whose lower body terminates not in a fish tail, but a tightly-wound spiral (Figures 45-46). Behind the benches on the left-hand side of the path, are three shallow niches,

¹⁴ Dotson 213.

the largest of which is occupied by a crude low-relief depiction of the Three Graces twined about each other. The roughly carved *tuffo* gives the Graces a pockmarked and lumpish appearance, transforming such paragons of lithe and nubile beauty into humorously spongy and inelegant antitheses of Classical beauty.

Directly beyond the Three Graces is a recessed, three-sided nymphaeum into which five small niches are carved, holding small, badly damaged figures of female nudes (Figure 47). Unlike the stocky and ungainly figures of the Three Graces, the female figures are slim and elegant, their elongated bodies curving supplely in a sinuous *contrapposto*. The nymphaeum is outfitted with benches and a partially obscured inscription, which reads:

L'ANTRO E LA FONTE IL BEL...
D'OGNI OSCURO PENSIER GLI ANIMI SGOMBRA¹⁵

The remnants of the epigram echo the words that encircle the mouth of the *Orco*, emphasizing the *bosco*'s ability to relieve the mind and soul of burdensome concerns, the distractions of its 'funhouse' atmosphere an enlivening and diverting departure from the ordinary. On the other side of the path from the nymphaeum is a large basin which once clearly served as a fountain, with jets of water spurting from the mouths of the dolphin-like creatures positioned at either end of the tub.

Following the path, the visitor enters a clearing with a large retaining wall to the left and unadulterated forest to the right. Built into the retaining wall is a large alcove inhabited by a monumental female nude—her arms, now broken, appear to have once been outstretched—who stands astride a beaked dragon-like creature with outstretched membranous wings, that resemble the striations of a scallop shell, like a version of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Figure 48) made grotesque and strange. Near the niche rests a stone plaque depicting the face of a bearded male

¹⁵ "The cave and the fountain... clear the mind of every dark thought."

with ram's horns (Figure 49), often identified as Jupiter Ammon,¹⁶ which appears to have fallen at one point in time from its place on the retaining wall, as a similar plaque still remains affixed to the edifice above. Nearby, a narrow staircase leads down from the reclining female nude and vase-lined hippodrome on the terrace above. Abutting the staircase is a hemicircular theater studded with rectangular recesses (Figure 50); six broad stairs extend out from the theater, which is flanked by two plinths, which bear the following epigrams:

SOL PER		VICINO
SFOGAR	and	ORSINO
IL		NEL
CORE		MDLII ¹⁷

The inscriptions provide vital clues concerning the site's construction and function, not only supplying a concrete date with which to associate the otherwise poorly-documented *bosco*, but also reiterating the themes of carefree enjoyment and liberation from the burdensome mind or heart as expressed in numerous epigrams throughout the park.

Near the theater, at the far end of the park is another of the Sacro Bosco's most renowned and recognizable monuments, a wildly tilting, two-story garden pavilion often referred to as the *casa pendente* (Figure 51). Effectively made useless by its own architectural character, the exaggerated pitch of the building interferes with the visitor's sense of balance, producing an overwhelming, "dizzy instability induced by the conflicting tilt of the floor felt underfoot and the perception of one's eyes."¹⁸ In a properly logical system, the rustic house would have been a destination within the grounds, a site intended for repose and sedentary contemplation after strolling the paths of the *bosco*, yet the structure offers no seating, no respite for the visitor. Like

¹⁶ Guidoni 63.

¹⁷ "Only to unburden the heart" and "Vicino Orsini in 1552"

¹⁸ Sheeler 114.

many of the edifices in the *bosco*, the *casa pendente* bears an inscription, the two parts of which read:

ANIMUS		CRIST MADRUTIO
QUIESCENDO	and	PRINCIPI TRIDENTINO
FIT PRUDENTIOR		DICATUM
ERGO		

The Latin inscriptions are the only ones of their kind in the *bosco*, the former imparting to the visitor that the mind which is quiet is thereby wiser, with the latter a dedicatory inscription to Vicino Orsini's friend and neighbor, Cristoforo Madruzzo, the Cardinal of Trent and key participant in the eponymous council of the Counter-Reformation.

Next to the entry way leading to the first floor of the *casa pendente* is located a strange and rarely discussed element of the *bosco*: a petite altar topped by a bas-relief 'altarpiece' depicting a draped, half-nude female figure, her legs crossed at the ankles and her hands clasped together in prayer, her badly eroded face turned toward a small crucifix in the upper left-hand corner of the stone slab (Figure 52). The religious bent of the image seems incongruous with the lighthearted atmosphere and secular imagery of the *bosco*, creating a certain degree of ideological and spatial friction, as religious imagery was often seen as inappropriate for garden settings.¹⁹ The altar, however, is not the only element of the Sacro Bosco that has largely escaped discussion, for if the visitor were to proceed past the stone tubs that mark the northern edge of the clearing, one would discover a cluster of fragments in near-ruinous condition—including a large rectangular basin and two mask-like faces similar to those found near the hemicircular theater—which, while for the most part are nearly impossible to identify, clearly imply that the site extended beyond the boundaries of the modern Parco dei Mostri.²⁰

¹⁹ MacDougall 1985, 122.

²⁰ Alessi 215-216, 219. The twentieth-century *Parco dei Mostri*, owned, operated and restored by the Bettini

Retracing one's steps from the *casa pendente* to the battling colossi, the visitor has returned to the aforementioned fork in the path, and taking the right-hand course, ascends a staircase to encounter another example of fabricated Etruscan ruins, in this case the pediment and partial facade of a rock-cut aedicule tomb, lying on its side as though it had broken away from a larger edifice (Figure 53-54). The pediment is carved with a number of lively figures, including dolphins, a ram, and a mermaid with a bifurcated tail, recalling the hybrid female figures encountered earlier in the visitor's explorations. From the pseudo-Etruscan tomb, the visitor is presented with two directional choices: to the right, the path takes the visitor past a high-backed stone bench (Figure 55) and into the hippodrome surrounded by gigantic acorns and pinecones, and to the left a path leading away from the rest of the *bosco*.

Opting for the unfamiliar path, the visitor enters a clearing, abutted on the left-hand side by a large crenellated stone gate that marks the entrance to the *bosco* as delineated by the modern day Parco dei Mostri, and to the right a pair of stone sphinxes (Figures 56-57), moved from the glade near the *casa pendente* to their current location some time around 1955.²¹ The sphinxes perch upon inscribed pedestals, which read:

TU CH'ENTRATI QUA PON MENTE
 PARTE A PARTE
 ET DIMMI POI SE TANTE
 MARAVIGLIE
 SIEN FATTE PER INGANNO
 O PUR PER ARTE²²

And:

family, is presented more as a roadside curiosity or "mystery spot," than an artifact of sixteenth-century courtly culture, erudition and artistic tastes. While the site is relatively well maintained, the owners seem to have paid little heed to the integrity or history of the *bosco* itself, repositioning several statues and altering at least one inscription within the park.

²¹ Quartermaine 72.

²² "You who enter here, put your mind to it part by part, and tell me if these many wonders were made as trickery or as art."

CHI CON CIGLIA INARCATE
 ET LABRA STRETTE
 NON VA PER QUESTO LOCO
 MANCO AMMIRA
 LE FAMOSE DEL MONDO
 MOLI SETTE²³

The epigrams engage in the same dialectic of wonder and singularity that are expressed by the other inscriptions found throughout the *bosco*, yet these in particular seem to cultivate a poetic atmosphere for the site, invoking the particularly Mannerist theme of the astonishing *meraviglia*, caught in a *paragone* of sorts between artful naturalism and stylish artifice.

Continuing along the path, the visitor passes between eight herms (Figures 58-59)—some with one face, some with two, some with four—which have often drawn comparisons to Janus or Pan, the former due to the herms’ multipartite nature, the latter due to their pinched, satyr-like features.²⁴ The path ultimately terminates in a small clearing, where the visitor is confronted by a massive, grotesque head that appears to emerge from the ground, its bulging eyes, flared nostrils and peg-like teeth (Figure 60) reminiscent of the *Orco* grotto encountered on the opposite side of the *bosco*. From the creature’s toothy maw, which is large enough to accommodate a relatively short visitor, extends a flat, ovoid *tufo* slab, giving the impression of a large and fleshy tongue reaching outward to the path before it. Atop the monster’s head sits a massive striped globe, which itself is surmounted by a miniature fortified castle, creating a sense of extreme discord in regard to scale, as in the case of the proportionally mismatched pinecones, acorns and *orsini*. The bizarre and enigmatic forms seem to cry out for interpretation, background or context, anything to help anchor them to a system of meaning outside of their

²³ “Whoever visits this place without raised eyebrows and pursed lips will fail to admire the seven wonders of the world.”

²⁴ Godwin 170; Oleson 213; Guidoni 61.

own grotesqueness and oddity, the very characteristics that effectively estrange the Sacro Bosco from its contemporaries as a complete aberration of ugliness, monstrosity and chaotic structuration.

Getting Closer to Vicino

The matter of historical context, however, has been the proverbial thorn in the side of Bomarziana since the ‘rediscovery’ of the Sacro Bosco in the 1950’s. Few historical records concerning the origin, construction and period interpretation of the *bosco* remain, with basic logistical details particularly lacking. The exact year the project began is unclear—the cippus near the *casa pendente* mentions 1552, yet no indication is given whether the year refers to the grounds as a whole, or just the hemircular theater and its surroundings—just as the name or names of those involved in the layout of the site and the sculpting of its enigmatic creatures are unknown. No definitive master plans of the Sacro Bosco have come to light, and what little can be gleaned regarding the history and construction of the park comes largely from the vast catalogue of letters written by its patron, Vicino Orsini. While Vicino revealed few concrete details about the *bosco* in his many letters to friends and family, he regularly discussed his frequent visits and strong emotional investment in the park, implying a deep personal connection. His mentions of working on “*disegni nuovi al boschetto*”²⁵ indicate that Vicino had a hand in the ideation and design of the park, a theme frequently reiterated in art historical discussions of the site, with most scholars casting him as the creative force, “the true innovator, the director”²⁶ behind the Sacro Bosco. To better understand the *bosco*, it would seem, the patron must be examined in further detail.

²⁵ Bredekamp vol. II, 27 from a letter to Jean Drouet, written Dec. 22, 1573.

²⁶ Bruschi 1963b 43.

Born in 1523 to Duke Gian Corrado Orsini of Bomarzo and Clarice di Franciotto di Monterotondo, Pierfrancesco—called Vicino by friends and family alike—was the second son in a lesser branch of the esteemed Orsini family that had long been beleaguered by disputes regarding inheritance and hereditary succession.²⁷ While Vicino’s elder brother, Girolamo, was slated to succeed Gian Corrado as the primary heir, Vicino ultimately received the ducal seat due to Girolamo’s disinheritance for refusing to join the clergy, as per their father’s request.²⁸ Numerous relatives, however, laid claim to Gian Corrado’s lands, with the matter of succession becoming so contentious that the neighboring Cardinal Alessandro Farnese was called upon to resolve the matter, granting Bomarzo and the adjacent village of Chia to Vicino, and extending lordship of several smaller territories, including Penna in Teverina, to Vicino’s younger brother, Maerbale.²⁹ The outcome of the ruling seems to have fostered a relationship that was equal parts friendship and fealty between Vicino and the Cardinal, a liaison that while beneficial to the Orsini household, also seems to have rankled the Duke, with the upwardly mobile Farnese quickly outstripping the once-prestigious Orsini line in terms of power and influence.³⁰

Yet Vicino quickly made a name for himself, following in his father’s footsteps as a *condottiere*, serving honorably under the Farnese banner in a number of conflicts related to the Habsburg–Valois wars that regularly involved the Holy Roman Empire, the Papal States, and the dominant city-states of central and northern Italy.³¹ While praised by his contemporaries for his military exploits, Vicino distinguished himself as an accomplished man of letters, described by his friend Francesco Sansovino as “*practico di tutte le cose*” and a great friend to authors and

²⁷ Sheeler 8.

²⁸ Sheeler 8.

²⁹ Sheeler 8; Bredekamp vol. II, 69.

³⁰ Sheeler 9.

³¹ Von Henneberg 1972, 44-47.

artists.³² Vicino's literary interests were vast and eclectic; he was a voracious reader of Marsilio Ficino, Rabelais, Ariosto and Girolamo Cardano, with a particular taste for the eccentric and the unorthodox, professing in his correspondences a passion for diverse and extravagant subjects.³³ Vicino was also known to dabble in poetry—preferring Petrarchan sonnets and rhetoric, often expressing a certain inquietude of the soul, as well as a desire for glory and virtue—and saw three of his verses published in a 1545 collection of poems compiled by his friend Lodovico Domenichi.³⁴

In addition to Domenichi, Vicino counted a number of *letterati* and humanists among his circle of friends, casting a wide net that encompassed many prominent names of his generation, including Annibale Caro, Francesco Sansovino, Bernardo Tasso, Giuseppe Betussi, Francesco Maria Molza, Claudio Tolomei, Bernardo Cappello, Francheschina Baffo, and Gabriele Giolito de Ferrari.³⁵ Betussi, in fact, dedicated a number of poems, as well as his 1545 treatise on love, *Il Raverta*, to Vicino, in which he praised the Duke's immortal honor and virtue, characterizing him a man of "immense and fatal" beauty in both body and soul.³⁶ In his exhaustive history of the Orsini family, Sansovino likewise commended Vicino's form, mentioning his friend's regal appearance, while applauding both his "highly creative spirit" and graceful poetic expression.³⁷ Vicino also kept as close confidante Jean Drouet, a French associate of the Farnese pope Paul III, with whom he corresponded on a frequent basis, sharing many details of his private life and philosophies, conversing with a certain dry wit and bawdy informality that was often—but not always—tempered in his communications with nobility and leading members of local society.

Among the elite of the Viterbo area, Vicino was particularly close with Cardinal Cristoforo

³² Bruschi 1963b, 34.

³³ Bruschi 1963a, 96; Bruschi 1963b, 19; Belanger 70; Darnall and Weil 9.

³⁴ Perucca 198-199.

³⁵ Bredekamp vol. I, 18; Quartermaine 70.

³⁶ Bredekamp vol. II, 69-73.

³⁷ Bredekamp vol. II, 82.

Madruzzo of Trent, who made his home in nearby Soriano nel Cimino, and Cardinal Gianfrancesco Gambara, whose villa in Bagnaia not only boasted one of the most glorious *giardini all'italiana* of the Cinquecento, but was created relatively contemporaneously with both the Sacro Bosco and the gardens of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese's villa in neighboring Caprarola.

Vicino's connections with the Farnese family became all the more concrete in the early 1540's when he married Giulia, the daughter of *condottiere* Galeazzo Farnese of the Latera branch, and while the match granted Vicino a considerable boost in political influence, it effectively transformed him into a vassal of the Farnese family, a bitter pill to swallow, considering the position and power the waning Orsini house once held.³⁸ Despite the complex power dynamics in play, the match between Vicino and Giulia seems to have been an amicable one, with Giulia's fidelity to and unwavering support for her husband lauded by her contemporaries as truly remarkable.³⁹ Her good-natured charm and pragmatism were also a topic of much discussion among the Orsini circle of friends, with Sansovino describing her as "thoroughly prudent and magnanimous," and Betussi commenting on her "stalwart and strong soul."⁴⁰ During Vicino's numerous and extended absences from Bomarzo during wartime, it fell to Giulia to manage their estate, particularly during her husband's two year stint as a prisoner of war in Belgium, following the Battle of Hesdin in 1553. The nature of Giulia's stewardship of Bomarzo has been hotly debated, with some scholars claiming she spearheaded numerous building campaigns in the city during her husband's military career,⁴¹ with others consigning her

³⁸ Sheeler 14, Perucca 195-196.

³⁹ Perucca 202.

⁴⁰ Perucca 202.

⁴¹ Theurillat 27; Bredekamp vol. I, 21.

to the more domestic role of raising the couple's seven children, as well as tending to straightforward concerns of local governance.⁴²

With Vicino busy in the field for much of the 1550's,⁴³ the question naturally arises—particularly given the '1552' inscription in the park—when did the majority of the work on the *bosco* occur, and was it carried out under Giulia's supervision? While such a hypothesis is tempting, it is not until the 1560's and '70's that the site is referred to in Vicino's correspondence, seemingly indicating that work progressed slowly on the *bosco*, and was not fully under way until Vicino retired from military service some time around 1560.⁴⁴ It was during this window of time that Giulia passed away,⁴⁵ and while the exact date of her death is unknown, her passing is referenced by Sansovino in relation to the *bosco* on three separate occasions, all of which indicate that the park, or at least the *tempietto*, bore some manner of dedicatory function to her illustrious memory.⁴⁶ However, it is likely that Sansovino was in fact referring to the nearby church of Santa Maria della Valle (Figure 61), a possibility that has never been fully explored. Dating from the mid-Cinquecento,⁴⁷ the petite rock-cut church bears undeniable similarities to the *tempietto* in the *bosco*, and is situated just below the promontory home to Bomarzo's *centro storico*, roughly equidistant from Palazzo Orsini and the Sacro Bosco. Yet a number of scholars have seized upon Sansovino's ambiguous words, with many assuming that the Sacro Bosco or certain elements within the park were created by the inconsolable Vicino primarily as a monument or memorial to his beloved wife, as a grand gesture of love and Petrarchan longing.⁴⁸

⁴² Perucca 201, 206.

⁴³ Von Henneberg 1972, 45.

⁴⁴ Von Henneberg 1972, 47.

⁴⁵ Perucca 206.

⁴⁶ Bredekamp vol II, 83, 90, 91.

⁴⁷ Calvesi 2009, 114..

⁴⁸ Texts that have forwarded this position include, but are not limited to: Lazzaro 123; Kretzulesco-Quaranta 280;

Vicino's own writings, however, call into question these romantic interpretations and shed light on his relationship with Giulia, showing him to be less the faithful spouse devoted to the memory of his beloved and more of a serial philanderer. Giulia seems to have been the more committed spouse by far, with Vicino exhibiting a rather lukewarm attitude toward both their union and the institution of marriage in general, admitting in a letter to Jean Drouet that "The taking of wife has to be done more from necessity than for pleasure, and should be an undertaking more for the well-being of others than for oneself."⁴⁹ Marital fidelity did not seem to be a top priority for Vicino; during the early years of his marriage, he carried on a well-known affair with a young Roman woman named Adriana della Roza, and took solace in the "venereal consolations" of numerous courtesans during his captivity after the Battle of Hesdin.⁵⁰ In his many letters to Drouet, Vicino spoke openly of his appetites, describing himself as "dry straw before the flames of lust," while detailing the multiple affairs and mistresses he pursued after the death of his wife.⁵¹ Vicino was even so bold as to send a letter to Giulia's cousin, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, several years after her passing, remarking on the many prostitutes "of whom, thanks be to the Lord, I have more than one, today on my fortieth birthday,"⁵² clearly showing himself to be anything but the heartbroken widower so often portrayed by modern art historians. While Vicino no doubt grieved the loss of Giulia, his correspondences do not link the *bosco* to her memory; instead, he spoke of the site as a place to retreat with one of his many lovers, writing bawdy poetry laced with ribald double entendres wherein he uses his *boschetto*—also a term for a small, handmade trap to catch little birds—to excite female guests, who react

Darnall and Weill, 38-39, 70; Zander 22; Calvesi 2000, 113-116; Bosch 100, 103-104; Bury 1985, 214.

⁴⁹ Sheeler 21.

⁵⁰ Perucca 202; Sheeler 21.

⁵¹ Sheeler 21-23; Bredekamp vol. I 40; Bredekamp vol. II, 29-30; Von Henneberg 1972, 47.

⁵² Perucca 206.

with noisy squeals and giggles when holding an *uccello* “*grosso e grasso*” in the palm of their hands.⁵³

Yet Vicino did not perceive the Sacro Bosco solely as a secluded place for trysts, wherein he was free to “dally with [his] beautiful shepherdesses under the shade of a fine beech tree,”⁵⁴ as the site was clearly a point of pride for Vicino, who took great pleasure in escorting both visiting nobles and his learned peers through the grounds.⁵⁵ After retiring from his military career, additions and alterations to the Sacro Bosco seem to have been a primary concern for Vicino, as his letters to his close friends and neighbors frequently discussed his plans for “*disegni nuovi al boschetto*,”⁵⁶ which included his decision to paint the statues of the *bosco* garish primary colors,⁵⁷ as well as the addition of several small dams to create an artificial lake.⁵⁸ The *bosco*, it appears, became something of an outdoor *Wunderkammer* intended to delight and astound, as Vicino began to collect exotic animals to populate his woods, with his sights set on the acquisition of a monkey.⁵⁹ Cardinal Farnese allegedly contributed a domesticated bear to the collection, to which Vicino responded in kind, sending his friends live turkeys, the “fruit” of his *boschetto*.⁶⁰

The Sacro Bosco also seems to have been a refuge of sorts for Vicino, as evidenced in his communications with Drouet, for he often wrote of his aversion to city life, preferring to stay in his woods, and “visit stones and trees... to mix with tigers and bears”⁶¹ than suffer “the falsities

⁵³ Sheeler 31-32; Bredekamp vol. I, 44.

⁵⁴ Sheeler 23.

⁵⁵ Sheeler 16.

⁵⁶ Bredekamp vol. II, 27.

⁵⁷ Bruschi 1963b, 35-36.

⁵⁸ Theurillat 40; Bury 1985, 222-223.

⁵⁹ Bruschi 1963a 101.

⁶⁰ Bruschi 1963a, 101; Lazzaro 122.

⁶¹ Sheeler 28.

and vanities of the courts.”⁶² This fondness for his *bosco* was independent of the seasons, as he tended to visit it almost daily, rain or shine, riding his horse, Ragazzino, down from the *palazzo* to sit among the trees and stone monsters, to simply “enjoy the folly of the *boschetto*.”⁶³ Vicino’s words show a clear preference for raw and untamed nature, a drastic departure from the more conventional tastes displayed in the symmetrical, manicured gardens of Cardinals Farnese and Gambara. While the Sacro Bosco was obviously and inextricably linked to Vicino’s personal tastes and interests, it appears to have been less a grieving husband’s expression of personally resonant emblems, and more an extension and evocation of Vicino’s inclination toward the exotic and the unrefined, drawing upon the character and spirit of the wild local landscape for inspiration.

Directions, Old and New

Study of the Sacro Bosco, however, has tended to overlook Vicino’s admitted “[preference for] living here among these woods,”⁶⁴ emphasizing not his peculiarly unconventional drive to create a *boschetto* in a rugged and heavily forested corner of Alto Lazio, but focusing instead on either the iconographical decoding of particular sculptural elements within the park, or the attribution of the site to specific artists or landscape architects. While perhaps the most discussed of the epic, large-scale landscape architectural projects of the Italian Renaissance, the Sacro Bosco is without doubt the least understood, despite over fifty years of authors’ dogged attempts to unravel the site’s mysteries. This lineage of academic inquiry traces its origin to the *bosco*’s ‘rediscovery’ in the early 1950’s,⁶⁵ and its ensuing rapid rise to fame, which coincided

⁶² Sheeker 11.

⁶³ Quartermaine 73-74.

⁶⁴ Sheeler 11.

⁶⁵ While Salvador Dalí is often credited with “rediscovering” the *bosco*, Italian scholars such as Alberta Campitelli and Claudio Castelletti argue that the site was never truly lost, and was in fact known to local residents, the Borghese family of Bomarzo, and a handful of authors. The ‘rediscovery’ of the *bosco* in the 1950’s should perhaps be relabeled as a large-scale renovation of and resurgence of interest in the Sacro Bosco, which seems to

neatly with a new scholarly interest and examination of Italian Renaissance gardens, effectively positioning early discussions of the site on the inaugural cusp of landscape architectural study as an academic discipline. Perhaps as a result of the schism of landscape architecture from the larger umbrella of art history, scholarship concerning the Sacro Bosco is fundamentally fragmented, with little conversation between the two disciplines, thus producing one faction predominantly reliant on the comparative study of period garden practices and structures, and another that has fundamentally concerned itself with iconographic linkage of the site to specific art and literature of the Cinquecento.

While numerous texts within the field of Bomarziana have focused on the more sensational elements of the Sacro Bosco, contributing little beyond iconographic and psychobiographical speculation, major schools of thought have emerged concerning the site's distinct and enigmatic artistic program. Various authors have connected the park's bizarre and idiosyncratic atmosphere to a normative discourse of Mannerist tastes for oddity and eccentricity, while others have linked the Sacro Bosco to the surreal and dreamlike imagery of period literature and epic romances, looking specifically to *Orlando Furioso* and the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* as sources of inspiration for the park. Similarly, allusions have frequently been made to Bomarzo's rich Etruscan past, raising the possibility that the plethora of tombs and monuments in the region somehow contributed to the "local survival of Etruscan patterns of taste and thought in the person of Vicino Orsini and his workmen,"⁶⁶ yet few attempts have been made to concretely link the *bosco* to the historical or cultural topography of Alto Lazio. Among the multiple loose ends—none of which have been successfully connected to create a definitive perspective on the

have been the direct result not only of Dalí's association with and popularization of the site, but also the mass publication of articles written by his friend, Mario Praz, concerning the surreal landscape architectural wonder. See Castelletti 12-18, Campitelli 200-203.

⁶⁶ Oleson 411.

Sacro Bosco—is the issue of the landscape itself: why create a wild and unrefined *bosco* instead of a systematically ordered and visually pleasing *giardino all'italiana*?

As both a reflection and an extension of Vicino's vast and eclectic scope of learning, the Sacro Bosco as a whole seems to deflect comprehensive, programmatic interpretation, as though drawing inspiration from disparate sources, creating a tangled, aporetic knot, its significance lying more in its potential valences than any one fixed reading. The *bosco*, in turn, becomes a mirror of sorts, a *tabula rasa* of seemingly familiar imagery upon which visitors project their own cultural literacy and erudition. The site need not signify one meaning in particular; instead, it is a hydra of multiple significations, creating an ambiguous, dreamlike atmosphere that embraces and evokes the multifaceted cultural climate with which Vicino Orsini surrounded himself. Indeed, the Sacro Bosco could be best described as the perfect distillation of Cinquecento culture in the region, drawing upon period literature, Viterbo-centric *campanilismo*, burgeoning archaeological impulses, and a growing sensitivity to the cultural and physical topography of Alto Lazio.

Chapter 1

Genius Loci, Genius Forgeries; The Terrain and (Mostly True) History of Alto Lazio

In the field of Bomarziana, authors have primarily tended to limit their search for the site's meaning within the boundaries of the *bosco* itself. While to a certain extent, the Sacro Bosco invites such an approach—this attitude is clearly reflected in one of its many inscriptions, which emphasizes the site's “[resemblance to] itself and nothing else”—it is necessary that modern scholars of the site recognize that the Sacro Bosco did not exist in a cultural or spatial vacuum. Indeed, while numerous authors have sought to uncover direct linkages between Cinquecento literature and the epic wonder of the Sacro Bosco, few efforts have been made to establish links between the site and the region's history or topographical makeup. Truly, the verbal conflation of the Sacro Bosco with the town of Bomarzo itself speaks to this veritable omission of the surrounding landscape, for the Sacro Bosco is no more Bomarzo than Villa Giulia is Rome, or Villa d'Este is Tivoli.

In fact, it is the topic of Villa d'Este that perhaps provides the best template for exactly how an examination of the Sacro Bosco's relationship to local history and topography should proceed. Both Marcello Fagiolo and David Dernie have extensively discussed alignments between particular Ancient Roman sites that populate the Tiburtine landscape (such as Villa Adriana and the Temple of Vesta) and the principal fountain components of Ippolito d'Este's stately garden complex.¹ This configuration and its emphasis on the local landscape and its history adds a new and exciting dimension to the study of garden environments, pushing the scholar to adopt a deeper and far more nuanced perspective on Renaissance involvement with and understandings of Antiquity, particularly in regards to understandings of the localized ancient past. In the case of Villa d'Este, the world of the past is neither abstract nor foreign, but made decidedly tangible

¹ Fagiolo 1979, 180-183; Dernie 21.

and immediate, as concrete ties and linkages display the profound bond between the site's past and present. These linkages are made all the more visceral through the spoliation and display of sculptures at Villa d'Este from Villa Adriana, presenting the site as a topographical palimpsest in which the inhabitants of Tivoli directly invoke, re-present and inhabit the unique character, history and patrimony of their particular corner of the world.

Fagiolo's and Dernie's attentiveness to period engagement with and response to the specificity of location, regional topography, and the unique character of place should both inform and provide a template for inquiries into the world that lies beyond the Sacro Bosco's borders. Is it possible that the Sacro Bosco engages in a similar historical and topographical dialogue with Bomarzo's local history? Could the mysteries of the Sacro Bosco correlate to the unique Etruscan landscape within which the park is situated? The possibility that the Sacro Bosco stands as conversation between past and present, an ongoing discourse with and visualization of the *genius loci* of Alto Lazio, has remained an avenue virtually untouched until now, one that may yield new perspectives and shed new light upon this artistic enigma. However, in order to properly situate the Sacro Bosco within this larger landscape—both cultural and geographic—the region of Alto Lazio must first be explored in greater depth and with a particular sensitivity to the ineffable atmosphere or spirit that pervades and creates a sense of place in this distinctive region of Italy.²

While situated in close proximity to Tuscany, Umbria and the Roman *campagna*, Alto Lazio possesses a distinct and arresting geographical character that sets the region apart from surrounding localities. The terrain alternates between rough and rocky, to mountainous and heavily forested, creating a space—roughly forming a triangle between Orte, Bolsena and

² The term 'Alto Lazio' will be used interchangeably with 'Tuscia' throughout, and while the historic borders of Tuscia stretched well beyond Lazio into Tuscany and Umbria, modern usage of the name generally refers to lands within and directly surrounding the province of Viterbo.

Sutri—that seems utterly at odds with popular understandings of central Italian topography. The gentle, rolling hills of Tuscany and the solitary umbrella pines of a Classical, pastoral Latium are replaced by a raw, volcanic landscape punctuated by the foreboding, heavily wooded Monti Cimini. The dense forests, deep valleys and fog-shrouded peaks, coupled with the region’s seemingly omnipresent *tuffo*, create the sense of a world primeval, a rugged and untamed land far removed and decidedly Other when viewed in comparison to nearby provinces.³ Whether pockmarked by craggy, vesicular *tuffo* or deeply scored by decidedly lunar-looking *calanchi*, Alto Lazio is largely defined by rock, as the landscape dips and swells, creating sharp, jagged cliffs and pronounced, winding ravines known as *forre*.

A handful of scholars have addressed this Otherness of Alto Lazio, including Arnaldo Bruschi, an early contributor to the field of Bomarziana, who stressed the magical, eerie character of the region as a platform to wax poetic and introduce the peculiarities of the Sacro Bosco.⁴ Characterizing the Tuscan countryside as a space where the rocks, trees, and the very air itself is impregnated with an unequivocal, ineffable aura of enchantment, Bruschi articulates a Romantic sense of the sublime, in which beauty and trepidation coningle to create a sweeping, overwhelming sense of awe that ravishes the senses.⁵ Bruschi’s comments are echoed in travel writer Giovanni Menichino’s guides to the Etruscan features of Alto Lazio, in which he characterizes the land as saturated with an “atmosphere of mythic, bewitching charm and heightened esoteric force, a still-present intimate vitality.”⁶ This sense of magic and fearsome

³ This geographic Otherness is so pronounced that from practically any point in Alto Lazio it is possible to travel less than 30 miles in any given direction and find one’s self in an entirely different—and far more stereotypically “Italian”—topography.

⁴ Bruschi 1955, 3.

⁵ Bruschi 1955, 3.

⁶ Menichino 8.

wonder is palpable in the rugged terrain, which others have noted seems to embody the duality of the Etruscan legacy, reading as simultaneously lighthearted and sinister.⁷

The impression of the mysterious and the sublime felt so strongly in the dramatic topography of Alto Lazio stands in direct opposition to the idyllic, pastoral landscapes of Tuscany and the Roman *campagna*, which, unlike the striking Tuscan juxtaposition of mountain, valley, cliff and forest, presents “a distinct and easily imaginable relationship between masses and space.”⁸ In his meditation on the differing *genius loci* of Tuscia and the Alban Hills, Charles Norberg-Schulz couches this vast gulf of topographical and atmospheric difference in terms relating to pagan worship, for while Apollonian reason and clarity are most at home in the Alban or Sabine Hills, Alto Lazio courses with a lively, unpredictable and chthonic spirit more suited to Bacchus or Janus.⁹ The dense, labyrinthine makeup of space and the untamed, frenzied wildness of the terrain stand so far removed from Classical rationality and clarity, functioning as an antithesis to the gentle, Arcadian landscape that surrounds Alto Lazio on all sides. The raw Tuscan backcountry thrums with an air of primordial energy, as the overgrown enmeshes with the craggy and desolate, creating a sense of otherworldliness, or perhaps better still, a sense of pre-humanity, a place frozen in time when the world was still new and uncorrupt in its wild, primeval naturalness.

This air of overpowering ahistoricity grows all the more palpable as one takes note of the myriad of Etruscan ruins and remnants that populate the countryside, hewn from the ubiquitous *tufo* that so thoroughly defines the region. Sculpted and excavated from the living rock, these Etruscan mausolea, monuments, tombs and other crumbling vestiges engage in an almost playful

⁷ Michael Vickers discusses this fascination with the Etruscans, which dates back to the Romans, characterizing such interest as a part of the popular imagination’s thirst for that which is both playful and mysterious, intoxicating and “spooky.” See Vickers 153.

⁸ Norberg-Schulz 146.

⁹ Norberg-Schulz 143, 147.

dialogue with the landscape, insinuating a quasi-natural emergence from the rock forms themselves, seamlessly intertwining with the environment and topography. Often it is difficult to distinguish these manmade Etruscan tombs from the naturally-occurring grottoes that dot the landscape,¹⁰ blurring the dichotomy between natural and artificial, implying a certain organic relationship between the Etruscans and their surroundings. Just like the *tufo* of Alto Lazio, Etruscan traces are ubiquitous to the region and keenly felt across the topography, whether encountered as enigmatic remnants carved into a cliffside, or half-carved boulders nearly buried in the dense undergrowth. These piecemeal fragments speak of a long-gone people far removed from the here and now, yet whose remains leave such a tangibly present absence, maddeningly just out of reach. Just as their architecture blended and became one with the land, a pervading sense of Etruscan-ness remains, imbuing and saturating the topography with an aura of mystery and bewitching, otherworldly energy which points to something now departed that lingers only in pregnant traces. A presence hangs over this region; a spirit emerges that can only be defined as Etruscan, for its profound energy and sublime mysteriousness is so connected to the place, and its sense of anti-Romanitas. The land positively courses with an Etruscan *genius loci*.

An Etruscan Renaissance

Despite the sheer palpability of the distinct Otherness in Alto Lazio, it is to more quantitative—and less affective—discourses that one must turn in order to situate Bomarzo and its Sacro Bosco in a dialogue of both topographical and historical engagement. The question of how the Renaissance mind approached and responded to the Etruscans looms large. How aware were Cinquecento Italians of Etruscan civilization, and how much contact did they have with these remnants of a local, non-Roman past? Could this contact have been enough to actively influence sixteenth-century art? What interest could Etruscans possibly have held to the

¹⁰ Lazzaro 118.

Renaissance, which was so deeply invested in an all but exclusively Greco-Roman version of Antiquity?

While minimal consideration has been afforded perceptions of Etruscans in Renaissance Tuscany, it is largely through the writings of Quattrocento and Cinquecento Florentines that modern scholars have been able to reconstruct period understandings of Italy's ancient, pre-Roman past. Recent scholarly efforts have demonstrated that the civilization and art of the Etruscans seem to have been a subject of great and continued interest to Renaissance Tuscans, effectively refuting long-held beliefs that that "rediscovery" of Etruria was largely a phenomenon of scientific and ethnographically-minded Englishmen of the nineteenth century.¹¹ While a great number of Etruscan sites are still considered and documented as having been discovered within the fairly recent past, Renaissance records seem to indicate that the large-scale excavation of tombs was a relatively common occurrence.

A number of tombs outside Florence bear graffiti from the late Quattrocento and early Cinquecento, inscriptions of names and dates indicating numerous visits in little more than a decade, with further evidence pointing to these tombs having been stripped of their grave goods as early as 1400.¹² This concern with substantial, physical items of Etruscan culture is particularly salient, as period sources often focused on description of the unique character of Etruscan tombs' architecture, sarcophagi and other remains. Grave goods within a Volterranean cave-tomb were described in detail by humanist Antonio Ivani in a letter from 1466,¹³ and in 1474, Ivani was known to have sent to Lorenzo de' Medici numerous finds from local tombs,

¹¹ Authors working to "reclaim" the rediscovery of Etruscan Antiquity for Renaissance Italians include Steven Bule, Amanda Collins, Gilda Bartolini and Piera Bocci Pacini. See works cited.

¹² Panofsky 100, Bartolini and Pacini 453.

¹³ Bartolini and Pacini 459.

including a small bronze Heracle figure.¹⁴ In the mid-Cinquecento, humanists Tomasso Braccioli and Rinaldo Baldelli wrote of their excavations of tombs in the Cortona area, making sketches of terracotta vases and burial urns, going so far as to send items of particular interest, including spears, swords and lamps, to Grand Duke Cosimo I for examination.¹⁵ Within this same timeframe, Giorgio Vasari wrote to Vincenzo Borghini describing a vaulted, circular tomb in Cortona, including a rough sketch of the site to further illuminate the tomb's wondrously strange interior.¹⁶ Perhaps most intriguing of all are documents concerning Vicino's friend, neighbor and liege lord, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, who requested that all "*oggetti e frammenti antiche*," excavated from the necropoli of Tarquinia, including stones, gold and over six thousand pounds of metalwork, be sent to the Roman cathedral of San Giovanni in Laterano for the decoration of capitals and columns.¹⁷ While many of these metals were smelted and repurposed for decorative or monetary purposes, the connection between the archaeological riches of Tarquinia and Fulvio Orsini—Vicino's nephew, working as an antiquarian under the patronage of Alessandro Farnese—is tantalizing, particularly given the young Orsini's interest in Etruscan antiquities.¹⁸

While the city of Tarquinia proved to be a particularly fertile site for Renaissance excavations and explorations into the Etruscan world—detailed correspondence between humanists Lorenzo Vitelli and Francesco Filelfo concerning paintings within a tomb outside the city have proved so accurate that the site can today be identified as the Mercareccia tomb¹⁹—the principal site of discovery was Castellina in Chianti, where in 1507 a wealth of Etruscan items, including

¹⁴ Bule 311.

¹⁵ Bartolini and Pacini 458.

¹⁶ Bartolini and Pacini 458.

¹⁷ Bule 312, Hillard 143.

¹⁸ Steingräber and Prayon 105.

¹⁹ Bartolini and Pacini 451.

jewelry, sarcophagi, urns, metalwork and sculptures were found, instigating great enthusiasm and curiosity across Tuscany.²⁰ While there is no shortage of period documentation that speaks to Renaissance inquisitiveness and the marvelous wonder of excavation and discovery, Steven Bule notes that the cataloging of finds from these sites are in actuality “fairly bland, with no real surprise or excitement,” concluding that such lack of zeal seems to indicate a habitualness or normalcy to these types of events.²¹ Bule cites the expansion of cities across Tuscany in the Trecento and early Quattrocento as a driving force in the excavation of Etruscan goods, which could be found in such abundance across the region that certain digs unearthed upwards of two hundred items a day, thus making such finds relatively commonplace.²²

While these physical vestiges of an Etruscan past clearly abounded in Tuscany and northern Lazio, the question remains concerning precisely how much accurate, reliable knowledge Renaissance Italians truly possessed of Etruscan history, civilization, and cultural practices. While references to Etruscans are relatively common in the writings of celebrated Quattrocento Florentines, the authors demonstrate limited knowledge of the ancient, pre-Roman past. Leonardo Bruni’s 1442 text, *History of the Florentine People*, unambiguously heaps praise upon Etruscan wisdom, power, dignity and judiciousness, and yet much of the text reads as a politically-motivated aggrandization and anachronistic displacement of Florentine republican sentiments fused with Livy’s histories of the Roman-Etruscan wars.²³ Bruni’s valorization of Etruscan Fiesole and its inhabitants’ resistance to Roman rule contributed to period ideals concerning the noble and indomitable Florentine spirit, forwarding Etruscanness as a point of pride and distinct local identity, enshrining the suburb as the ur-site of Florentine independence

²⁰ Hillard 138-140, Bartolini and Pacini 453.

²¹ Bule 312.

²² Bule 312.

²³ Hillard 40, 44.

and character.²⁴ This mapping of contemporary principles and concerns upon the Etruscan past as seen in Bruni's writings runs as a common theme throughout the vast majority of Renaissance re-presentations of the Etruscan world. Alberti, too, partakes of this dialogue of abstract and projected Etruscan-ness, ascribing the invention of sculpture and temple architecture to their civilization, relying heavily on a buoying sense of Tuscan pride and biased readings of Pliny and Vitruvius for his reconstruction of Etruscan values and aesthetics.²⁵ Similar comments were made by Lorenzo Ghiberti, the celebrated Florentine sculptor, who wrote in 1420: "I believe that, at that time more than any other, the art of painting flourished in Etruria—and even more importantly that it ever did in Greece."²⁶ While this comment has led some Etruscologists and art historians to believe that Ghiberti had first-hand knowledge of painted tombs—a reasonable scenario well within the realm of possibility—Ghiberti's intent is clear: to accentuate and supply storied lineage to contemporary Florentine artistic prowess.

In effect, the presence of a shrouded, partially-known Etruscan past provided a manipulatable, alternate Antiquity for central Italians to rally around in opposition to Roman primacy and hegemony, allowing Tuscan culture to "[regain] independence from the Rome-centric vision of the world" which prevailed among medieval sensibilities.²⁷ The Etruscans of the Renaissance Florentine imagination are exactly that: imaginative products of localized nationalism, standing as empty vessels of meaning upon which any necessary signification may be inscribed.²⁸ In the absence of definitive knowledge of Etruscan antiquity, the bevy of unknowns served not as hindrances, but as expedients in the construction of a legitimizing ancient past. The air of

²⁴ Hillard 38-40.

²⁵ Hillard 144-145.

²⁶ Bule 310.

²⁷ Hillard 6.

²⁸ Such fanciful and exaggerated embroideries of local history were hardly a new phenomenon in Italy, as local *campanilismo* frequently led to patriotic aggrandizement. See Rowland 1998, 54.

mysticism and unknowable, enigmatic equivocality surrounding the Etruscans—well in place by the time of Livy and clearly articulated in his *Histories*²⁹—seems to have contributed to this fill-in-the-blank dialogue, in which the image of the Etruscans could be easily molded in favor of certain ideologies, localities or narratives.

And yet, a certain degree of caution is necessary when approaching these recent scholars' assessments of Renaissance Tuscans' connections with and embellishments of the Etruscan past, particularly when comparing or equating them to the historical circumstances and attitudes of Alto Lazio. While the lack of concern for Cinquecento perceptions of Etruscans in Alto Lazio may perhaps be attributed to a certain Tusco-centrism within Renaissance art history, it may also be the result of modern Etruscology's emphasis on Etruscan art, tombs and cultural vestiges that fall within the boundaries of Tuscany. Or perhaps, more simply still, is it because the shadow of Rome looms large over modern Lazio, leaving Etruscan-ness to be conflated with Tuscan-ness? Wherever the root of this problem may lie, the key fact of the matter is that Florence would hardly have been considered the indisputable, reigning capital of ancient Etruria by Cinquecento minds. That honor falls to Viterbo—the *capoluogo* of Alto Lazio—a mere 10 miles from the village of Bomarzo.

Viterbo, lying roughly fifty miles north of Rome, not only claims the distinction of being the only *comune* in Tuscia of substantial size, but also stands as the largest city within the metropolis' immediate sphere of proximity and influence. Viterbo has languished in the shadow of Rome, close enough that its affairs and histories have often been amalgamated into or eclipsed by those of Rome itself, a little sister overlooked in the wake of its larger, more powerful and more distinguished sibling, unable to forge a wholly independent identity. Coupled with the dominating force of Roman antiquity upon Renaissance culture, art and history, Viterbo's place

²⁹ Livy V.1, V.15.

in the shadow of Rome seemed all but assured. Yet such would not stay the case, due to the radical interventions of one particular *Viterbese*: Giovanni Nanni.

A Tangled Web of Histories

Known simply as Annio da Viterbo, the Dominican friar took it upon himself to forge a new history and destiny for his city that would separate Viterbo from and match that of Rome. While such an aspiration was hardly uncommon for his time, as the latter half of the Renaissance would see a monumental surge in alternative, non-Roman histories that valorized local personalities, narratives and aesthetics “from Novgorod to Naples,”³⁰ Annio’s rewriting of Viterbese history stands apart through the author’s inventiveness and sheer audacity. As in the case of the Florentine appropriation of the Etruscan mythos, Annio’s lack of concrete information about Alto Lazio’s Etruscan past could hardly be considered a hindrance. While fifteenth-century antiquarians were aware of Viterbo’s Etruscan past in an abstract sense, only scant concrete details concerning the city’s history or lineage could be teased from Ancient Roman sources, thus allowing Renaissance minds to fill in the gaps and construct their own glorious narrative of Viterbo’s place on the world stage.³¹ Annio went above and beyond; his liberally embroidered history of Viterbo told a story so magnificent that it surpassed mere rivalry with or alternativity to Rome, catapulting it instead into such a realm of superlatives, grandiosity and crucial significance that the legacy of Viterbo stood poised to outshine that of Rome itself.

While best known for his *Antiquitates*, first published in 1498, Annio’s efforts to resuscitate the glory of Etruscan Viterbo began years earlier, his assertions transforming and crystallizing over time into those eventually put forth in his magnum opus. In 1491, his first published treatise—largely concerned with a needlessly inventive genealogy of the Farnese family—

³⁰ Grafton 1990, 14.

³¹ Rowland 1998, 54.

intimated the extent of Annio's fervent *campanilismo*, launching the author on his single-minded quest to reveal the sacred destiny and true supremacy of Viterbo.³² This particular treatise touched upon the founding of Viterbo, for which Annio wove together a complex tapestry of factual ancient sources and outright falsehoods to bolster his claim that the city and Italian civilization itself were established by the Egyptian gods Isis and Osiris.³³ This fledgling civilization evolved into a great Etruscan Empire which, according to Annio, colonized and brought learning to all corners of the world.³⁴

While this argument was further developed in a second treatise, Annio partially recanted these declarations in a third, arguing instead that it was Janus—an Etruscan deity later incorporated into the Roman pantheon of gods—who brought civilization to Italy, founding Viterbo as his capitol and establishing the Etruscans as his chosen people.³⁵ This decision to locate the generative seed of Etruscan culture, and consequently the origin of all human civilization and knowledge within Etruria itself, instead of Egypt, marks a turning point in Annio's 'scholarship,' as it emphasizes his single-minded drive to demonstrate the absolute preeminence of Viterbo, and to associate the greatest glories and triumphs of humanity not with the Greco-Roman tradition, but with his particular region.

Annio's later texts elaborated upon and further embellished these claims concerning Janus and the founding of Etruscan society and, perhaps in an effort to downplay the problematic, sacrilegious nature of arguing for a pagan deity's actual, phenomenological existence, Annio contended that Janus was actually the biblical Noah, who had chosen Viterbo as the ideal

³² Collins 2000, 60.

³³ Collins 2000, 60; Stephens 1989, 102.

³⁴ Collins 2000, 72.

³⁵ Collins 2000, 69.

location to rebuild postdiluvian civilization.³⁶ Such a claim put Viterbo at the forefront of world history as the original capitol of humanity, a city older than Babylon³⁷ and more important in the grand scheme of human affairs than Rome or Jerusalem as the true cradle of civilization. The Etruscans stood elevated above all other ancient peoples as true progenitors of civilization, for as descendants of Noah, they inherited not only his worldly wisdom, which they spread across the globe,³⁸ but also his close connection to the Judeo-Christian God, thus ennobling the Etruscan people as more than simple pagans. Through this exhumation and reawakening of the region's illustrious past, Annio supplied Viterbo with a glorious lineage and history, the lack of which had been so keenly felt in the Quattrocento,³⁹ effectively casting Alto Lazio as the original Holy Land, with the Etruscans and their descendents as the true chosen people of God.⁴⁰ Further complicating Annio's grand and often circuitous claims was his assertion that Noah and his family had actually been giants—in fact, the only pious and genial members of their sinful and bellicose race⁴¹—creating an even more magnificent and superlative genealogy of superhuman powers and intellect for the Etruscans and, by extension, the fifteenth-century residents of Alto Lazio as well.

In order to support and authenticate his outrageously embellished history of Viterbo and its epic foundation, Annio relied heavily on doctored sources, namely antique primary texts altered or forged by Annio himself interspersed with references to reliable texts by the likes of Aristotle, Vergil and Thomas Aquinas.⁴² Annio's greatest counterfeit text was arguably his 'recovery' of the lost books of Berosus the Chaldean, who was known through the works of Pliny the Elder

³⁶ Collins 2000, 74; Stephens 2004, 208; Stephens 1989, 104.

³⁷ Stephens 2004, 208.

³⁸ Collins 2000, 72.

³⁹ Rowland 1998, 54.

⁴⁰ Collins 2000, 74.

⁴¹ Stephens 1989, 103; Grafton 1990, 12.

⁴² Stephens 1989, 102; Collins 2001, 113-114.

and Flavius Josephus to have been a Babylonian sage and astrologer whose histories partially aligned with certain Old Testament narratives.⁴³ With ‘authenticity’ of the documents corroborated by Berosus’ mention in the works of such illustrious authors, Annio’s trail of citations appeared watertight, for by folding his own fabrications in among credible sources, he legitimized his invented sources, in turn legitimizing his far-fetched claims. Through this masterful juxtaposition of distinguished Antique sources, biblical narrative, ancient myth and calculated falsehood, Annio’s publications appeared to conform to proper scholarly structures, as they “looked—and read—like a comprehensive and powerful history of the world.”⁴⁴ Furthermore, by presenting unknown texts freshly discovered and translated, Annio styled himself as a great academic on the cutting edge of his field, more knowledgeable than the majority of Italian humanists still hindered by their devoted study of and misguided favor for Greco-Roman Antiquity.

Additional support for Annio’s textual forgeries came in the form of fabricated antiquities which, when put into conversation with his publications, functioned as a “mutually reinforcing circuit between visual and verbal document,”⁴⁵ that irrefutably connected the Etruscans to Noachian Viterbo. While the fabrication of pseudo-Etruscan antiquities seems almost counterproductive in a region teeming with Etruscan ruins and remnants, Annio’s calculated construction of objects carrying very deliberate meanings essentially forced the enigmatic air surrounding Etruscan civilization to function in his favor. Since the late Quattrocento possessed minimal concrete knowledge of the Etruscan past, Annio’s claim to having broken their silence with specific ur-objects which at long last shed light on Etruscan history, culture and origins was groundbreaking. If authentic objects and sites could not be made to speak for the Etruscans, then

⁴³ Collins 2000, 73; Stephens 2004, 209.

⁴⁴ Grafton 1990, 12.

⁴⁵ Nagel and Wood 247.

the next best option was to manufacture a Rosetta Stone that served as a mouthpiece for the culture as a whole, helping to put all other Etruscan traces and fragments into perspective, while simultaneously bending to the will of Annio's propagandistic ideologies.

The majority of these objects were tablets inscribed with Greek, faux-hieroglyphics or pseudo-Etruscan script created by Annio himself,⁴⁶ which would then be planted at specific sites around Viterbo, only to be excavated by Annio at a later date on staged digs for Etruscan treasures.⁴⁷ The first stelae 'discovered' by Annio were the Libiscillan tablets, inscribed with mysterious Etruscan characters that, according to Annio, were enchanted and visible only under certain circumstances and at particular angles.⁴⁸ Such mystical properties seemed to make perfect sense, given the enigmatic and oracular connotations associated with the Etruscans since the rise of Ancient Rome, and thus thanks to this supernatural "*lapis incantatus*"⁴⁹ Annio was able to decode the Etruscan language, something that contemporary humanists, including Leon Battista Alberti, had been unable to decipher.⁵⁰ The Etruscan language, according to Annio, was in actuality an archaic tongue from which Hebrew eventually descended,⁵¹ adding additional credence to his claims regarding the Etruscans' pivotal originary role in the flowering of Western civilization as a whole. Furthermore, his alleged ability to read Etruscan set Annio at the forefront of Renaissance Etruscan studies as the singular authority in the field, the one man through whom the Etruscans were able to speak and impart their wisdom to the modern world.

⁴⁶ Nagel and Wood 247; Stephens 1989, 103; Collins 2007, 113.

⁴⁷ Collins 2001, 113; Stephens 1989, 103. Annio's most notorious instance of 'discovery' occurred in 1493, when the friar staged an excavation for Pope Alexander VI and his court, whereupon a great cache of Etruscan goods were found outside the city of Viterbo, thus inspiring Annio to launch into an impromptu lecture concerning the great significance on the finds and the pivotal role Viterbo played in the history of human civilization and Christianity. See Collins 2001, 113.

⁴⁸ Collins 2000, 61.

⁴⁹ Collins 2000, 61.

⁵⁰ Collins 2000, 6; Scaglia 21.

⁵¹ Stephens 1989, 110; Stephens 2004, 208.

This wisdom was great indeed, and nearly all of it involved the singular supremacy of Viterbo and its surrounding countryside. The Maeonic tablets, the second set of stelae promoted by Annio in his writings, discussed the Ancient Roman deity Magna Mater (or Cybele) who, according to the tablets had actually been the queen of the Etruscan King Jaisius, a direct descendant of Janus/Noah.⁵² Well versed in ancient history, Annio dismissed and wove a convincing defense against Cybele's Anatolian origins by arguing that she had emigrated with Jaisius' brother, Dardanus, from Etruria to found Troy, and through the progression of time was mistakenly deified and eventually imported back to the Italian peninsula as a goddess.⁵³ The inscriptions also implied that Isis, the Egyptian mother-deity and Queen of Heaven, was also present and part of Etruscan society, an assertion tautologically supported by Annio's very own Berossus the Chaldean, who asserted that Isis was the Etruscan inventor of bread.⁵⁴ In addition, Annio contended that these Maeonic stelae referred to tablets that were older still, which succinctly delineated the founding of Viterbo by Janus/Noah. This slew of revelations effectively placed the Etruscan civilization as the pinnacle and progenitor of all human endeavor, for the founders of the great nations and empires of Antiquity were all Viterban in origin. Viterbo was the true omphalos of the world, the cradle of civilization where all of human knowledge and aspiration had been birthed. Furthermore, the eastern Mediterranean connection also accounted for the Greek epigraphy on the stelae,⁵⁵ which Annio claimed bore Etruscan—or more specifically, Maeonic—elements,⁵⁶ implying local manufacture, and perhaps even the local invention of the Greek language itself. Of greater note than the use of Greek perhaps, is the

⁵² Collins 2000, 61-62.

⁵³ Collins 2001, 61-62, 69.

⁵⁴ Collins 2001, 65.

⁵⁵ Collins 2001, 63.

⁵⁶ Collins 2001, 63-65.

distinctive use of the word ‘Maeonic,’ as in his later texts concerning the history of Viterbo and its outlying cities, Annio identifies Bomarzo as the seat of the ancient city Maeonium.⁵⁷

Annio’s final piece of noteworthy physical evidence was not so much a forgery in its own right, but an assemblage of various sculptural reliefs heavily embroidered with Annian pseudo-history. The so-called *marmo osiriano*, which Annio described as a tablet of Viterban origin commemorating Osiris, was actually an amalgamation of sculptural reliefs dating from the twelfth century to the early Renaissance.⁵⁸ Annio, however, argued for the works’ authenticity, claiming that its place below the pulpit in Viterbo’s Cathedral signified the efforts of the city’s forefathers to “keep the eternal memory of the antiquity of the city before our eyes,”⁵⁹ and to emphasize that not only had the Egyptian god Osiris visited the city, but that he had lived among and possibly descended from the stock of Janus/Noah. Despite Annio’s arguments that the *marmo*’s seemingly anachronistic and incongruent figural imagery pointed to “sacred Egyptian letters symbolizing the historical encounter between the [Etruscans], the Giants and the Egyptians,”⁶⁰ it is clear that Annio’s position concerning Osiris and his exact role in the history of Viterbo had vacillated wildly when compared to his earlier texts. Annio’s shifting assertions and conflicting claims, which at various times advanced that Osiris had founded Viterbo, visited Viterbo and been of Viterban origin himself, clearly demonstrate the nonsensical and ridiculous nature of his scholarship. However, it is not Annio’s exact claims and the degree of sense they legitimately make that is actually of concern here, as they have long since been disproven. Instead the importance lies in the fact that Annio anchored all manner of Ancient traditions and histories to Viterbo in order to ennoble the city and place it front and center in world affairs.

⁵⁷ Dennis 216; Bredekamp vol. I, 84-85.

⁵⁸ Collins 2001, 67; Nagel and Wood 249.

⁵⁹ Nagel and Wood 247.

⁶⁰ Nagel and Wood 249.

A New Ascendancy for an Ancient Land

This issue of whether or not Annio's structures of reasoning and key arguments hold together under close inspection is effectively moot. His works were highly lauded, and reached a vast audience across Europe, with his seminal text, *Antiquitates*, published in at least eighteen different editions between 1498 and 1612.⁶¹ Annio stood as one of the most read and most widely quoted authors of the Cinquecento,⁶² and while his work drew attention from detractors and naysayers—particularly in Cinquecento Florence—his narratives reached their height in popularity during the years of 1520 and 1575.⁶³ Giorgio Vasari himself cited Annio's *marmo osiriano* as irrefutable evidence of the Etruscan's superior skill as sculptors.⁶⁴

It is difficult to overestimate the popularity of Annio's texts or the esteem held for him in Viterbo, as he was immortalized in fresco by Teodoro Siciliano in 1558 among other elite *Viterbesi* in the Council Chamber of the city's Palazzo dei Priori.⁶⁵ Annio's work was again saluted in the late 1580's as Baldassare Croce and Tarquinio Ligustri frescoed the palazzo's Sala Reggia with a series of *istorie* chosen from Annio's texts, including a scene of Janus/Noah's founding of the fledgling Etruscan civilization.⁶⁶ Even centuries later, after much of Europe had discounted Annio's claims as mere propagandistic forgery, the city continued to hold him in high esteem, convinced of his innocence and good intentions, proudly displaying his tablets in the Palazzo dei Priori.⁶⁷

Looming large, of course, remains the matter of whether or not Vicino Orsini could have owned or had access to Annio's writings, and if these histories could have played a pivotal role

⁶¹ Stephens 2004, 203-204.

⁶² Stephens 1989, 101.

⁶³ Schoonhoven 463.

⁶⁴ Nagel and Wood 249.

⁶⁵ Hillard 63.

⁶⁶ Hillard 63-64.

⁶⁷ Stephens 2004, 214; Hillard 63-64.

in the imagery or creation of the Sacro Bosco. This question of Vicino's familiarity with the works of Annio is perhaps too simplistic—and essentially tantamount to asking if Lorenzo de' Medici would have read Leonardo Bruni's *History of the Florentine People*—for surely Vicino would have been well acquainted with the prevailing histories of his region, and Annio's erudition and esoteric bent would no doubt have appealed to Vicino's eclectic tastes and interests in the arcane and exotic.⁶⁸ In addition, the fact that Francesco Sansovino, close friend to Vicino and biographer of the Orsini family, published an Italian translation of Annio's *Antiquitates* seems to provide further evidence that Annio and his arguments were of significant concern and interest to Vicino and his learned circle of friends and compatriots.

Further evidence pointing to interest in Annio's histories comes from Vicino's possession and display of a gigantic bone, borrowed from Cardinal Madruzzo and purported to have come from a giant,⁶⁹ clearly a charged object given the key role given giants in Annio's history of Viterbo. It is possible that Vicino may have considered this bone to be a relic of Janus/Noah or one of his descendants, and thus a piece of vitally important local history, instead of a simple *Wunderkammer*-type oddity. Given Annio's mention of such remains in one of his many treatises outlining the foundation and history of Viterbo,⁷⁰ Vicino's ownership of such a relic seems hardly coincidental. The discovery of a gigantic skull near Viterbo's church of Santa Rosa and the excavation of a gigantic skeleton outside of Tarquinia,⁷¹ as well as instances of Etruscan tombs outside of Saturnia and Orbetello yielding great caches of massive, prehistoric

⁶⁸ Oleson 416-417; Dotson 214.

⁶⁹ Calvesi 2009, 143.

⁷⁰ Feo 2008, 24.

⁷¹ Feo 2008, 24.

bones,⁷² must have stood as incontrovertible proof of Annio's claims of giants, bolstering weak points in Annio's reasoning that were not fully supported by his epigraphic forgeries.

While this wholehearted belief in giants may appear to be incongruent with long-held perceptions of Renaissance rationalism and the rise of measured, scientific logic, it seems perhaps to be indicative of a strain of Cinquecento culture more receptive to mystery and the irrationality of emotion, which gravitated toward the arcane and enigmatic world of the Etruscans. The appeal of this enigmatic, occulted and somewhat foreboding articulation of Antiquity may point to another, darker side of the Renaissance—or “Anti-Renaissance” as coined by Eugenio Battisti—for which the Etruscans seem to have served as a kind of muse or prevailing spirit. Annio's forgeries, invented histories and activation of the local myth and mystery of the Etruscan past seem to have satisfied a need specific to his particular time and place, which called for an alternate history and aesthetic distinctly separate from that of the Greco-Roman cultural hegemony. This fascination with the Etruscan past should not, however, be viewed as an alternative or opposite to the influence of Ancient Rome upon the Renaissance, but should instead be approached as part of a complex cultural landscape in which multiple spheres of Antiquity sometimes merged or complemented each other, engaging in more of a playful *paragone* of time and location than outright opposition.

Yet Annio da Viterbo appears to have approached Rome and Etruria as polar opposites, casting his hometown as the protagonist of human history, and Rome as an inferior imitator usurping much of the praise Viterbo deserved. Annio's glorification of his region, as well as his fanatical insistence upon the local origins of practically all humanity's cultural endeavors appear to stem from this drive to divorce himself not only from the sphere of Rome, but by association, Ancient Greece as well. By locating the generative nucleus of Western civilization in Viterbo,

⁷² Feo 2008, 25.

Annio seems to have sought to destabilize what he perceived to be a Classical stranglehold on central Italian culture, simultaneously disavowing Greek culture, to which he claimed Italian civilization was now in no way beholden.⁷³ In Annio's eyes, Magna Graecia and Ancient Rome imprudently looked beyond the riches of Etruria to partake in the aesthetics and paradigms of inferior foreign cultures, creating bastardized societies vastly inferior to that which had flourished in Viterbo.⁷⁴ Declaring that the cultural and historical laurels bestowed upon Ancient Greece and Rome rightfully belonged to Etruscan Viterbo, Annio regarded contemporary Italian praise for, interest in and desire to emulate these civilizations as "unjustified, dishonest and unpatriotic," for who would willingly glorify a culture whose influence overtook and led to the downfall of the true chosen people?⁷⁵

Linking the Roman adoption of "alien" Greek civilization to the Republic's wars against and ensuing extermination of Ancient Italic peoples,⁷⁶ Annio seems to have served as a figurehead of sorts for a growing period impulse to look to one's own localized past for inspiration and legitimacy. This agenda is clear in Annio's scathing critique of the Ancient authors so highly praised and widely studied by Italian humanists and literati, for in the presentation of his various forgeries and fabrications, Annio proudly asserted the pivotal role that his newly found Etruscan texts would play in the discrediting and correction of numerous accounts by Ptolemy, Strabo, Pliny, and a myriad of other Ancient authors.⁷⁷ His hatred for the Greeks nearly eclipsing his love of Viterbo, Annio's *Antiquitates* stands a "veritable indictment of the Greeks,"⁷⁸ in which an alternate approach to the past, present and future of the Western world are presented from a

⁷³ Stephens 1989, 115.

⁷⁴ Stephens 1989, 104-105. Annio, however, either willfully ignored or remained naïve to the fact that Etruscan civilization was extremely hybrid, and shared much with Hellenic culture. Similarly, his reductivist approach to the Roman world overlooked the city's indigenous Latin roots.

⁷⁵ Stephens 1989, 104.

⁷⁶ Stephens 1989, 104.

⁷⁷ Stephens 1989, 312; Collins 2000, 68.

⁷⁸ Tigerstedt 303.

localized, Etruscan perspective that effectively sought to sideline and render impotent Greco-Roman authority.⁷⁹

With this period emphasis of Viterbocentric narrative and the valorization of the Etruscan world of Alto Lazio, the question arises regarding how exactly the Sacro Bosco corresponds to these local trends and teleologies. The site's overt eschewal of the conventional geometric linearity and classicizing garden tropes so readily visible in contemporary gardens such as Villa d'Este, Villa Lante or Villa Medici di Castello appears to indicate the privileging of a unique and entirely separate aesthetic. Could the Sacro Bosco be an experiment in or the deliberate creation of specifically Annian Etruscan aesthetics? Might it be a deliberate evocation of the region's mysterious and glorious past as the Etruscan *axis mundi*, a visualization and reification of the wild, atemporal *genius loci* that pulses throughout Alto Lazio, bestowing the *campagna viterbese* with a sense of enigmatic vibrancy and primordial gravitas? Shedding a modicum of light on this question of intent and localized Etruscan heritage is the embellished, Annian genealogy of the Orsini, providing a bridge between the region's ineffably Etruscan *genius loci* and Annio da Viterbo's fancifully exaggerated histories.

While Annio's inventions provided a fertile source for royal houses and noble families across Europe to "pillage" in the fanciful embroidering of their own ancestries,⁸⁰ he reserved explicit discussion of family lineages for both his benefactors and the most prestigious houses of Tuscia.⁸¹ The Orsini received particular praise from Annio, who located their beginnings in the age of Janus, and the flowering of Noachian Alto Lazio,⁸² a claim seconded and expounded upon by Francesco Sansovino, who was the close friend of Vicino, Orsini family biographer and

⁷⁹ Hillard 60.

⁸⁰ Stephens 1998, 108-110; Hillard 70-71.

⁸¹ Collins 2000, 60, 71.

⁸² Lazzaro 126.

translator of Annio's *Antiquitates* into vernacular Italian. In his *L'Historia di Casa Orsina*, Sansovino collapsed distinctions between Arcadia and Annian Etruria, claiming the two to have been one and the same.⁸³ Such a connection is particularly salient given the dedication of Sansovino's edition of Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* to Vicino, a gesture that appears to have been motivated by more than just flattery, but by a larger ideological linkage of the Orsini family, Etruscanness and the landscape of Alto Lazio. In his foreword, Sansovino wrote that Sannazaro's verse contained such a wealth of pastoral scenes reminiscent of Bomarzo and the Sacro Bosco that in its reading his heart stirred with the greatest of longing for Orsini lands.⁸⁴ By fixing the Orsini lineage squarely in Arcadian Etruria and openly comparing Sannazaro's panegyric to the Sacro Bosco itself, Sansovino forged strong and compelling links between the family's reputation and the ancient power of their lands. His unabashed aggrandizement of the family outstripped even Annio's commendations, for Sansovino wove a complex and equally fallacious genealogical web that proved the Orsini to be the oldest and essentially the originary family of the entire Etruscan region,⁸⁵ casting Vicino as the ultimate Etruscan prince, paragon of and heir to the Viterbo-centric world constructed by Annio. The raw beauty of the land, and its pure, untouched spirit, pregnant with the enigmatic power and mystical acumen of the Etruscans, had formed the Orsini into archetypal descendents of Janus, their heritage and character inextricable from their physical place of origin.

This legacy was explicitly discussed by Alfonso Ceccarelli who, in his poem "Il Simolacro di Casa Orsini," lavished praise upon Vicino for his Sacro Bosco, which Ceccarelli described as renewing the ancient glory of the primogenial Etruscan Orsini, thus honoring both Vicino's

⁸³ Lazzaro 126; Bredekamp vol. I, 121; Cazzato 156-157.

⁸⁴ Bury 1983, 108, Kelif 128.

⁸⁵ Bredekamp vol. II, 121; Kelif 128.

familial roots and the memory of Golden Age Etruria.⁸⁶ Of particular note is Ceccarelli's spelling of Etruria within the poem as "Hetruria," a particularly Annian conceit⁸⁷ that seems to imply a natural connection among contemporary minds between the Orsini, Vicino's *bosco*, the Etruscan world, and the histories of Annio da Viterbo. In the eyes of his contemporaries, Vicino appears to have been understood as responding to the historical topography, displaying and living out the sacred Etruscan heritage of his region in a site dedicated to and playfully interacting with the history of both his family and the local landscape, a claim which grows all the stronger when viewed in conjunction with the Etruscan features and history particular to Bomarzo and the lands directly surrounding the Sacro Bosco.

⁸⁶ Bredekamp vol. II, 91; Lazzaro 126.

⁸⁷ Rowland 2004, 76.

Chapter 2 Etruscan Elements within and without the *Bosco*

The small village of Bomarzo, perching atop a *tuffo* promontory, rises sharply from the misty, overgrown Silva Cimina, a cluster of grey and brown structures amid the vast sea of deep green vegetation. With Monte Cimino directly to the southwest and the Tiber to the northeast, Bomarzo situates itself in the midst of a landscape defined by extremes, where raw, stony terrain meets the dense primeval forest, punctuated by a juxtaposition of craggy peaks and deep, narrow valleys. Positioned atop its *tuffo* bluff overlooking the countryside, the town conveys the impression of complete removal from the outside world, frozen against the march of time in the stillness of the rough Tuscan backcountry. This dense tangle of rock and woodland that surrounds Bomarzo has been described as a “magic triangle,”¹ where pristine nature is relatively untouched by the structures and interventions of human civilization. Imparting a profoundly archaic atmosphere, the volcanic landscape carries a sense of time unaltered and unbroken, as though one has stepped into a *terra incognita* wherein the past is never fully divorced from the present.

Despite this abstract impression of a deep and pervading antiquity, surprisingly little is known with any degree of certainty about the early history of Bomarzo. Much like the Sacro Bosco itself, the origins of Bomarzo are shrouded in mystery and built upon conjecture, half-truths and poetic embellishments. Difficulties arise in creating an accurate account of the town’s history due to Bomarzo’s status as a relative geographic and political backwater, and partly due to the sheer number of discrepancies and subtle variations that exist regarding the name of the town itself. The word “Bomarzo” is often cited by modern historians as being derived from Polimartium, meaning “City of Mars,” which, according to tradition, was the name associated

¹ Mazzuoli and Moscatelli 5.

with the region beginning in the late Iron Age.² While scholarly attributions of Polimartium as the historical title for Bomarzo date to Thomas Dempster's seventeenth-century text, *De Etruria Regali*, actual usage of the term during the era to which it is ascribed is lacking. Ultimately, primary source evidence is nonexistent when it comes to nearly all facets of Etruscan, Roman and early medieval habitation of the region, including the most rudimentary detail of what precisely the locale was called. Nevertheless, Father Luigi Vittori in his exhaustive—albeit slanted—nineteenth-century history of the city, insists upon the antiquity of the name Polimartium, declaring it to be of purely Etruscan origin.³ Vittori's claim was critiqued by the famed nineteenth-century Etruscologist George Dennis in his landmark text, *The Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria*, wherein the author highlighted several incongruities, emphasizing that the term not only appears solely in medieval texts,⁴ but is also etymologically suspect in its amalgamation of both Greek and Latin.⁵ Any degree of lingual consistency or linear transformation across time is further blurred by Vicino Orsini's indiscriminate use of Polimarzio, Buonmarzo, Bummarzo, and numerous other spellings when referring to his ducal seat.⁶

The prehistory and etymology of Bomarzo becomes all the more convoluted when taking into account another name that has been ascribed to the town: Maeonia. This appellation is also routinely cited as the archaic title of the region⁷, but just as in the case of Polimartium, actual

² While the archaic Polimartium seems to have first been introduced into discussions of the Sacro Bosco by Eugenio Battisti in *L'Antirinasimento* (see page 126), earlier discussions of the name and its etymology occur in the works of Thomas Dempster (110), George Dennis (216) and Luigi Vittori (10).

³ Vittori 10.

⁴ Dennis 216.

⁵ Dennis 226.

⁶ In his letters, Vicino primarily uses the proper spelling of Bomarzo, but also refers to the village as Polimarzio, Buonmarzo, Buonmarzio, Bummarzo, Buomarzo, Bommarzo, and Bumarzo among other spellings. See Bredekamp vol II, pages 13-65.

⁷ While use of the term Polimartium is much more common in literature concerning the Sacro Bosco, those scholars who refer to the name Maeonia generally cite Luigi Vittori's text as their source of information. See Bruschi 1955, 3-5. In general, usage of the term Maeonia is limited to texts that deal more specifically with the history and Etruscan archaeology of Bomarzo and the surrounding countryside, and includes the works of Vittori, Dennis, Dempster, and Baglione, among others.

historical usage is suspect. The most vocal proponent of the name Maeonia was Luigi Vittori, who discussed the word as a key indicator of Bomarzo's great antiquity and importance, since Maeonia was also a title for the ancient Anatolian kingdom of Lydia, and thus implied—at least, for Vittori—a linear connection between the two sites.⁸ Vittori cites ancient authors' references to Maeonia to establish and verify his claims, yet the majority of passages upon which he relies, which include the works of Strabo, Pliny and Herodotus, discuss Maeonia and Maeonians firmly within the context of the eastern Mediterranean.⁹ Vittori does, however, touch upon several ancient texts that make claims concerning the Lydian Maeonians settling within the ancient lands of Etruria,¹⁰ yet no textual connections between Lydian colonies and the actual site of Bomarzo have ever been established.

Thus the question: how did Maeonia and Bomarzo become linked? Unsurprisingly, the answer is Annio da Viterbo. In his examination of Bomarzo, George Dennis traces conflation of the two names straight to Annio's translation of *Origines*, a lost history written by Cato the Elder, which—naturally—the Viterbese friar happened to 'serendipitously' find.¹¹ As in the case of his 'recovery' of the works of Berosus the Chaldean, authentic historical documentation of Cato's *Origines* gave credence and authority to Annio's doctored texts, elevating them beyond reproach, while simultaneously bolstering his own reputation as a reputable scholar for his recovery of works previously considered lost to time. True to form, the reuse of the name of Maeonia is consistent with Annio's methods of appropriating lost or enigmatic texts and shaping them to corroborate his Viterbocentric worldview, for despite the fact that ancient authors the likes of Vergil and Strabo mentioned Maeonia as situated within southern Etruria, the exact

⁸ Vittori 5-7.

⁹ Vittori 6. See also Pliny book V, chapter 30; Herodotus book VII, chapter 74; Strabo book XII, chapter 8.

¹⁰ Vittori 6-7. Silius Italicus, Strabo and Vergil make passing mention of Lydian/Maeonic colonies on Italian soil. See Silius Italicus IV. 9-13; Strabo V.2; and Vergil VIII. 454-519.

¹¹ Dennis 216.

location of the settlement was never overtly discussed, thus leaving the title free to be co-opted and positioned anywhere within Alto Lazio as best suited Annio's needs. While it is unclear precisely how or why Annio linked Bomarzo with Maeonia, Dennis forwards the hypothesis that Annio connected the two by virtue of Maeonia's aural similarity to Pianmiano, a large, tufaceous plateau on the northeastern outskirts of Bomarzo, studded with Etruscan ruins and necropoleis.¹² Dennis' theory, however, presupposes that the moniker Pianmiano predates Annio's attribution of the name Maeonia to Bomarzo, and while Annio claimed that the town once bore the name *Planum Maeonianum*,¹³ no records other than those penned by the friar himself add credence to this claim. Annio does, however, mention "the remains of an ancient town" in his discussion of *Planum Maeonianum*,¹⁴ providing solid evidence that the plateau's vast network of ruins were relatively well-known during the Renaissance, serving for period minds as visible, irrefutable evidence of Bomarzo's sacred Etruscan past, and locating Bomarzo as a "center of major importance" in Annio's new and improved version of world history.¹⁵

Regardless of how Annio came to link Bomarzo and Maeonia—modern consensus generally casts the connection as an "arbitrary etymological reconstruction"¹⁶—it is clear that the site played a key role in the framing and structuration of the Annian universe. It was, after all, Annio's counterfeit Maeonic tablets that helped forge tangible 'proof' of Noah/Janus' activities in the Viterbo region, locating the origins of civilization in Alto Lazio. In his discussion of the tablets, their stylistic elements and pseudo-Etruscan runic text, Annio frequently elided the terms "Maeonic" and "Etruscan," essentially treating the words as interchangeable synonyms, thereby implying a perceived correlation, at least for Annio, between Bomarzo and an essential kernel of

¹² Dennis 216.

¹³ Dennis 216.

¹⁴ Dennis 216.

¹⁵ Baglione 73.

¹⁶ Baglione 73.

Etruscanness.¹⁷ Through such a lens, Bomarzo is effectively cast as an omphalic, originary site inextricably connected to the sacred destiny and inherent, defining essence of the Etruscan people, thus functioning as a central shrine in the Annian new world order from which the Maeonic tablets emerged as venerable relics attesting to the glory and supremacy of the Etruscan people. The pivotal role of Bomarzo in the history, structure and propagation of the Annian universe could surely not have been lost on Vicino, and while no overt references to the Viterbese friar's texts or worldview have been uncovered in the Duke's personal correspondence, period maps of the region, including the famed *Theatri Orbis Parergon* of Abraham Ortelius, indicate the usage and survival of Annian appellations, with Bomarzo commonly labeled as 'Maeonum.'¹⁸

Ancient Echoes in the *Bosco*

While the writings of Annio da Viterbo clearly demonstrate the elevation of Bomarzo as a pivotal site in the formation and projection of Etruscan history and identity, little consideration has been given within the study of the Sacro Bosco to this facet of Bomarzo's historical and cultural legacy.¹⁹ This profound void in the field of Bomarziana no doubt stems from the wholesale scholarly disavowal of Annio's forgeries and fantastical histories. Yet given the fantastical nature of the Sacro Bosco, the site seems to exist as a kind of kindred spirit to Annio's far-fetched writings, as neither work is particularly rational, realistic or linear, with the Sacro Bosco and the *Antiquitates* alike weaving complex, torturous paths through bizarre worlds of gigantic proportions. Thus, while authors have routinely commented on the Etruscan spirit of the *bosco*, this claim, which at times walks a razor's edge between Romantic sensibility and the

¹⁷ Collins 2000, 63-64.

¹⁸ Baglione 21.

Warburgian *pathosformel*,²⁰ is rarely qualified with discussions of how or why such an air of Etruscanness is so perceptible on the grounds.²¹ While early research concerning the Sacro Bosco proposed some manner of linkage between Alto Lazio's Etruscan past and the park's oddities,²² scholars are beginning to turn toward the matter of what precisely constitutes the palpable impression of Etruscanness within the *bosco*, to probe beyond the atmosphere of mystery and the ineffable, incalculable spirit *genius loci* that flows through and shapes the landscape. Could this Etruscan aspect be more definable and tangible, extending beyond mere sentiment and intuition? A small handful of authors have begun just such an examination, isolating and identifying numerous elements and visual references to Etruscan art, architecture and aesthetics within the *bosco*, likening the site to something not unlike a museum of invented antiquities, where imitation of the historical past is presented as erudite amusement.²³

Within the *bosco* there exist varying degrees of this artificial, re-presented Etruscan antiquity that seem to exert influence upon the artistic program of the *bosco* within a larger spectrum, ranging from the microcosmic—volutes at the base of the *tempietto* that resemble motifs common to Etruscan jewelry from the seventh century BCE²⁴—to the macrocosmic. Vicino's wholesale decision to paint the statues in the *bosco* garish primary colors has been cited as an

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- 20 Oleson forwards the possibility that “the local survival of Etruscan patterns of taste and thought in the person of Vicino Orsini and his workmen” contributed to the unique appearance and organization of the Bosco. See Oleson 411.
- 21 The most flagrant examples of this tendency can be found among “armchair” scholars of the *bosco*, who, as epitomized by G Bazin, conflate the mysteries of the Sacro Bosco with the “mysterious” civilization of the Etruscans. John Oleson, Etruscologist and scholar of the Sacro Bosco, characterizes such publications as “naïve” (see Oleson 411). This transgression, however, is not limited to publications geared to a more casual interest in the site, as noted authors in the larger field of Bomarziana, including Marcello Fagiolo, Eugenio Battisti and Arnaldo Bruschi, have discussed this Etruscan “atmosphere” in relatively abstract terms, skirting concrete details. See Fagiolo 1986, 70-71; Battisti 126; Bruschi 1955, 3 and 14; Bruschi 1963a, 105.
- 22 Settis 17, de Mandiargues 14, as well as an unpublished lecture by Luigi Lotti for the Associazione Archeologica Romana (see Zander 26).
- 23 Bredekamp vol. I, 84-85; Polizzi 2009, 111; Oleson 416-417; Bacino 104. While it appears the Bredekamp was the first to suggest this concept regarding a museum-esque assemblage of amusing, faked antiquities, it is Polizzi, Oleson and Bacino who have expanded the most upon this theme, adding greater depth to Bredekamp's collection of observations and arguments concerning nearly all aspects of the *bosco*.
- 24 Oleson 411.

indication of a larger Etruscan program, as well as signaling a close understanding of ancient tastes and artistic practices, as Etruscan statues and tombs were often decorated with the same bright palette.²⁵ In a similar vein, the composition of the Sacro Bosco itself has at times been compared to the layout of Etruscan rock cut necropoleis, where large masses of worked and unworked *tuffo* rise seemingly at random from the underbrush, “surrounded and animated by uncultivated vegetation.”²⁶ The square-shaped grotto inside the mouth of the iconic roaring *Orco* has likewise been compared to Etruscan rock cut tombs, its simple interior and benches built into the walls drawing comparisons to tombs in Tarquinia and Norchia.²⁷

The crumbling brick tower (Figure 30)—located halfway between the recumbent female nude and the sculptural group of male figures locked in combat—has also been compared to structures from Norchia, in this case a dilapidated Roman tower installed during Republican occupation of Etruscan lands.²⁸ While modern scholars have dated the tower at Norchia to the Roman era, in his examination of Renaissance perceptions of and encounters with Etruscan Antiquity, André Chastel emphasizes the period assumption that all objects and sites encountered within Etruscan lands were understood to be of local Etruscan origin.²⁹ Similar challenges arise concerning Etruscanness in the case of the sloping, covered bench on the northern edge of the *bosco* (Figure 14), which is referred to as an Etruscan bench, a description that finds its origin in an informal guide to the park written by Giovanni Bettini, the original owner of the modern-day Parco dei Mostri.³⁰ While no particular reasons are supplied for the bench’s perceived Etruscanness, one can only assume Bettini is referring to the fact that the niche is largely hewn from the living

²⁵ Coloration of the statues is discussed in Bruschi 1963b, 34; and Bosch 104, while direct connections between Vicino’s pigmented sculptures and Etruscan art/artifacts/architecture can be found in Sheeler 26, and de la Cruz 74.

²⁶ Oleson 411, de Grummond 30 and 34.

²⁷ Battisti 126; Bacino 104.

²⁸ Lazzaro 125-126.

²⁹ Chastel 167.

³⁰ Bettini 30.

rock, or perhaps is comparing the niche to the bed- or bench-like structures found inside the majority of rock cut tombs.³¹

Stronger arguments for intentional display of Etruscanness, however, can be found in some of the Sacro Bosco's architectural features. David Coffin has discussed in-depth the proportions of the *tempietto* and their relatively close adherence to Vitruvius' specifications and descriptions of Etruscan temples,³² and while no such insistently architectural temples have been encountered in Alto Lazio, Vicino, as a well-read man of his day, would no doubt have been familiar with the writings of Vitruvius. Unlike the structures outlined by Vitruvius, rock cut aedicule tombs were much more prevalent in Southern Etruria, standing as a characteristic form easily identifiable as simultaneously ancient and indigenous to the region,³³ thus making the relatively accurate reproduction of this specific type of tomb within the park particularly significant (Figures 53-54). A single mass of worked *tuffo*, the structure lies on its side, half buried in the dirt and undergrowth, forming the right half of a "full-sized, substantially accurate reproduction" of a gabled, rock cut aedicule tomb,³⁴ seemingly cracked in half down the middle, giving the impression that the piece had crumbled away from the rest of a larger edifice and slid down the embankment to its current resting place. In the absence of the other half of the façade, it is clear that the faux-tomb functions as an intentional ruin—a scenic device more commonly associated with eighteenth-century English landscape gardens—that implies natural upheaval, melancholic contemplation of and nostalgia for the grandeur of a bygone era, and the inevitable progression

³¹ Of course, Bettini's claims must be taken with more than a few grains of salt, as first-hand conversations with *bomarzesi* have revealed local perceptions of the original owner of the Parco dei Mostri to have been less a conservator and far more of a showman/profiteer à la P.T. Barnum. The privatization of the Bosco is a sore point for locals, who view the Bettini as monopolizing and growing rich from a resource that could have profoundly benefitted the *comune*. Bettini's guide should first and foremost be approached as a moneymaking venture alongside the slew of Parco dei Mostri souvenirs, which include lighters, ashtrays and collectible plates.

³² Coffin 116-117.

³³ Oleson 411.

³⁴ Oleson 413.

of time as nature overturns, reshapes and reclaims the works of man and Art.³⁵ While the pseudo-ruin clearly articulates Renaissance knowledge of and interest in the historical Etruscan presence in the region, and even hints at a proto-Piranesian interest in the aesthetic and emotional qualities of derelict antiquity, the structure itself indicates a meticulous and studied comprehension of local Etruscan architecture.

While certain similarities have been noted between the figures that populate the gable of the artificial ruin and frescoed figures in the Grotta Dipinta, one of the many frescoed of Pianmiano,³⁶ scholars of Bomarziana have generally dismissed such correlations, focusing instead on the ruin's architectonic features and their close resemblance to the Etruscan tombs of Norchia, Castel d'Asso and the southern reaches of Tuscany's Maremma.³⁷ Authors such as Oleson insist that Vicino must have had "an architectural model in mind,"³⁸ as the Etruscan tombs surrounding Bomarzo are for the most part underground or built into hills and bear little architectural resemblance to the fabricated ruin.³⁹ However, the similarities between the decorative figures of the ruin and the frescoed forms of the Grotta Dipinta seem to indicate a slightly more flexible, permeable mode of thinking, in which sculpture, architecture and painting are not rigidly divided separate entities, and one medium may influence another.

The faux-ruin has been most frequently compared to a group of tombs located near the village of Sovana, a small hill town of the southern Maremma, falling within the ducal holdings of the Pitigliano branch of the Orsini family.⁴⁰ These rock cut, gabled aedicule tombs, the Tomba della Sirena (Figure 62) and the Tomba dei Demoni Alati (Figure 63), bear immediate visual parallels

³⁵ Dotson 213, de Grummond 34.

³⁶ Oleson 415.

³⁷ Oleson 413-415; Manni 167; Bredekamp vol. I, 151-153.

³⁸ Oleson 415.

³⁹ Manni 167.

⁴⁰ Oleson 413-415; Manni 167; Bredekamp vol. I, 151-153.

to the faux-ruin in the *bosco*, particularly when the ‘extant’ side is mirrored to create a full-scale representation of an Etruscan tomb structure. However, the visual similarities between the sites extend beyond simple structural correspondence, and into the realm of iconography, with the depiction of a dual-tailed mermaid, or Scylla—a funerary motif relatively common to gabled Etruscan tombs⁴¹—present in the pediments of the Tomba della Sirena, Tomba dei Demoni Alati, and the pseudo-ruin of the *bosco*, implying an almost scholarly level of interest in and examination of the Sovanese ruins. The reoccurrence of the Scylla motif in the Sacro Bosco in the form of a three-dimensional statue (Figure 10) on the *platea* below the *tempietto*, seems to add credence to this perspective, particularly when considered in tandem with the statue’s pendant figure, a visually imbalanced, fantastical female figure with one wing and only one mermaid tail (Figure 11), which bears a striking resemblance to the asymmetrically damaged gable figure of the Tomba dei Demoni Alati.

The insistence of authors such as Oleson upon the studied reproduction of the tombs outside Sovana, coupled with their effective avoidance of Bomarzo’s wealth of Etruscan ruins, appears to point toward an interpretation of the Sacro Bosco as being largely influenced by and reflective of experiences with Etruscan traces and heritage stemming from the Pitigliano line of the family. Implicit in these arguments is the belief that in one way or another, Sovana and Pitigliano hold the key to unraveling the mystery of the Sacro Bosco. Yet why would Vicino turn to a small hill town of the southern Maremma for inspiration and contact with Etruscan Antiquity? While it is most certainly within the realm of possibility that Vicino was received as a visitor by the Tuscan line of cousins in Pitigliano, and was there exposed to and gained a certain familiarity with the extensive network of necropoleis surrounding their ducal seat,⁴² it would seem perhaps most

⁴¹ Shepard 33, Alessi 116, Oleson 411

⁴² Oleson 415-416

plausible that Vicino—especially given the illustrious Etruscan history supplied Bomarzo by Annio da Viterbo—looked to his own backyard for elements of Etruscanness with which to flavor his *bosco*. The *campagna bomarzese*, though rarely discussed in literature concerning the Sacro Bosco, is surprisingly rich with Etruscan archaeological finds, effectively encircling the town with a vast web of necropoleis, ruins and remnants that stretches as far as the neighboring cities of Soriano nel Cimino, Vitorchiano and Mugnano.

Bomarzo Beyond the *Bosco*

While the majority of these sites have received minimal scholarly attention, several hypogeal tombs of the Bomarzo region have been the subject of considerable discourse since the nineteenth century resurgence of interest in Etruscan Antiquity. Replete with Etruscan inscriptions and figural fresco work, the tombs known as the Grotta della Colonna and the adjacent Grotta Dipinta—both located in Pianmiano—were described and catalogued in detail by both George Dennis and Luigi Vittori, who wrote of walls covered in depictions of fantastic beasts, menacing creatures and “hideous caricatures of the human face divine.”⁴³ Such descriptions bear distinct similarities to the Sacro Bosco’s stone menagerie and grotesqueries, and invite immediate comparisons between the sites, seeming to indicate influence on the level of content, rather than pure structural form. The tombs, however, have since been damaged beyond repair, and while further comparative analysis is duly warranted, the assessment of Salvatore Settis—one of the first scholars to make the connection between the Sacro Bosco and a regionalized Etruscan aesthetic—must suffice, as he forwarded the position that Cinquecento

⁴³ Vittori 39-43, Dennis 219-225. Dennis discusses the major find within the tomb, the well-preserved and highly ornamented sarcophagus of the haruspex Vel Urinates, and ascribes ownership of the site to the Urinates, a prominent Etruscan family. See Dennis 222 and 227.

discoveries of and interactions with this particular localized Antiquity were a potential driving force and overarching theme of the *bosco*.⁴⁴

While there exists no direct documentary evidence of Cinquecento contact with the particular tombs of Pianmiano, Annio's textual descriptions of the hill's location were largely validated by excavations in the nineteenth century,⁴⁵ seemingly providing an answer to the question of whether or not sixteenth century residents of Bomarzo knew of these sites. This assertion is not only validated by the surprisingly apt coordinates provided by Annio, but also Pianmiano's accessibility during subsequent centuries.⁴⁶ The writings and experiences of Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher during his mid-seventeenth century survey of Etruscan ruins—titled *Iter Hetruscum*, interestingly enough—attest to this point of view, most particularly Kircher's encounters with cave-dwelling *bomarzesi* who professed an awareness of local subterranean tombs decorated with frescoes.⁴⁷ Nineteenth-century documentation concerning collections of Etruscan grave goods and artifacts in Bomarzo likewise seem to point toward local interest in and interactions with these lavish funerary sites. These records dating from the early nineteenth century predate the ensuing decades' surge of interest in Etruscan archaeology and the official 'discovery' of the tombs in the 1830's,⁴⁸ implying much more complex and much earlier contact with the sites than previously believed. This perspective is in turn corroborated by Dennis' observation that a number of the tombs in the region appeared to have been opened and looted of their contents long before his explorations during the height of archaeological activity in the

⁴⁴ Settis 17.

⁴⁵ Giannini 197.

⁴⁶ Dotson argues that if certain tombs and remains were visible to the naked eye after the sixteenth century, then they were most likely visible in the preceding centuries as well, a claim that echoes the earlier assumptions of Settis and Battisti. See Dotson 214, Settis 17, Battisti 126.

⁴⁷ Battisti 126.

⁴⁸ Settis 17, Baglione 25.

area.⁴⁹ The ease with which the town's inhabitants were able to guide Dennis,⁵⁰ as well as Kircher almost two centuries earlier, to the site of the tombs also indicates a longstanding familiarity with the Etruscan features of the region, an acute topographical awareness no doubt informed and enhanced by the local propensity to adapt and repurpose caves, grottoes and tombs into either domestic residences or shelters for livestock.⁵¹

Yet to focus exclusively on the primary tombs of Pianmiano is ultimately shortsighted, for while these necropoleis may be the most documented Etruscan traces of the Bomarzo region, the neighboring hill of Monte Casoli offers more tantalizing clues toward Cinquecento contact with Etruscan Antiquity. Roughly 900 meters northwest of the Sacro Bosco, Monte Casoli is the local appellation for a long, thin hill of *tuffo* that runs parallel to the Vezza River, creating a topographical saddle in which the Sacro Bosco occupies the lowest point between the town of Bomarzo and the volcanic ridge itself. This strip of land is studded with shallow, rudimentary tombs, rough grottoes excavated from the living rock that form an irregular network of fissures that pockmarks the abrupt rock face (Figures 64-65). Adjacent to the tombs are situated a number of columbaria likewise excavated from the *tuffo*, their shape conforming to and defined by the uneven topographical character of the volcanic outcropping (Figures 66-67). The tombs' cavernous maws make the necropolis readily visible from a distance, easily perceptible and directly in the line of sight from the northern-facing balcony of Palazzo Orsini,⁵² forming a strong visual alignment and linkage between the *palazzo*, the Sacro Bosco and the Etruscan ruins.

⁴⁹ Dennis 217.

⁵⁰ Dennis 214.

⁵¹ Lazzaro 118; Baglione 38, 47.

⁵² Bredekamp vol. I, 76.

Within strikingly close proximity to this cache of Etruscan remnants—in truth, less than 150 meters—are located the two other significant features of Monte Casoli: the ruins of a medieval Orsini fortress, and the small, single-chambered church of Santa Maria di Monte Casoli. While the exact date of the castle’s construction is unclear, records show the site as passing in ownership from the people of Viterbo to the Orsini family in the fourteenth century, whereupon it was outfitted with numerous military fortifications.⁵³ Furthermore, the entire Monte Casoli region appears to have been gifted by way of papal grant to the Mugnano/Bomarzo line of the Orsini during this period,⁵⁴ and while documentary proof of such a land grant is sorely lacking,⁵⁵ a deed from 1502 indicates the division of family holdings between Ulisse and Gian Corrado Orsini, awarding the latter—Vicino’s father—possession of Bomarzo, Chia, Monte Casoli and the surrounding woodlands.⁵⁶ Following this transfer, annual census payments were fulfilled with “varying regularity,”⁵⁷ as documents indicate that the Camera Apostolica received payments in 1520,⁵⁸ 1548, 1549, 1551⁵⁹ and 1567,⁶⁰ the latter four of which were paid by Vicino himself.

Records concerning Santa Maria di Monte Casoli add further dimension to Orsini involvement with the area, as the church, which is believed to have been built on the site of a previous religious edifice hewn from the living rock, was substantially renovated during the sixteenth century, an undertaking which would be quite consistent with the surge of construction and repair work enacted across Bomarzo under Vicino and Giulia Farnese’s governance.⁶¹ Records also show that the diminutive church was—and continues to be—a destination

⁵³ Moroni 35.

⁵⁴ Baglione 34; Scardozzi 2004, 70.

⁵⁵ Evidence does however show that the Orsini were unable to produce their grant in 1520, when the annual tax on the property was changed from one hound to one wax candle at least four pounds in weight. See Shaw 37-38.

⁵⁶ Mori 74.

⁵⁷ Shaw 41.

⁵⁸ Shaw 38.

⁵⁹ Bredekamp vol. II, 74-75.

⁶⁰ Baglione 34.

⁶¹ Perucca 200; Donadono 12-13.

interwoven with centuries-old local traditions carried out on Pasquetta, the day following Easter Sunday, increasing likelihood that Vicino had contact with the church and its immediate environs.⁶² Furthermore, a 1586 letter penned by a church official by the name of Prosperus Campanus concerning Vicino's death and postmortem formalities, indicates that Santa Maria di Monte Casoli was not only an semi-active parish during this time, but was in relatively close contact with the Orsini family,⁶³ implying a fair degree of contact and interaction between Vicino and the area of Monte Casoli. With the church a mere 150 meters from the necropolis, and 120 meters from the columbaria, it seems extremely probable that Vicino was aware of and had firsthand experiences with these Etruscan features, particularly given his predilection for retreating with his horse, Ragazzino, to his *bosco* and surrounding properties when the stresses of the world became too great and he found himself called by a desire "to visit stones and trees."⁶⁴

Adding further depth to the issue of Cinquecento contact with Etruscan Antiquity, are the columbaria of Monte Casoli, a site of which Vicino's close friend Annibale Caro made possible mention in a letter to the Duke's brother-in-law, Torquato Conti, in 1563. Caro addresses Conti's desire for a garden that would rival the "*boschetto del signor Vicino*," and counsels his friend that such a project would require extraordinary, extravagant marvels that outstrip typical garden features, of which Caro lists a number of such elements, including fountains, a lake, terraces, wooded areas—all of which were components of the Sacro Bosco—and finally, *colombaie*,⁶⁵ the existence of which can not be supported by any documentation or physical evidence within the park itself. Given the relative opacity of Caro's comments, further light may be shed on the letter upon examining the word *columbaia* itself, which can be taken as having

⁶² Giannini 202.

⁶³ Buchicchio 54.

⁶⁴ Sheeler 28-29; Theurillat 53-54.

⁶⁵ Bredekamp vol. II, 78.

two potential meanings, referring to either a columbarium or dovecote, two structures which at the most basic level are essentially identical to each other, consisting of rows upon rows of small square compartments.⁶⁶ The disambiguation becomes murkier still when comparing the medieval *colombaie rupestri*, or underground rock-cut dovecotes of nearby Orvieto, Orte, and Civita di Bagnoregio, with the *columbari rupestri* of Monte Casoli and neighboring necropoleis, for the sites and structures are virtually identical in all aspects. Might Caro have been referring to the columbaria of nearby Monte Casoli instead of dovecotes, or might he have collapsed distinctions between the two related structures, and referred to the columbaria on the hill above the *bosco* as dovecotes? Matters are complicated further when considering the fact that the necropoleis of Monte Casoli were adapted and repurposed from the medieval era up through the nineteenth century by the *bomarzesi* peasants to function not only as ready-made, cost-effective living quarters, but also as shelters for livestock and agricultural storehouses.⁶⁷ Evidence also suggests that the site may have been used as a dovecote by the Orsini themselves, as the practice of keeping doves was largely connected to “castle life, increasing in popularity from the medieval era until the Settecento.”⁶⁸ Could it be possibly that the site simultaneously functioned as Ancient Etruscan *columbario* and modern Cinquecento *colombaia*?

If in fact Caro was using the term to refer to the Etruscan necropolis contiguous to the park, then it appears he had forged some manner of ideological linkage between the Sacro Bosco and the ruins, effectively implying that the *bosco* stretches beyond its boundaries proper, and into the surrounding woods to incorporate other wonders and peculiarities carved from the region’s ubiquitous living *tufi*. An additional letter penned by Caro, written in this case to Vicino a year

⁶⁶ Gigli comments on the interchangeability of “*columbaria*” and “*colombaia*,” in her attempts to distinguish ancient funerary sites from medieval dovecotes throughout Alto Lazio. See Gigli 105-106.

⁶⁷ Baglione 38, 47; Lazzaro 118; Sheeler 26.

⁶⁸ Scardozzi 2004, 76.

after said correspondence with Conti, adds further dimension to the issues and equivocalities raised by the *columbario/columbaio* dilemma. Formally addressing the Duke, Caro compares his own busy schedule in Frascati to that of Vicino, surrounded by and preoccupied with the “*teatri e mausolei del suo Bomarzo*.”⁶⁹ While the theaters Caro mentioned can most likely be explained as the stage-like spaces throughout the bosco—most particularly the stepped space adjacent to the *casa pendente*—the question natural arises: to which mausoleums is Caro referring?

While at first glance it seems probable that Caro speaks of the *tempietto*, there are no indications that the site ever served as a burial chamber,⁷⁰ despite early scholars’ assumptions that the structure housed the remains of Giulia Farnese.⁷¹ Caro’s term *mausolei* instead implies a grouping of sepulchral structures, which once again leads the reader to consider the wealth of tombs and funereal structures that dot the surrounding countryside. Additionally, Caro’s usage of “*il suo Bomarzo*,” instead of “*il suo boschetto*” or “*il suo giardino*,” is telling, as the interchangeability of the appellations “Bomarzo” and “Sacro Bosco” seems to be a product of twentieth century scholarship. Caro’s words seem to indicate that Vicino’s penchant for wooded areas extended well beyond the Sacro Bosco and into the outlying *boschi* of the region, as though the park’s boundaries were perceived as fluid and unfixed, incorporating a larger collection of sculptural elements and oddities. Indeed, the forests surrounding Bomarzo are brimming with uncanny topographical formations and anomalous, Etruscan traces, ancient counterparts of Vicino’s stone monsters who, if anything, would be more fully at home in the strange and mysterious woods of Bomarzo than they would be in any conventional *giardino all’italiana*. When one takes the surroundings of the Sacro Bosco into account, it becomes clear that Vicino’s *bosco* of marvels is in fact situated within a larger and far more ancient *bosco*, one populated by

⁶⁹ Bredekamp vol. II, 79.

⁷⁰ Indeed, the final resting places of Vicino and Giulia are still unknown. See Bury 1985, 218-219.

⁷¹ Bury 1985, 220; Lang 428.

even stranger and more enigmatic wonders, standing as a microcosm reflective of the macrocosm, a single tessera in a larger mosaic of stone oddities.

Chapter 3 *Bosco within a Bosco; A Curious Mirror in Stone*

Bomarzo's cavalcade of stone peculiarities begins at the immediate margins of the Sacro Bosco itself, near the entrance to the modern Parco dei Mostri, a mere two hundred meters southwest of the steep cliff face overlooked by the aforementioned loggia of Palazzo Orsini. Roughly halfway between the palazzo and the *bosco* proper, a large mass of *tufo* (Figure 68) occupies the space originally proposed by Arnaldo Bruschi to have been a Cinquecento *giardino all'italiana* that segued from the ducal residence to the Sacro Bosco.¹ Fixed with two deep niches, one rectangular and the other semicircular, the stone announces a distinct sense of intentionality, its particular function, however, obscured by time, effectively leaving the block bereft as an empty vestige of *something*, a mysterious fragment trapped in the liminal space between known and unknowable.² A nearby boulder, roughly half as tall in height, bears similar indications of intentional geometric shaping, displaying a rectangular alcove approximately one meter in height (Figure 69). Regardless of their originally intended functions, these blocks of *tufo* were undoubtedly visible during the Cinquecento, being the largest freestanding stones on the hill between the palazzo and park, an area which one is obliged to traverse in order to reach one destination from the other.³

A similar clutch of shaped *tufo* anomalies are found in the nearby Bosco del Serraglio, a densely wooded zone that embraces the Sacro Bosco on its northern and western perimeter, separating the grounds from the Monte Casoli region. The first of these oddities is encountered less than a kilometer from the Sacro Bosco: a massive *tufo* block bearing two deeply incised

¹ Bruschi 1955; 9, 13.

² Steingraber and Prayon forward that the block may have served a sepulchral function, yet are unable to assign any particular date to the niches. See Steingraber and Prayon 101.

³ Steingraber and Prayon make a similar argument, speculating that the tufaceous masses "must have already been known by the time of the Orsini." See Steingraber and Prayon 101.

niches of modest height, one a long ovoid semicircle, and the other more rectangular in shape, crowned by a pediment crudely carved in low relief (Figure 70). An adjoining boulder carries the inscription “PVERI HIC CONDITI,” identifying the niches as the loculi of several anonymous children, presumably interred during the era of Roman occupation and habitation.⁴ The rock, colloquially known as *il Sasso delle Madonelle*,⁵ most likely because of the gabled niche’s shrine-like characteristics, provides an intriguing example of sculpted living rock paired with an epigraphic inscription within a forested setting, a theme echoed throughout the Sacro Bosco.

Some two hundred meters from the *Sasso delle Madonelle* is another mass of *tufo* which displays Latin epigraphy pointing to sepulchral usage during Roman occupation (Figure 71). While the majority of the stone is left raw and untouched, the top of the boulder is shorn away and leveled, creating a flat expanse into which a large, rectangular basin is carved. On the exterior of the basin’s eastern lip is clearly inscribed: “L. ROSCIVS. M. F. ARN.” classifying the site as a monument to Lucius Roscius, son of Marcus of the Arnensis tribe.⁶ While the Latin script marks the escalated Romanization of Etruria, mention of the Arnensis tribe indigenous to the region⁷ establishes a clear local connection to Etruscan roots and heritage long after the absorption of Rasennic peoples under the mantle of Rome. While the Lucius Roscius monument engages in the same juxtaposition of text, sculpture and nature as the *Sasso delle Madonelle*, it is the nearby *Sasso Bucato* (Figure 72)—as well as a number of other, albeit unnamed, carved *tufo* masses—that partakes of another leitmotif to be found in the Sacro Bosco: the visual *paragone*

⁴ Steingräber and Prayon, as well as Gasperini, date the works to the early Imperial era. See Steingräber and Prayon 110; Gasperini 1989, 125.

⁵ Menichino 142. This appellation seems to predate the rock’s entry into scholarly discussion in 1989. See Gasperini 1989, 123.

⁶ Gasperini 1994, 108.

⁷ Gasperini 1989, 93; Gasperini 1994, 110.

expressed between Art and Nature, and the problematic intersection wherein the two become indistinguishable.

Less than thirty meters from the tomb of Lucius Roscius, the massive *Sasso Bucato* takes the form of a rock-cut shelter, its remarkably level overhang giving the impression that the rock had been hollowed out to form a shallow grotto, the back wall of which is punctuated by a large circular opening, creating a window effect. The distinct shape of the stone seems to imply a certain intentionality, and yet the lack of any inscriptions or irrefutably manmade marks leaves possibility that the formation came about naturally by way of erosion. Similar rocks may be observed in the immediate vicinity, exhibiting indentations, recesses and straight edges that seem too precise to have occurred by chance,⁸ recalling the riddle presented by the sphinx of the Sacro Bosco concerning nature, *inganno* and art. Indeed, one such formation/monument (Figure 73), bearing remarkably level and rectangular cavities, teeters between intentionality and environmental erosion, closely resembling a block of *tuffo* in the park itself: a seemingly half-carved mass across the field from the *tempietto* (Figures 74-75). While never touched upon in scholarly literature concerning the *bosco*, the block shows clear signs of shaping, with strong horizontal and vertical cut marks. The inclusion of the block among the highly finished and sculptural elements of the Sacro Bosco is curious, though perhaps fathomable when viewed through the lens of the Bosco del Serraglio, where the clearly manmade comeslingles with objects of more ambiguous origin.

Retracing one's steps back toward the Sacro Bosco and the *Sasso delle Madonelle*, one encounters the Bosco del Serraglio's most peculiar piece of *tuffo*, a large cuboid monument which

⁸ Uberti, n. pag. See <http://www.duepassinelmistero.com/Serraglio.html>. While Uberti's journal-like accounts concerning the woods surrounding Bomarzo are far from scholarly, the author provides unparalleled in-depth detail concerning the wide variety of peculiar rocks and boulders that bear the traces of human shaping not otherwise discussed in the literature of Gasperini, Menichino, Steingraber and Prayon.

would be equally at home in Vicino's *bosco* (Figure 76). Emphatically geometric in character, the block sits atop a small fluted base, which in turn is situated upon a large rectangular stylobate, creating a distinct layered effect that draws the eye to the cubic centerpiece, which bears on its western face the inscription "L. ARLENVS STRAB." A second line of text, largely degraded over time, reads "[...]A [...]VS [...]S." Gasperini identifies the site as a sepulchral monument of a freedman—potentially of Etruscan origin—who was released from the services of one Lucius Arlenus Strabo, a member of the distinguished Arlenus family hailing from this particular region of southern Etruria.⁹

Tracing the lineage of the Arleni, Gasperini establishes the family as a Romanized group of Etruscan descent,¹⁰ thus possibly accounting for the monument's fusion of Latin text with decidedly indigenous material and form. Indeed, it is this peculiar form that makes the block so striking; it stands out as a precisely carved and rigorously linear stone that does not simply bear crude traces of human modeling and usage, but has instead been completely altered in terms of its appearance. Whereas the *Sasso delle Madonelle* and the *Sasso Bucato* still bear all the outward characteristics of ordinary boulders found *in situ*, the cuboid monument—nicknamed the "Altarone" or "*Sasso Quadrato*" by the local *bomarzesi*¹¹—is no mere rock incised with a smattering of human modifications and interventions, for it is decidedly sculptural. Much like the *tufi* monsters of the Sacro Bosco, the *Sasso Quadrato* creates a fundamental shift in the landscape it inhabits, transforming the living rock into something greater and removed from its inherent and natural 'rock-ness,' and changing the immediate forested area into a stage of sorts that both reveals and provides a setting for the sculptural elements. The presence of sculpture creates a space that fuses First and Third Nature, producing an atmosphere of unexpected

⁹ Gasperini 2001, 51-52.

¹⁰ Gasperini 2001, 52-53.

¹¹ Menichino 144.

discovery and enigmatic wonder not dissimilar to that which the Sacro Bosco constructs and exudes.

A True *Selva Incantata*

Similar claims can be made concerning the sculptural elements and tufaceous oddities of the Selva di Malano, an equally wooded region that abuts the western edges of the Bosco di Serraglio and Monte Casoli, forming the southwestern boundary of the “magic triangle” of stone *bizzarrie* between Bomarzo, Vitorchiano, and Soriano nel Cimino.¹² Following the Fossa di Serraglio—a tributary of the Veza river, which itself flows into the nearby Tiber—from the tomb of Lucius Roscius, the Bosco del Serraglio gives way to the Selva di Malano, wherein the visitor first encounters the fortified Romanesque ruins of the Benedictine abbey of San Nicolao, the foundation of which rests partly upon a steep *tuffo* cliff. The bottom of the cliff exhibits three rock-cut *tombe a dado* (Figure 77) which, like the monuments in the Bosco del Serraglio, share both Roman and Etruscan characteristics, most likely situating them within the late Republican or early Imperial period.¹³ Surmounting the first tomb is a low relief pediment and entablature, carved from the living *tuffo*, supported by fictive Doric columns in sunken relief, creating the illusion of a small edifice emerging from the rock. The two remaining tombs are relatively similar in appearance, with one small distinction: the inclusion of the crudely inscribed “HEROS V.A. XXV” above a niche adjacent to the smaller of the pair, indicating the tomb of a twenty-five year-old slave with the Grecianized name of Heros (Figure 78).¹⁴ A nearby niche bears traces of an Italo-Byzantine fresco of the Crucifixion, attesting to the area’s habitation and usage as late as the Duecento or possibly Trecento.¹⁵ Perhaps most striking of all, however, are the

¹² Mazzuoli and Moscatelli 5.

¹³ Menichino 75; Steingraber and Prayon, 121-122.

¹⁴ Gasperini 1989, 112; Steingraber and Prayon, 122.

¹⁵ Menichino 75. Steingraber and Prayon disagree with Menichino, arguing that the propose of the site was

neighboring *tombe a fossa*, rectangular sepulchral pits excavated from the living rock (Figure 79). These tombs, with their raised lips and carefully incised linear trim, are for all intents and purposes identical to the *tomba a fossa* found in the Sacro Bosco (Figure 18), potentially functioning as some manner of visual reference to localized Antiquity, creating direct linkages between Vicino's fantastical *bosco* and the genuine, mysterious *boschi* that surround Bomarzo.

Several meters to the north of the Heros tomb lies a large block of *tufo*, of which several surfaces have been vertically leveled and shaped into rectangular forms. The northeastern façade houses a loculus, above which reads the inscription “C. URINATIUS. C. L. DAMA. ET [PE]TRONIA. P. L. RUFA.” revealing the site to be the tomb of Dama and Rufa, slaves released from bondage by Caius Urinatus and Publius Petronius.¹⁶ The *cognomen* Urinatus is of particular interest, as it appears to be a Romanized form of the Etruscan family name Urinates, a bloodline closely associated with the Bomarzo area,¹⁷ the Grotta Dipinta of Pianmiano most particularly, thus potentially accounting for certain formal elements of the site that bear greater similarities to Etruscan rock-cut tombs than Roman sepulchral monuments. A similar boulder-turned-tomb, lying less than one hundred meters to the north, bears a comparable inscription concerning the sepulture of a freed couple (Figure 80). Commonly categorized as a monumental funerary altar,¹⁸ the large ovoid boulder is marked by two flights of steps cut into the top half of the living rock and placed well over five feet above ground level.¹⁹ The uppermost step of the northwestern façade displays the inscription: “D. COELIUS D. L. ALEXANDER / QUINTIA. P. L. HILARA.” The funerary altar maintains much of its organic shape, not unlike the *Sasso delle*

used until the late twelfth century. See Steingraber and Prayon 99.

¹⁶ Gasperini 1989, 115-116; Steingraber and Prayon, 122-123.

¹⁷ Berrendonner and Munzi 656-685. Giannini goes so far as to characterize the Urinatii as one of the leading Roman families of the area. See Giannini 201.

¹⁸ Steingraber and Prayon, 120; Gasperini 1989, 107.

¹⁹ While this odd placement could potentially be the result of soil erosion, none of the other adjacent boulders or monuments show similar dissonances.

Madonelle and the tomb of Dama and Rufa, creating an incongruous juxtaposition of and interplay between the manmade and the natural, as though steps were simply impressed into the fabric of the boulder.

Similar interpolations of the organic and the sculptural are expressed by a pair of monuments four hundred meters to the north of the freedmen's tombs. Bearing considerable resemblance to the Coelius altar, the *Sasso del Predicatore* (Figure 81) is a massive ovoid boulder, largely inchoate and unshaped, excepting the sizeable flight of stairs notched into the rock, leading up to three altar-like protuberances jutting roughly twenty degrees up from the plateaued culmination of the monument. The sharp interpolation of raw boulder with a deep-set excised stairway calls to mind the rarely-discussed ruined tower of the Sacro Bosco (Figure 82), the northern face of which bears a similar staircase excavated from the living rock. While the linearity and formality of the *Sasso del Predicatore* suggests some manner of ceremonial function, the stone carries no inscriptions or indicative details clarifying its exact provenance or purpose.²⁰ Perched atop a knoll, the *Sasso del Predicatore* looks out across the valley below, projecting a certain monumentality whilst pointing toward some sort of occulted ritual function, the suggestion of which still palpably clings to the block of *tuffo*.

Much the same can be said concerning the immediately adjacent *Ara Cubica* (Figure 83), a large cuboid monument mere meters from the *Sasso del Predicatore*, which bears a near mirror resemblance to the sepulchral monument of Lucius Arlenus Strabo in the Bosco del Serraglio. Like the *Sasso del Predicatore*, the *Ara Cubica* bears no identifying or epigraphic marks, leaving

²⁰ As in the case of all other monuments surrounding Bomarzo, Steingraber and Prayon date the block to the late Republican or early Imperial era. Menichino and Tizi assume an Etruscan origin, relating the three altars to the Archaic Triad of Uni, Tinia and Menvra. Feo, Melani, Edlund and Giannini simply list the *Sasso* (or *Altare*) *del Predicatore* among the number of Etruscan features in the Bomarzo region. See Steingraber and Prayon 116; Menichino 78; Tizi 36; Feo 2006, 92; Melani et al 418; Edlund 71; Giannini 299.

questions of function and dating virtually unknowable.²¹ Incised with bricklike gridding, the monument is a single block of stone, rigorously sculptural and rectilinear, creating the impression of a large geometric cube miraculously and unceremoniously deposited in the woods. A similar block may be found nearby—a second monument with the appellation of *Sasso del Predicatore* (Figure 84)—which takes an equally cubic shape, its southeastern façade meticulously edged and quadrate. Overlooking the valley, the northeastern side of this second *Sasso* loses much of its sharp rectangularity, tapering off into a nebulous shape that merges back into the organic fabric of the boulder, thus suggesting a half-finished monument in the process of emerging from the stone, like a distant cousin to Michelangelo's incomplete *Prigioni*.

The monument, lacking inscriptions, sepulchral niches or salient markings,²² is flanked by a gently inclined staircase, both of which emerge from a larger amorphous base of unshaped *tuffo*, producing the same sense of incongruity and alienation demonstrated by the Lucius Arlenus Strabo marker. The uncanniness of these monuments, so profoundly shaped by human hand and associated with the realm of Art, yet left totally adrift in the untamed domain of Nature, invites a simultaneous sense of enigmatic attraction and guarded trepidation. The visitor, having stumbled upon something so far removed from the ordinary and explicable, enters into a dialectic not dissimilar from that presented by the Sacro Bosco, wherein a cavalcade of puzzling marvels is encountered in the mysterious woods, leaving one struggling to ascribe meaning to that which through its very bizarreness exists outside of mundane reason or experience.

²¹ Steingraber and Prayon concede that without inscriptions the block is virtually unreadable, and hypothesize that the monument may have potentially served cultic and/or funerary functions. See Steingraber and Prayon 119.

²² Once again, Steingraber and Prayon struggle to date the work, referring to it as a platformed monumental altar most likely of late Republican or early Imperial manufacture. Because of the monument's advantageous location overlooking the Selva di Malano, Menichino theorizes that it was a site for Etruscan augurs or haruspices. See Steingraber and Prayon 116; Menichino 82-83.

As in the case of the *bizzarrie* of the Sacro Bosco, the utter strangeness and inexplicability of the monuments in the forests of Bomarzo compels the viewer to fill in the proverbial gaps, to prescribe meaning, narrative and historicity to the block of *tuffo*, which falls so far outside of the realm of the ordinary and expected, that it simultaneously invites and assumes a *meravigliosità* all its own. Instead of inspiring wonder through monstrosity or fantasticality, as in the case of the Sacro Bosco's sculpted denizens, the *Sassi del Predicatore* astonish through their lack of context, their form which both infers and demands meaning, yet carries none. The viewer must engage in a cognitive game with the forests' enigmatic monuments, traveling through a territory of empty signifiers to which meaning may be ascribed, enlivening an evocative landscape through the act of discovery and personal narration.

This narration is both implied and encouraged by the overwhelming presence of epigraphy in the Selva di Malano and its environs, which prompt the viewer to make sense of and interpret the sculptural features of the forest. The area between the first and second *Sassi del Predicatore* features an array of epigraphic monuments that, like the Coelius altar or the tomb of Dama and Rufa, reach out through their usage of text inscribed onto both raw and shaped *tuffo*, as similarly seen in the Sacro Bosco. The majority are rectangular or otherwise geometric interventions onto the surface of largely unsculpted *tuffo*, marking the final resting places of either freedmen or Romans of local Etruscan descent.²³ A similar cluster of epigraphy can be found in the locality of Castelluzza, a promontory overlooking the Sacro Bosco and directly abutting the eastern edge of the Bosco del Serraglio. Like the Selva di Malano, Castelluzza contains a number of Latin inscriptions relating to freedmen and Romanized Etruscans,²⁴ the majority of which are found along an Etruscan *tagliata*—a road excavated from the living *tuffo*—the most noteworthy of

²³ See Gasperini 1989, 99-105, 117-122; Steingraber and Prayon 117-130.

²⁴ See Scardozzi 2007, 19-28; Gasperini 1989, 127-128; Sanna 12-14; Vittori 23-24.

which contains Etruscan characters and numerals believed to have been incised as late as the first century BCE.²⁵ The presence of so many inscriptions so close to the Sacro Bosco casts a new light on the textual elements of the park itself, particularly the pairing of often enigmatic epigraphy with the carving and sculpting of the living rock. If such a linkage exists, then perhaps the epigrams in the Sacro Bosco function as more than mere courtly erudition, serving instead as an intellectually stimulating and amusingly multivalent foil to the spate of inscriptions throughout the *boschi* of Bomarzo. Could this account for the formal similarities between the lettering employed in the Sacro Bosco and that on the monuments scattered throughout the woods? Was Vicino looking to the woods of Bomarzo as inspiration for his Sacro Bosco, or were such correlations mere happenstance? Such manner of coincidence does not seem to be a possibility, however, when one takes into account that a handful of these monuments and epigraphic inscriptions were verifiably known during the Cinquecento.

The Plot Thickens

Southeast of Bomarzo's *centro storico*, where the wooded regions identified as Cagnemora and Tacchiolo coalesce and intermingle, is a group of inscriptions documented in the first half of the sixteenth century by artist/architect Baldassare Peruzzi (Figure 85). Closely involved with renovations to Palazzo Orsini between the years 1519 and 1535,²⁶ Peruzzi most likely completed his sketches during this period of architectural activity, recording three separate identifiable inscriptions in the Bomarzo area. Despite his extended interactions with the Orsini family, Peruzzi's interest in and encounters with the region's monuments and inscriptions have never been linked to any evaluations of the Sacro Bosco and its Etruscanizing features. While the

²⁵ Scardozi 2007, 19 and 23-24

²⁶ C.L. Frommel 16 and 20. Renovations and additions to the *palazzo* continued throughout Vicino's tenure as duke, possibly continuing as late as 1585 (see Bruschi 1955, 11). Peruzzi's direct involvement in the project cannot be substantiated after the year 1535.

question remains concerning exactly how Peruzzi came into contact with the inscriptions—it seems most plausible that he did not discover them himself, as the monuments and inscriptions are nearly a kilometer and a half from Palazzo Orsini through farmland and forests—he was most likely led into the woods by a friend, patron or knowledgeable local. Such a scenario would thus imply that the inscriptions were both known and accessible to the *bomarzesi* during the time of Vicino’s minority, a hypothesis corroborated by their prominent placement along a deep Etruscan *tagliata* (Figure 86). Locally known as the *Tagliata delle Rocchette*, the sheer manmade ravine is incised with shallow stairs, making for an easy descent from Cagnemora to the more sloped location of Tacchiolo, which itself bleeds into the Fosso di Chia on the valley floor, separating Bomarzo from the nearby village of Chia, a small Orsini holding.

Of Peruzzi’s sketchbook page depicting the *Tagliata delle Rocchette* inscriptions, fully one third of the composition details two Latin inscriptions in direct proximity to one another on the *tufo* of the ravine, respectively reading “TER” and “ITER PRIVATM DVORVM DOMITIORVM,” the former demarcating the end of a public road, with the later indicating commencement of a private road owned by two members of the Domitii family (Figure 87).²⁷ Written in clear *capitalis monumentalis* script—remarkably similar to that employed within the Sacro Bosco—the epigraphs concerning the crossroads are clearly visible; it is only upon much closer inspection that the presence of graffito, reading “RVXX,” is perceptible, a detail dutifully rendered by Peruzzi. The architect similarly documented another, often-overlooked inscription of *Tagliata delle Rocchette*: an additional inscription of “TER,” some twenty-five paces as

²⁷ Gasperini 1989, 129-130. The author hypothesizes that the Domitii were perhaps the notorious brickmakers, Domitius Lucanus and Domitius Tullus, discussed in the letters of Pliny the Younger (see Kehoe 51), a claim supported by nearby Roman brick kilns and bricks bearing stamps of the Domitii workshop (see Gasperoni 264-269).

recorded by Peruzzi himself from the Domitii marker, incised in a later hand (Figure 88).²⁸ The remainder of the sketched page details an inscription carefully noted to be “*in eodem loco*,”²⁹ which currently remains unaccounted for by modern scholars, implying a heightened familiarity—whether on Peruzzi’s part or on that of his guide—with the surrounding landscape and its peculiarities.

An additional sketched page by Peruzzi (Figure 89) details a monument similarly lacking from modern study of Bomarzo’s ancient monuments. Occupying the uppermost half of the page, Peruzzi provides the frontal view of a large, cuboid mass similar in form to the *Ara Cubica* and sepulchral marker of Lucius Arlenus Strabo, bearing the inscription “Q. CALFVRNIVS C. F. ARN. CALFVRNIA Q. L. SIRAION [.....] ICA.”³⁰ Recalling the “ARN.” of the Bosco del Serraglio’s monument to Lucius Roscius of the Arnensis tribe, the inscription is consistent with the family names found on the region’s many Etrusco-Roman epigraphs, much as the monument’s cubic shape aligns with certain localized forms and sculptural configurations. While the specific monument has yet to be conclusively identified, it bears a particular distinguishing feature heretofore unseen on any of the region’s cube-shaped forms: a string-coursed cap that gently flutes out from the rectangular body of the monument. Perhaps coincidentally, a badly weathered *tuffo* cube displaying prominent, albeit profoundly eroded, molded capping has been recently uncovered in Cagnemora (Figure 90).³¹ While the lack of epigraphy might perhaps be explained by the cube’s relatively poor state of preservation, its general proximity to the *Tagliata delle Rocchette* increases the possibility that the block in

²⁸ Uberti’s website is the only modern source to make note of this inscription, making note of this most “recent discovery,” and its exclusivity to her website. See <http://www.duepassinelmistero.com/misteriosiboschi2.htm>

²⁹ Perusal of Peruzzi’s sketchbooks will show that his pages do not interpolate dissimilar and unrelated plans, inscriptions, formulas and monuments, further leading the viewer to believe that the mystery inscription is not far from the *Tagliata delle Rocchette*.

³⁰ The top of the page bears a faded notation which appears to read “a polimartio,” and is consistent with Peruzzi’s hand. An adjacent notation of “Bomarzo?” is written in a markedly different script.

³¹ Proietti 2012, 39; Ceci and Fosci 8.

question was in fact the same monument depicted by Peruzzi, and inevitably invites one to ponder which, if any, other monuments did Peruzzi and his peers encounter in the woods of Bomarzo?

Following the path carved by the *Tagliata delle Rocchete* downhill and into Tacchiolo proper, it is a mere three hundred meters to what is arguably the strangest and most spectacular stone monument in all of Bomarzo's *boschi*. Just past a rock-cut dwelling *a dado* of unknown date—the shelter, locally known as the *Finestraccia* (Figure 91) for its vertically stacked windows, bears a striking resemblance to the *casa pendente* of the Sacro Bosco, not just for its formal characteristics, but its distinctly slanted proportions and floor—one discovers a massive and vaguely triangular boulder, known colloquially as the *Piramide Etrusca* (Figure 92). Heavily modified by human interventions, the sculpted mass is a true unicum, its formal characteristics thoroughly unlike any other known monument—Etruscan, Roman, or otherwise—so far repelling modern scholars' attempts to determine a particular date or function for the mass of *tuffo*.³² Jutting sharply out of the soil and undergrowth, the colossal boulder takes a roughly triangular shape, its edges relatively leveled and geometric. The left-hand side of the monument is incised with a steep ramp composed of twenty-two steps, four of which extend to the center of the monument. Two other, albeit far shorter, staircases are also carved from the living rock, visually dividing the monument into vertical thirds, which in turn are separated by large square recesses quarried into the boulder. The steps culminate in a small, even platform at the apex of the *Piramide*, that as in the case of the first *Sasso del Predicatore*, provide an unparalleled view

³² Steingraber and Prayon favor an early Imperial date for the monument, while Proietti suggests slightly earlier Etrusco-Roman dating. Menichino proposes that the monument dates to the 6th or 7th century BCE, going so far as to suggest an even earlier date, a hypothesis supported by Proietti's discussion of Villanovan artifacts in the direct vicinity of the pyramid. See Steingraber and Prayon 109; Proietti 2010, 37-38; Menichino 128. More esoteric readings are also plentiful, as some armchair enthusiasts connect the monument to Neolithic goddess cults. Such views are expressed, for example, on an Italian website promoting tourism in the Bomarzo area (<http://trentaesto.altervista.org/bomarzo/piramidedibomarzo.html>), and were articulated by a local tour guide encountered by the author en route to the *Piramide* on June 28th of 2012.

of the surrounding countryside. Long, linear channels run diagonally from the far right corner of the monument to the center left, as though intended to funnel liquid away from one point to another. Square indentations scar the boulder at regular intervals, suggesting the long-ago presence of wooden posts or other ephemeral additions. The processional and linear construction of the *Piramide* seems to imply some manner of ceremonial or ritual function, just as the disparate sets of steps and niches suggest a dualistic or tripartite quality. The *Piramide* presents no single, particular path as superior for one's ascent, forcing visitors to make choices regarding both their route and the meaning of the monument.

The monument, ultimately estranged from the meanings and functions originally invested in its unique form, occupies a liminal ontological space into which many of the statues of the Sacro Bosco may also be placed: that of a mysterious stone oddity without context, unable to create stable meaning beyond mere peculiarity and fantasticality, serving only to astonish. The bizarre otherworldliness of the *Piramide* makes it impossible to categorize the monument as Etruscan, Roman, or anything other than a warped *ghiribizzo* played by some strange amalgamation of Art and Nature. Such a monument would no doubt have been so far removed for a Cinquecento viewer's realm of experience or understanding—or truly, that of any viewer unaffiliated with the monument's originary culture—that it seems improbable the *Piramide* could have been approached as anything but an enigmatic abnormality, particularly given subsequent generations' perceptions of Etruscan artifacts and tomb facades as “‘*scherzi*,’ freaks produced either by nature or by the caprice of their ancestors.”³³ Without a clear voice to shed light on its ancient connotations, the *Piramide* becomes in effect monstrous, due to its inability to fit within any of the particular, well-defined categories of previous experience and knowledge. The visitor's encounter with the pyramid can be viewed as a mirror of sorts to the experience presented by the

³³ Oleson 411.

Sacro Bosco, for in both cases, the act of discovering something so utterly bizarre and unexpected in the woods transforms the otherwise familiar landscape into a communicative and interactive environment, wherein the viewer must make choices and ascribe significance to a variety of extraordinary elements, the viewing of which remains free of ideological structuration or explicit signification.

And yet, the *Piramide Etrusca* is by no means the closest resemblant of the Sacro Bosco in the woods of Bomarzo; just south of Tacchiolo is the wooded territory of Santa Cecilia, home to the expansive ruins of an early medieval village, believed to have been inhabited between the sixth and tenth centuries (Figures 93-99).³⁴ Largely composed from the local *tuffo*, the structures of the abandoned village first greet the eye as a vast array of shaped boulders strewn across a wooded area comparable in size to the Sacro Bosco. The site is a veritable ghost town in stone over which hangs a pregnant and slightly eerie atmosphere. In many cases, only the foundation or the most rudimentary stone elements remain of an edifice, populating the landscape with an abundance of rock-cut walls, seats, columns and large cuboid forms carved from the living *tuffo* that surrender few clues as to their original functions. The complex is littered with a variety of stone basins, *tombe a fossa*, and boulders inscribed with rectangular niches, as well as large *tuffo* bricks, often stacked to form low ashlar walls which closely resemble the benches and oversized brickwork of the Sacro Bosco (Figure 100). Grottoes excavated from massive boulders are plentiful, their entryways resembling large, yawning mouths.

The extensive network of ruins transforms the landscape in a manner far more explicit than that seen in the vicinity of the *Piramide Etrusca* or the *Sassi del Predicatore*; its status as a true built environment creating a far stronger sense of place than the isolated stone monuments

³⁴ While Steingraber and Prayon, Menichino, and Feo all present differing dates of habitation, the authors concur that the city was first developed and most heavily populated during the time of Longobard incursions, spanning from the sixth to the eighth century. See Steingraber and Prayon 98; Menichino 114; Feo 2006, 93-94.

marooned in their forested settings. The visitor must now interact with and navigate through a complex of shaped, enigmatic and potentially interconnected stones, where no privileged pathway exists or stable program of meaning is offered. Moving through the landscape, the urge to narrate and ascribe meaning to the surrounding *bosco incantato* is unavoidable, as the placement of the stones adumbrates a backdrop upon which the viewer must expand, actively and imaginatively engaging with one's surroundings. The structural and topological similarities between the Sacro Bosco and Santa Cecilia cast new light on the Orsini wood, drawing emphasis away from the representational elements of the *parco*, and wresting the lens of examination from the question of *what* is depicted, and repositioning it on the matter of *how* content is represented and arranged.

With its wending paths and lack of programmatic, linear meaning, the organization of the Sacro Bosco is so far removed from the governing logic of its contemporaries, that it is only in a complex the like of Santa Cecilia that the park finds its closest match. The same elements that make the Sacro Bosco so unique—the role of *tufo*, the extensive carving of living rock, the forested setting, the enigmatic and equivocal space meant to be explored in no particular order—which are entirely absent in most Cinquecento gardens, can readily be found in the woods of Bomarzo, mirrored in the ancient sites and spaces. The Orsini *bosco* demonstrates an intimate linkage to its physical location, connecting visually and thematically to its surroundings and the distinctive peculiarities of the region, its stone, and the overwhelming feeling of the place. The Sacro Bosco is uniquely Bomarzo, existing as a function of its location, drawing on all the disparate elements and peculiarities of the region to reflect and parrot back its surroundings in a superlatively fantastic tongue. Never seeking to tame or alter the land by forcing Nature to bend to the will of Civilization by shaping the landscape into man's idealized Third Nature, the *bosco*

instead re-presents and glorifies its surroundings, a paean in stone to the wild and enigmatic forests of Bomarzo.

Et in Etruria Ego

While this creative reproduction and foregrounding of the local landscape may seem a radical and singularly innovative shift in terms of Renaissance garden conventions, it is by no means limited to the confines of the Sacro Bosco. Though it is perhaps difficult to conceive of the site as anything other than a superlative singularity unrivaled by other environments or structures—an aura actively courted by the *bosco* itself, and espoused in its many epigrams—the complex appears to fit within a larger type, a particular trans-Tuscan phenomenon linked to the characteristic local landscape. A thorough examination of the gardens and built environments of Vicino's close friends and family shows a pattern of intention, built upon a fascination with both the Etruscan past and its mapping upon the distinctive topography of the region. Indeed, the agenda of localization at play in the Sacro Bosco comes increasingly into focus when viewed in tandem with nearby, contemporary works that visualize and foreground both the unique topography and *genius loci* of the rough Tuscan backcountry.

Perhaps the closest parallel to the Sacro Bosco can be found in Pitigliano, a holding of the Orsini family, and the ducal seat of Vicino's cousin, Niccolò IV. On a spur of land just north of the town is situated a derelict and largely forgotten complex commonly referred to as the Parco degli Orsini, believed to have been commissioned sometime around 1560 by Niccolò himself.³⁵ It is possible that Niccolò's project was commissioned as a response to the Sacro Bosco, for it appears as though a certain playful and competitive spirit existed among the Orsini and their circle of friends in regard to the construction of gardens and landscape architectural projects. Given Annibale Caro's 1563 letter to Vicino's brother-in-law, Torquato Conti—in which Caro

³⁵ Lazzaro 118.

suggests Conti approach the design of his own garden with a greater degree of creativity so as to eclipse the “*bizzarrie del boschetto del Signor Vicino*”³⁶—it seems likely that Niccolò took a similar approach to his own built environment.

More a wooded park than a garden, the site occupies an ontological space caught somewhere between Art and Nature, with coarsely hewn stone forms that seem to vacillate between intentional construction and chance formation. As is the case in the Sacro Bosco, the sculptures and edifices of the Parco degli Orsini are largely excavated from the living *tuffo*, forming a relatively unsystematic network of canopied benches, seats and miniature grottoes facing out onto the *forre* below, the grand, sweeping views of which serve as a unifying centerpiece of the complex, instead of a fountain or sculpture (Figures 101-103). A handful of crude sculptural elements ornament the park, including the now largely fragmentary forms of a colossal male nude holding a cornucopia, and a female figure reclining atop a large tuffaceous cube (Figures 104-105).

The Etruscan atmosphere of the park has frequently been noted in scholarly discussion concerning the site, with visual connections drawn between the site’s sculptures and the Etruscan necropoleis of Sovana and Sorano,³⁷ particularly in regard to the numerous recessed benches and individuated high-backed seats with their tall, fluted capping reminiscent of pedimental detailing on rock-cut *tombe a dado*. The fact that the seats appear to emerge from the ruins of such a tomb creates a scenario of fictive reuse, appropriation and interaction, as though the Renaissance park had simply been grafted onto an existing necropolis.³⁸ Furthermore, the seats’ position

³⁶ Von Henneberg 6.

³⁷ Portoghesi 76; Steingraber and Prayon 104-105; Lazzaro 118. Woefully inadequate academic attention has been paid the Parco degli Orsini, with Lazzaro, Coffin and Portoghesi’s short meditations on the site composing the near entirety of examination. Further analysis may help determine if the site, particularly when viewed in conjunction with the Sacro Bosco, is part of a larger aesthetic unique to the Orsini.

³⁸ Lazzaro 118.

overlooking a natural *belvedere* effectively ties this reimagining of Etruscan antiquity to an appreciation for and contemplation of the characteristic local landscape, a far more explicit linkage of topography and Etruscanness than ever displayed in the Sacro Bosco. Untamed landscape imbued with authentic Etruscanness is offered up as spectacle—indeed, the key focus of the park itself—taking precedence over Nature as altered by human intervention. And yet, the structures within the Parco degli Orsini are decidedly unpolished and equivocal, repeatedly forcing the visitor to question which objects were the work of Etruscan hands, modern craftsmanship, or Nature herself. The park’s lack of clearly delineated boundaries bolsters such uncertainty, as few clues are provided to help the untrained eye discern between the truly ancient remnants and those counterfeited by the Orsini.

The drive to replicate rock-cut Etruscan antiquities within a wild and heavily forested setting appears to be unique to the Orsini family, and is striking not only for its “unusual” specificity,³⁹ but also for its ideological synchronicity, which seems to point to a calculated program of meaning widely accepted and understood by the Orsini and their peers. The particular correspondences between the Sacro Bosco and the Parco degli Orsini go beyond mere coincidence, indicating a larger overarching connection between Orsini blood, the landforms of Tuscia, and the Etruscan past as mapped upon the local topography. In such a light, Vicino’s Bosco can be read as an extension of a theme, a ludic interaction with a discourse seemingly predating and independent from the site’s creation, operating instead within the parameters of an aesthetic linked to an innately Etruscan Orsini identity. The ideological foundation of the Sacro Bosco appears equally present at the Parco degli Orsini, which in turn looks to the Etruscan monuments and remnants of its own locale, equally displaying and bolstering personal and

³⁹ Lazzaro 126. Orsini falsification and reproduction of antiquities is, however, hardly limited to Tuscia; faux-Roman antiquities have been noted on the façade of the Orsini palace in Nola, asserting the family’s ancient origins and creating a “publicly avowed connection with the classical past.” See Clarke 46-49.

familial connections to the surrounding land and its illustrious, enigmatic past. While both sites emphasize the characteristic local landscape, the Parco and the Bosco ultimately approach this display from divergent vantage points and degrees of earnestness; the Sacro Bosco presenting itself in a far more blithe and erudite manner than its counterpart in Pitigliano. The underlying connection to the *genius loci*, however, remains a constant, producing environments that simultaneously mirror and play homage to their cultural, historical and topographical surroundings.

Further light is cast on this dialogue of connection with the land and its storied Etruscan past when removed from a specifically familial context and examined in conjunction with the Papacqua fountain of Soriano nel Cimino. Less than ten kilometers from Bomarzo, Soriano nel Cimino had once been part of the Orsini dominion, passing through a number of leading families' control until 1560, when the city came into the possession of Vicino's close friend to whom the Bosco's *casa pendente* was dedicated, Cardinal Cristoforo Madruzzo, the Bishop of Trent.⁴⁰ Completed in 1561, the construction of the fountain most likely commemorates Madruzzo's role in the diversion of the Papacqua spring to Soriano as a new source of drinking water.⁴¹ Occupying a corridor abutting the Cardinal's *palazzo*, the edifice forms a kind of three-sided nymphaeum, the back wall of which features a colossal female satyr reclining amid jets of water, her infant offspring, and a variety of pastoral characters and sylvan creatures, including snails, goats and an owl (Figure 106-108). Niched walls on either side of central figures depict personifications of the four seasons,⁴² with Spring and Summer flanking a sizeable, high-relief depiction of Moses Striking the Rock (Figure 110).

⁴⁰ Lazzaro 156.

⁴¹ Lazzaro 158.

⁴² Theurillat postulates that the figure of Winter may be a portrait of Vicino Orsini. See Theurillat 53.

With the exception of the rusticated façade of the *palazzo* and three fountain troughs, the nymphaeum is carved almost entirely from the living *tufo*,⁴³ exhibiting the same roughness of form and foregrounding of partially unsculpted, inchoate stone as seen in the Sacro Bosco and Pitigliano's Parco degli Orsini. Indeed, the extent to which the mythological creatures of the Papacqua nymphaeum formally resemble the monstrous denizens of the Sacro Bosco—particularly in terms of their pinched facial features and highly plastic bodies—has led scholars to suggest the two sites to be the product of the same hand during a relatively concomitant period.⁴⁴ In addition to the undeniable physical and stylistic similarities between the Papacqua fountain and the Sacro Bosco, the sites exhibit a myriad of thematic and ideological correlations, which shows a certain like-mindedness between their patrons concerning the local landscape and its Etruscan connotations. The sites function almost as sister works, with the Soriano nymphaeum providing a clear, precise voice to the dialogue of localized Etruscanness, helping to amplify and illuminate the more enigmatic and equivocal speech of the Sacro Bosco.

The Papacqua fountain makes explicit its connection to the surrounding lands in a dedicatory inscription nearby, extolling the nymphaeum as a pleasant site of relaxation and retreat, its inspiration drawn from the Muses and the spirit of the place.⁴⁵ This direct invocation of the *genius loci* as the driving force behind the site's creation effectively casts all the depicted elements as extensions and embodiments of this spirit, as though their being had flowed just as

⁴³ Lazzaro 157.

⁴⁴ Bruschi 1963a, 97; P. Wilson 404. While such a hypothesis is tempting—and certainly within the realm of possibility—it ultimately remains unprovable, until more reliable documentation concerning the creator/s of the Sacro Bosco can be obtained.

⁴⁵ The full inscription reads: “Quod felix faustumque sit. Pio IV Pont. Max. Surlatinorum Marchionatus, cui Gallesium et Bassianum subditur, institutori, Madrutiorum propinquo CRISTOPHORUS MADRUT. CAR., Marchiae Legatus, Tridenti Brixinaeque Episcopus, Princeps German. Italus, postquam sub divo Carulo V obit, cum in Alemania, tum in Italia, diversa munera publica, et sub Phiippo filio Isubres rexit, Ludovico Madrutio Car, nepoti curam rerum tradidit, celebrem arcem hanc jam vetustam instauravit, Ecclesiaeque libertati aequae ac Madrutius patere jussit, quin etiam vivos gelidi fontis Papaquae, lacus suo otio atque negocio, musis, genio loco, studiosorum secessui exornavit MDLXI.” See Lang 430.

naturally from the land as the Papacqua itself. The use of *tuffo*—the characteristic rock that defines the landscape of Alto Lazio—reads as especially calculated, creating a perfect confluence of the region *in vivo*, with fantastical, chimeric creatures emerging from the living rock itself to present the true essence of the region. The amalgamation of wildness, beauty and fecundity as personified by the satyress may also be read as representative of the region,⁴⁶ her liminal, half-human body partaking of two separate realms, embodying the duality of and indeterminacy between Nature and Art. Functioning as the *genius loci* incarnate,⁴⁷ her association with both the uncertainty and mysteriousness of the untamed, organic world and the transformative presence of humanity upon the region speaks of a time and place removed from the present, an ancient Arcadia still perceptible in the essential spirit of the place as articulated by the land itself.

This intimation of an epic and idyllic past reaches more overt expression in the form of a pseudo-Etruscan inscription that rings the basin below the colossal satyress (Figure 109). The text mimics distinctive Etruscan script, indicating a close familiarity with and scholarly affinity for the particular history of the region within Vicino Orsini's circle of friends.⁴⁸ The commixture of epigraphy, deliberately Etruscanizing elements and usage of the living *tuffo* closely parallels the edifices and themes of the Sacro Bosco and Parco degli Orsini, further evidencing some manner of calculated trend or imperative among contemporaries concerning the re-presentation of localized Etruscanness. As in the case of the Orsini landscapes, Madruzzo's fountain crosses into the territory of invented artifact, which, like the fabricated ruins and *tomba a fossa* of the Sacro Bosco, serves not to deceive, but to conjure a certain atmosphere and transport the viewer

⁴⁶ Lazzaro 158 and 161; Milone 129; Lang 430.

⁴⁷ Lang 430.

⁴⁸ An Etruscan alphabet was discovered in Bomarzo's Grotta Dipinta, and may possibly have served as inspiration or a visual referent for the Soriano inscriptions. See Dennis 225.

into a carefully constructed portrait of Etruscan Antiquity. The presence of the epigraphy playfully gives the impression that the nymphaeum is of Etruscan manufacture, as though a product of an earlier, Arcadian time when the region's "human stock was not yet separated from the goat-footed ones."⁴⁹

The Arcadian flavor of the nymphaeum has often been noted by scholars, given the fountain's lively scene of satyrs, goats, woodland creatures, and even a rustic playing a *zampogna*, forms closely associated with the genre of the pastoral and, more particularly, Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* itself.⁵⁰ Francesco Sansovino's comparison of Sannazaro's panegyric to Orsini lands springs to mind, particularly the author's amalgamation of Arcadian paradise with Ancient Etruria's golden age as promulgated by Annio da Viterbo. Such associations seem to have been Madruzzo's intent as well, as evidenced by a letter penned by the Cardinal in 1563 to Giulio de Cavalieri, an associate of the Farnese. Madruzzo writes of the pastoral figures: "These fauns profess to derive from the sister of Janus,"⁵¹ drawing immediate associations to Annio's mythic history of the Viterbo region, and the pivotal role of Janus in the naissance of Etruscan civilization. The Cardinal's mention of Janus cannot be coincidental; such a high-ranking ecclesiastical official as Madruzzo would surely have had knowledge of relatively contemporary theological postulations concerning the nearest urban center of note. The addition of Janus to the discourse brings the allusions to Etruscan Antiquity into sharper focus, as this interest in the region's illustrious ancient past appears to stem from Viterbocentric *campanilismo*. The nymphaeum is a celebration of local history, a visualization of Annian Etruria as passed down

⁴⁹ Godwin 169.

⁵⁰ While Bredekamp and Lazzaro discuss the imagery as indicative of Arcadian pastoralism as a whole, Milone and Theurillat make direct thematic connections between the Papacqua fountain and Sannazaro's *Arcadia*. See Bredekamp vol I. 129; Lazzaro 160-161; Milone 122; Theurillat 149.

⁵¹ Theurillat 148. Theurillat fails to mention Annio da Viterbo in her discussion of Madruzzo's letter, and instead postulates that Madruzzo is alluding to "Zur Jani," which she alleges was the original name of Soriano nel Cimino, roughly translating to mean 'The Rock of Janus.' The author cites no sources for this information, nor does she indicate the language from which "Zur Jani" is derived.

from its Golden Age through the spirit of the land, as observed in its topography and monumental blocks of *tuffo*.

The depiction of satyrs seems particularly calculated as well. Annio's revisionist slant on Old Testament history provides an account of satyrs in ancient Etruria; according to the Friar, Janus/Noah's disobedient son, Ham, was actually Pan, the Greco-Roman satyr god.⁵² This tangled genealogical web is further complicated by the writings of Egidio Antonini, a successor of sorts to Annio da Viterbo,⁵³ who asserted that the Greeks—entirely dependent on the far more ancient and enlightened Etruscan civilization in all aspects of knowledge and culture—modeled their satyr god, Pan, after Janus Bifrons, the double-faced patriarch of the Etruscans.⁵⁴ Janus thus becomes the progenitor of the satyr, often found linked to Pan as a pastoral deity inhabiting a nebulous, pre-Roman Golden Age often transposed onto idyllic garden landscapes.⁵⁵

Oblique references to the Annian account of Noah—be he the father of Pan or not—are also detectable at nearby Villa Lante in Bagnaia, home to Cardinal Gambara, friend to both Vicino Orsini and Cardinal Madruzzo. The source that feeds the villa's numerous water features is known as the Grotto of the Deluge (Figure 111), and while lacking in overt Noachian iconography, has frequently invited a narrative interpretation concerning humanity's desire to return to a prediluvian Golden Age, foregrounding the pivotal role of the Flood in its destruction of Arcadian Nature.⁵⁶ To a number of scholars in landscape architecture, the Grotto of the Deluge stands as the key feature dividing the villa's *bosco* (Figure 112)—meant to represent the pristine Golden Age—from the increasingly complex fountains and sculptural features that flow

⁵² Whitford 63.

⁵³ While it is unclear if Egidio was shaped under the tutelage of Annio, the two moved in the same social and ideological circles, with Egidio ultimately expanding upon many of Annio's theories in a number of early Cinquecento texts. See Collins 2001, 120-133.

⁵⁴ Jacks 180.

⁵⁵ Kelif 127-128. The satyrs of the Papacqua fountain recall the enigmatic satyr figure (largely eroded and overlooked by scholars of Bomarziana) of the Sacro Bosco, which may perhaps bear similar meaning.

⁵⁶ Coffin 256-27; Lazzaro 268

outward from the grotto, which are frequently interpreted as representing the imprint of culture and civilization upon Nature.⁵⁷ As the Bishop of Viterbo, Cardinal Gambara would undoubtedly have been aware of the centrality of the Flood and Noah's key role in the restoration of civilization, as detailed in Annio's accounts of the region's storied history. Through an Annian lens, the fountains, geometric parterres and sculptural elements that emanate from the Grotto of the Deluge can be seen as representative of the flowering of human civilization under Janus/Noah and his Etruscan descendants. The usage of *tuffo* as the primary material of the garden's sculptural components, as well as certain Etruscanizing details, including a daisy-chain of Scylla figures around the central basin of the Fountain of the River Gods (Figure 113),⁵⁸ lend credence to the hypothesized Annian reading.

Such an interpretation of Villa Lante likewise bolsters the possibility that the Sacro Bosco is merely one of a type, part of a larger program of calculated Etruscanness in the gardens and built environments of a group of friends, family and peers. As a whole, this group of interventions upon the landscape of Tuscia can be read as a grand distillation of both local history and the Etruscan spirit, succinctly encapsulating and re-presenting the essence of Etruria. Whether intended as an earnest antithesis to a site like Villa Farnese at Caprarola, with its more overt ideological orientation toward and political connections with Rome, or as a playful approach to regional identity, a larger sense of unity prevails. Through Annian valences and deliberate representation of the local landscape and its ancient, enigmatic features, the region's illustrious past is asserted, as well as the Cinquecento aristocracy's place within and continuation of the glorious Etruscan legacy. This unique valuation of local topography, history and *genius loci* stands as a programmatic paean to the region, with each site created by the Orsini and their circle

⁵⁷ Coffin 256-27; Lazzaro 268

⁵⁸ Lazzaro 262

of Tuscan *cognoscenti* participating in a larger dialogue concerning the transhistorical essence and power of the place.

Chapter 4 *Hypnerotomachia Tyrrhenica*; Lucid Dreaming of Etruria

While the Sacro Bosco bears distinct and undeniable similarities to a number of contemporaneous, neighboring landscape architectural projects, to focus solely on the wood as a variation on a regional theme or program of meaning is to ultimately deprive the site of its many singular qualities. To neglect the surreal atmosphere of the *bosco*—its combination of the uncanny, the bizarre, the fantastic, and the monstrous—is to deny one of its defining elements, and to neuter the site of its unique ontological status as a collection of grotesques. Actively courting the unreal and the unsettling, the Sacro Bosco eschews the traditional model of the garden as a *locus amoenus*, a place of beauty and tranquil repose. It is a world made strange, operating on its own particular brand of illogic, one which “resembles itself and nothing else,” as proclaimed by one of the many epigrams interspersed throughout the *bosco*.

This characterizing grotesqueness that forges such a wide gulf between the Sacro Bosco and its contemporaries has been the subject of frequent note in the field of Bomarziana, as a ubiquitous, albeit rarely discussed, descriptor. Attempts to unpack said grotesqueness have resulted in two major schools of thought: the more antiquated approach that ascribes psychobiographical meaning to the monsters as extensions of Vicino Orsini’s inexplicably tortured psyche,¹ while others situate the *bosco*’s *bizzarrie* within a normative discourse of stylish Mannerist oddity and grotesquerie.² Numerous authors have assumed the park to bear an obscured programmatic meaning, and subsequently endeavored to decode its incongruous and

¹ See in particular E. Wilson, 23-25; Bosch 104-105; Darnall and Weill 15. While said interpretation may have sprung from Manuel Mujica Láinez’ novel *Bomarzo*, and Alberto Ginestra’s opera of the same name, such a perspective is reminiscent of Walter Friedlaender’s assessment of Mannerist style as a psychic exorcism of sorts, in which anxieties and tensions are purged through a reactionary art form.

² Texts ascribing to said viewpoint include but are by no means limited to Hansen, Maiorino, Lazzaro, West, Morgan 2011, and Coffin. John Shearman appears to be the progenitor of this reading, due to his seminal reinterpretation of Mannerism as a “stylish style,” driven by an increasing hunger for effortlessly beautiful artificiality, ingenious novelty and fantastical invention. See Shearman 1967, 18-19.

monstrous imagery,³ and yet the chimeric forms of the *bosco* have categorically resisted this application of comprehensive, narrative interpretation time and time again. While each approach bears certain kernels of plausibility, no single interpretation seems to adequately account for the surreal amalgam of the implausible, the eccentric, and the fanciful that inhabits the Sacro Bosco, almost as if the sculptural denizens of the site seemingly exist free of definitive meaning, as floating signifiers unable to connote or embody anything other than their own fantasticality or grotesqueness.

Meaning Unpinned

At its essence, grotesqueness is a warfare, a struggle between form and content which, when equally foregrounded, clash in a manner not unlike two opposing powerful magnetic fields.⁴ The content of the grotesque is the very form itself, which destabilizes attempts to imbue this manifestation of pure exteriority with a meaning larger than itself. The monster is king of indeterminacy, owning its status as an entity that simultaneously occupies multiple categories and falls between the cracks of knowledge, as both either *and* or, neither *and* nor, a paradox of contradictions and instability in which solely grotesqueness is stable and consistent.⁵ The deformed, inverted and incongruous discourse of the grotesque—dependent upon the conflict between form and content, yet so wildly unnatural in the former and utterly lacking in the latter—presents an almost impenetrable web of uncertainty and inexplicability, relying instead upon absurd tautology and unmitigated, aggregate ambivalence to project its meaning or lack thereof. At its core, the grotesque is not a mediation or marriage of opposites but the very essence of incongruity and opposition; Art “conceived as contradiction, operating by laws

³ Such authors include—but once again are not limited to—Guidoni, Althoff, Darnall and Weill, Manzo, Bettini, and Berberi.

⁴ Harpham 7.

⁵ Harpham 3.

peculiar to itself,” outside the bounds of rational understanding or language.⁶ Due to the monster’s antithetical existence as an incoherent “form suspended between forms” excluded from systematic structuration and stable modes of figuration or signification, such grotesquery operates in a space removed from any sensical ordering of the world that utilizes image or language.⁷ The artificiality and unnaturalness that defines the body of the grotesque effectively casts the creature adrift to float aimlessly as an anchorless simulacrum, existing without referent in the phenomenological world, once again recalling the inscription concerning the Sacro Bosco’s resemblance to itself and nothing else.

When viewed through the lens of the grotesque, the Sacro Bosco—not only the fantastical creatures that populate its wooded expanse, but also the site as a complete, singular unit that eschews linearity and consistent rationality—functions in a dialogue outside standard, logical modes of epistemology, for as an artistic unicum, the Sacro Bosco cannot properly enter into a discourse of meaning and signification with anything other than itself. Due to its lack of ties to phenomenological reality, and its capacity to represent nothing other than itself, the monstrous grotesque means nothing; its twisted and deformed body points to nothing other than its own semiological impotence and transcendence. In the end, the grotesque can only serve as an instrument to illuminate the shortcomings of meaning, to problematize and destabilize processes of connotation, to “reflect a consciousness of the ambiguity of truth and of the relativism of perception, which is fundamentally rhetorical.”⁸ Thus, as an ambivalent and anomalous nothing, the monster can only stand as a half-sign at best, a porous vessel for meaning that may repeatedly be imbued with content but is unable to contain or accommodate it, resisting such efforts at specification and ontological location as meaning flows freely through and ultimately

⁶ Harpham 178.

⁷ Cohen 6.

⁸ Hansen 259.

away from the grotesque, ambiguous body. Trapped in a state that is equal parts illegibility and “over-legibility,” the grotesque flirts with interpretation, appearing to conform to standard, straightforward modes of signification, only to slip away and disrobe or negate itself of stable meaning.⁹ The grotesque is only truly home in the inside-out, upside-down anti-world of the Sacro Bosco, a site that equally embodies eitherness and neitherness, allowing the forms to simultaneously absorb and deflect meaning in a shifting prism of indeterminacy. As a menagerie of oddities, fantasticalities, and grotesques, the Sacro Bosco cannot be made to signify or conform to programmatic iconographies. It cannot be forced to definitively mean anything. The site encompasses myriad possible meanings, yet fully partakes of none.

The Sacro Bosco’s inability to affix itself to stable, concrete and above all coherent meaning is echoed in its routeless and anti-axial structuration. The meandering paths, following no particular program of iconographic narration or signification, suggest the impossibility of a straightforward reading, instead compelling visitors to forge their own itinerary, lending a certain air of chance and interactivity to one’s visit.¹⁰ The *bosco* presents the viewer with a variety of prospective routes and, not unlike a maze, the intrinsically multicursal nature of the Sacro Bosco allows for an interplay of options, “[testing] choice, confusion, and ambiguity to the limits of endurance,” through an aggregation of prospective paths, identities and meanings.¹¹ The *bosco* is alive with nonlinear dialogues, equivocality and ambiguity that allows for the synthesis of radically divergent and contrasting valences that undergo a process of metamorphosis each time the site is visited. As a direct result of the grotesque unpinning of meaning, the Sacro Bosco naturally allows for fluid, ludic, and potentially infinite multivalences as statues, spaces and

⁹ Bélanger 18.

¹⁰ Van der Ree, Smienk and Bergen 125.

¹¹ Maiorino 96.

meaning itself operate in a continually shifting and fundamentally relative relationship to each other.¹²

This spatial ambivalence and capacity for multiple routes, coupled with the empty signifiers that populate the *bosco* ensure that no two visits to the grounds will ever be identical, emphasizing the park as a site of constant amusement, wonder and intellectual engagement. The mutability of meaning within the Sacro Bosco is echoed in the variable nature of the woods themselves, as such a site effectively functions as a living, mutable *Gesamtkunstwerk* engaging in an “endless process of its creation” through a symbiotic relationship with its ever-changing environment.¹³ In the *bosco*, meaning is no more fixed than the processes of Nature, for it is the implementation of grotesques, rather than any other means of expression or representation, that allows the greatest potential for diverse narratives and readings, creating an absurd and dreamlike (albeit relatively lucid) state wherein the viewer controls both the production of meaning and its inscription upon the landscape.

The overwhelming ambivalence and multivalency of the Sacro Bosco creates a space where “obscurity is most eloquent,”¹⁴ and viewers themselves have the ability to generate profound and individual meaning from nothingness, in a role not dissimilar to that of the all-powerful and godlike creator of Mannerist *capricci* and *meraviglie*, simply by drawing upon ingenuity, wit and intellect. The marginal and transitory nature of the grotesque, which “[celebrates] the flux of becoming rather than being,”¹⁵ makes these monstrous creatures ideal for the role of perpetual creation demanded of them by the Sacro Bosco. Allowing for a vast potential of interpretation through its total evasion of fixed ideology and narrativity, the sheer artificiality of the empty sign

¹² Guidoni 36; Van der Ree, Smienk and Bergen 191.

¹³ Szafrńska 194.

¹⁴ Shearman 1967, 159.

¹⁵ Camille 9.

fosters not an absence of expression, but instead an abundance, wherein instability and equivocality are privileged over hierarchy, order and logic.¹⁶ The existential ambivalence of the grotesque allows for such monstrous entities to engage in a wholly unique discourse of perpetual metamorphosis, embodying “death and birth, growth and becoming,” a process in which meaning is constantly rewritten.¹⁷ The combination of the park’s lack of a prescribed path, its absence of fixed iconography, as well as the mediating role of the constantly shifting experience of Nature—implicating season, weather, ambient noise and time of day to name a few variables¹⁸—allows for the viewer to create a different experience upon each visit to the *bosco*.

While the possibility that the Sacro Bosco may hold no all-encompassing, absolute meaning has previously been broached within the scope of Bomarziana, relatively few scholars have adopted such an approach, despite the fact that some of the earliest literature posited that no unified or straightforward iconographic scheme could encompass the multiplicities of meaning latent in the site and its inhabitants.¹⁹ Luisa Quartermaine has forwarded such an approach, comparing the Sacro Bosco to period courtly games and entertainments meant to “try the intellectual ability” of friends and *cortegiani*.²⁰ Josephine von Henneberg echoes Quartermaine’s arguments, positing that the Sacro Bosco was a site of sophisticated intellectual discourse, containing multiple levels of literary and symbolic resonance which could be “heatedly discussed” among Vicino and his entourage.²¹ Instead of pursuing an iconographical master key or narrative cipher to decrypt the artistic program, the site’s open-ended emblematic nature must inform any approach taken to the attribution of meaning within the park. Reading

¹⁶ Hansen 253; Maiorino 69; Van der Ree, Smienk and Bergen, 191.

¹⁷ Bakhtin 24.

¹⁸ Szafrńska 198-199; Bruschi 1963a, 101.

¹⁹ Fasolo 56-57; Shearman 1967, 125.

²⁰ Quartermaine 74.

²¹ Von Henneberg 6-7.

like a “dislocated allegory,”²² the Sacro Bosco is a “semiotic labyrinth”²³ through which transient meaning constantly flows, metamorphosing with each new interpretation imbued upon the park by each visitor who walks its paths. The site allocates the creation of meaning to the visitor, who, through the alchemy of imaginative processes, transforms the embryonic floating signifiers of the *bosco* into a personalized pilgrimage through the surreal.²⁴ Like an esoteric emblem, the site cries out for interpretation, and it is the visitor’s journey within and reflection upon the twisting alleys and fantastical sights that makes the process meaningful. The circuitous paths contribute an adventitious air to the wood, which is heightened by the visitor’s quixotic encounters with mythical figures, bewildering structures, and nightmarish beasts, as though gliding through a dream.

The mutability of interpretive meaning in the *bosco* bolsters such a reading, as the fantasticalities, grotesques and enigmas of the Sacro Bosco operate within a sphere of dreamlike illogic, defying reason, order and phenomenological reality that exists entirely separate from waking rationale. The meandering design of the site, which follows no distinct narrative path or directional goal, as well as the inexplicable and mysterious commingling of monsters, deities, derelict ruins and humanoid creatures, creates an overwhelming sense of irreconcilable disunity and non-sense closely akin to that which is found only in dreams, where reason, sanity, and the cause and effect of phenomenological reality are arrested and deferred. The illogical linkage of unrelated and surreal tableaux, when combined with statues and structures that wholly defy proportion, functionality or naturality, effectively creates an uncanny dreamscape where absurdity forges its own twisted brand of sense. Tapping into the fundamental power of the grotesque, the poetic and liminally ambiguous, the Sacro Bosco assumes the labyrinthine,

²² Polizzi 2009, 107.

²³ Bélanger 20.

²⁴ Bélanger 20, 280-281; P. Wilson, 413.

tautological structure of a dream, an impossible world wherein reality is suspended and visitors lose themselves in a realm of uncertainty, inversion and wonder. As a dreamscape made tangible—made experiential, made variable—the capacity for multiplicities of meaning within the Sacro Bosco makes a surprising degree of sense. Perceived and experienced as such, it open to the same flexibility of signification as a dream, wherein the visitor/dreamer’s own personality, knowledge, history, and disposition ultimately affect the interpretation. Operating within an oneiric semiological matrix, the Sacro Bosco is a constantly shifting bearer of meaning, possessing no fixed interpretation, but capable of denoting infinite meanings to infinite dreamers. Like a shared dream, or a hypnogogic *folie à plusieurs*, the Sacro Bosco may be experienced by many, only to be interpreted individually as per the idiosyncratic mentalities and personalities of each particular dreamer. This equivocal, personalized program of meaning is controlled by the visitor to the *bosco*—effectively functioning as a lucid dream state—creating a scenario of surreal experientiality as if sleepwalking through a dreamscape.

Dreaming within the Garden

Bolstering these readings of the Sacro Bosco as an experiential and equivocal oneiric space are sixteenth century understandings of dreaming and the dreamworld, which characterize hypnogogic states as sites of indeterminacy, interpretation and personal revelation. The Renaissance saw a vast shift in overarching cultural approaches to and theorization of dreaming, moving from the belief that dreams were largely visions or delusions imposed by external, supernatural sources, to the point where the dream state was increasingly regarded as the product of the dreamer’s own mentality.²⁵ Cinquecento dream theorists forwarded the radical perspective that dreams were an internally-seated phenomenon generated by the dreamer’s knowledge, feelings and past experiences, and contained no inherent or singularly definitive

²⁵ Rupprecht 112.

meaning, more closely resembling poetry than revelation.²⁶ Arguably the period's most widely read theoretician concerning dreams was Girolamo Cardano, whose vast array of publications touched on subjects ranging from mathematics and medicine to astrology,²⁷ and included the 1562 text *Synesiorum Somniorum omnis generis insomnia explicantes*, a treatise on the nature and interpretation of dreams. Cardano's oeuvre was known to Vicino Orsini, as evinced by his correspondences with Jean Drouet;²⁸ given the Duke's interest in offbeat, extravagant, and esoteric literature, Cardano's writings on dreams and astrology would have been of great interest.²⁹

Cardano's contributions to the field of dream theory emphasized a greater subjectivity on the part of the dreamer, to whom fell the near-divinatory role of unpacking and analyzing the opaque and equivocal experiences of the dreamscape.³⁰ According to Cardano, the hypnogogic imagery of the dream world did not engage in a one-to-one relationship of signification, and could instead make meaning on multiple and diverse levels, with imagery blending together and undergoing a consistent process of transformation, creating a very particular *ratio somniantis* wherein interpretive meaning ultimately rests in the hands of the dreamer.³¹ Operating on "many different levels of clarity and obscurity,"³² dreams were best understood on a level analogous to art or poetry, rather than the more fixed and concrete nature of astrological prognostications.³³

Cardano compared the multiplicity and mutability of meaning within the dreamscape to artistic

²⁶ Rupprecht 119-120.

²⁷ Interestingly enough, astrology was a field in which Annio da Viterbo had proven himself to be remarkably skilled. Furthermore, Annio's writings tie the practice of astrology to Noah/Janus, who allegedly taught the skill to the Etruscans, who were widely praised for their divinatory expertise in a number of Ancient texts accessible to Renaissance readers. See Hillard 56; Collins 2007, 115.

²⁸ Kretzulesco-Quaranta 278; Bélanger 60-70; Bruschi 1963b, 19.

²⁹ Bredekamp has offered an astrological reading of the *tempietto*, based in large part on a 17th century sketch of the site by Giovanni Guerra, depicting symbols of the zodiac within the now-empty roundels that adorn the temple's stylobate. See Bredekamp vol I, 154-160.

³⁰ Grafton 1999, 165, 169.

³¹ Fierz 130, 137.

³² Grafton 1999, 165.

³³ Rupprecht 119-120; Grafton 1999, 158; Hamburg 693.

and poetic invention, urging his readers to record their oneiric experiences in order to hone their literary prose and better understand their own person.³⁴ Describing the recorded dream as “a fiction with more than one layer,”³⁵ Cardano discusses its interpretation as varying widely, based on the dreamer’s age, temperament, life experiences and circumstances.³⁶ Since the dream comes from the mind itself, the act of recording and analyzing it helps the dreamer unravel and better understand the nature of his own personhood, character, and path in life.³⁷ Not only does the dream ledger reveal unique insights into the dreamer’s conscious and unconscious mind—all while refining the author’s creative, narrative voice—the act of recording such fantastical, oneiric encounters also creates a veritable personalized epic, wherein the dreamer travels to fantastic lands, engages in extraordinary or at times bizarre behaviors, and witnesses all manner of extraordinary beasts and structures. Once chronicled, the emblematic, personal mysteries of the dreamworld become an individualized labyrinth of obscured, poetic meaning that jumps from one hypnogogic tableau to another in a manner relatively analogous to the structure of the Sacro Bosco. This ability to personally invent and tailor meaning is what makes the dream pilgrimage significant, whether it derives from a sleeping, unconscious state or the waking act of navigating through a surreal and dreamlike *bosco*.

This linkage of dreams, art and poetic invention predates Cardano’s texts, and was a familiar staple of period attitudes toward creativity and inspiration. Informed by a number of ancient authors, dreaming was largely perceived by Renaissance minds as analogous to poetic creativity, with the sleeping figure finding its place in the visual arts as a common sign for generative and

³⁴ Fierz 129, 131; Rupprecht 119.

³⁵ Browne 129.

³⁶ Browne 127.

³⁷ Browne 127, 132-133.

ingenious thought, representing a moment on the cusp of inspiration.³⁸ The surreal inventions of the dreamer and the imaginative fantasies of the artist or poet both stand as equivocal forms effectively generated from nothingness, a product solely of one's *ingenium* and subjective interpretation, occupying a place rather removed from phenomenological or experiential nature, as articulated in Horace's *Ars Poetica* through the linkage of hypnogogic imagery and hybrid grotesques.³⁹ Hypnogogic matter—whether springing from the artist's paintbrush, the poet's quill, or the sleeper's fever dream—represented the triumph and ultimate expression of fantasy and ingenuity, open to vast interpretive license through the implementation of fanciful illusion, multivalent opacity and oblique allusion. Grotesques and unnatural, chimeric monsters, often referred to as *i sogni dei pittori*, were seen as demonstrative of this allusive and equivocal poetic ingenuity,⁴⁰ operating within the same parameters of Cardano's conception of the dream, beholden to no particular meaning or interpretive approach.

In addition to the connection of oneiric experiences and spaces with poetry, literature and art, Cardano and his contemporaries frequently equated dreamscapes to the natural world. Despite the dream's ability to produce unnatural, hypnogogic experiences and imagery, Cardano openly compared dreams to "plants and other works of nature,"⁴¹ effectively cultivating a notion of dreaming that carries both generative and regenerative connotations. In a process not dissimilar to the germination and growth of plants, the dream grows out of the seeds sown in the unconscious by waking reality, and is nurtured to full, surreal blossom by the fertile terrain of the dreamer's mind. Through this interpenetration of verdant nature and the oneiric experience, the realm of dreams, in turn, becomes a veritable enchanted forest, strongly echoing the literary

³⁸ Ruvoldt 18-20, 39, 120.

³⁹ Ruvoldt 18.

⁴⁰ Kayser 21-22.

⁴¹ Rupprecht 118.

trope of the *selva incantata* so familiar to period readers of chivalric and romantic epic poetry.⁴² In the composition of a dream journal, as suggested by Cardano, the wild oneiric woodlands are cultivated and tamed into a manageable—and above all, navigable—dream garden.

This manner of imagery, in which the dream and the natural world bleed into one another is echoed in another thematic thread carried through the Renaissance: the comparison of the garden to a dream. The utopian dreamland was often couched in the language of the garden, coopting understandings of Third Nature as a site of repose and pleasing *fantasie*, an Edenic landscape of renewal and invention.⁴³ The Renaissance garden, with its almost total lack of Christianizing content occupies a liminal space outside of linear time, where Golden Age Antiquity never faded, and indeed, continued to flourish.⁴⁴ The visitor moves through this precious world which occupies the space between actuality and possibility, enveloped in “a trancelike atmosphere... beyond words or the rational mind,” where the senses are ravished by the voluptuous beauty of an imagined and glorified Antiquity.⁴⁵

This perfect storm of the garden, the dream and Antiquity resurrected is most fully realized in Francesco Colonna’s labyrinthine novel, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, which roughly translated, means “Poliphilo’s Strife of Love in a Dream.” Richly illustrated with woodcuts, the text weaves a long and convoluted account of Polphilo’s journey to reunite with his beloved through nested dreamworlds overflowing with gardens, nymphs, and mysterious architecture. The search

⁴² Brunon 2008, 24; Polizzi 1998, 63; Bruschi 1963a, 104; Calvesi 1956, 372; Calvesi 1989, 142. Bruschi and Calvesi, in particular, have discussed at length the Sacro Bosco as an extension of this literary leitmotif, most particularly in regards to the *selve incantate* of Bernardo Tasso’s *L’Amadigi* and Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*.

⁴³ Barasch 115-117.

⁴⁴ Godwin 153. Period theories of decorum and appropriateness most likely played a role in this segregation of imagery, as *istorie* were generally considered inappropriate for the garden. See MacDougall 1985, 123.

⁴⁵ Godwin 153. This concept of the garden as a preserved capsule of Antiquity endured beyond the Renaissance, and is perhaps best exemplified by a particular remark made by Queen Christina of Sweden on the occasion of her 1655 visit to Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola. Upon seeing the gardens, she was said to exclaim, “I dare not speak the name of Jesus, lest I break the spell.” While other accounts claim she said, “It is as if our Savior had never breathed,” either statement reinforces the garden’s place outside of the linear progression of Christian history. See Masson 141; Godwin 180; P. Wilson, 401.

for Poliphilo's sweetheart, Polia, serves as only the thinnest pretense of a plot, occupying less than ten percent of the novel's 370 pages, all but swept aside in favor of Poliphilo's descriptions and interpretations of the various artifacts, gardens and architectural spaces encountered along his dream-pilgrimage.⁴⁶ As the third major architectural text published in the Renaissance, the novel was widely disseminated across Europe,⁴⁷ effectively encapsulating something of the contemporary humanist culture, with Poliphilo's interest in the Antique serving less as an actual character trait, and more as a model of antiquarian inquiry and erudition. Catering to period tastes for all things Antique and esoteric, Colonna's text was the perfect complement to the library of any humanist or aspiring antiquarian, ushering in a certain cultural climate of "Poliphilism," or yearning for the dreamlike Antique golden age in which the novel is set.⁴⁸ This predilection for the dreamy, verdant world of Poliphilo often became the subject of the grand Cinquecento gardens themselves, parroting back this taste for Poliphian Antiquity through direct or indirect allusion to the epic, creating a tautological cycle of referentiality, wherein the physical garden recalls the novel, which itself recalls the humanist gardens and the general antiquarian/humanist culture of the Renaissance.⁴⁹

The *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* presents an interesting case of intertextuality in the Renaissance approach to the garden, most particularly in the period ability to experience and interact with the garden much as one would a piece of literature. Drawing on the familiar concept of *ut pictura poesis*—the belief that painting, like poetry or literature, should take an ambiguous approach to meaning, so that instead of spoon-feeding the viewer a narrative or axiomatic interpretation, one must engage with and 'complete' the work, "[becoming] an

⁴⁶ Lefaivre 9.

⁴⁷ Rowland 1998, 61.

⁴⁸ Godwin 18; Lefaivre 23.

⁴⁹ Kretzulesco-Quaranta 19-20; Polizzi 1999, 83.

accomplice in its aesthetic functioning⁵⁰—there emerged *ut poesis hortus*, which forwarded a similar model for the reading of garden subject matter and design.⁵¹ In the case of both precepts, the artistic weaving of an equivocally poetic *mise en scene* is the prime directive, wherein the viewer's creation of a fitting scenario or signification creates the experience and pleasure of the work in question. Like dreams, poetry, art and literature, the ideal Renaissance garden was not intended to be approached literally, nor was it meant to be easily decoded by a master cipher; instead, it functioned more as an assemblage of evocative imagery meant to stimulate the visitor's creativity, while inviting erudite discussion through the multiplicity of meaning.

This attitude toward the poetic creation of meaning in the garden is reflected by a number of prominent critics and theorists, who included Leon Battista Alberti, Benedetto Varchi and Giorgio Vasari, who wrote that the decoration of gardens and the suitability of sculptural *poesie*.⁵² Varchi in particular warned against gauche, slavish depiction of literary subject matter,⁵³ implying that the period garden was expected to present a journey of sorts through a poetic puzzle of meaning. While certain readily-identifiable themes, compositions and sculptural types were readily adopted and nearly omnipresent in period gardens—depictions of Venus, river gods, and Pegasus were relatively ubiquitous tropes, as well as allusions to the Garden of the Hesperides or Parnassus—their inclusion was not meant to be approached literally or as an interpretive key, but instead more as poetic imagery meant to transport the viewer to a place beyond the here and now. The visual *poesie* invite the visitor to think creatively, to engage with the landscape in a manner beyond the facile identification of iconographies and narratives, and to approach the site as a network of evocative imagery meant to stir allusive imagination.

⁵⁰ Shearman 1992, 57-58.

⁵¹ Brunon 2008, 6-7.

⁵² MacDougall 1985, 122, 131.

⁵³ MacDougall 1985, 131.

Thus, the presence and engagement of an erudite viewer is key to the function of the Renaissance garden, which is effectively rendered meaningless and inoperable without a pilgrim/visitor present to supply interpretation. The experience hinges on the visitor's interaction with the imagery and scenes provided, ultimately placing the visitor as the subject and center of the garden, engaging with and completing the site's *poesie* through individual ekphrasis and personally tailored resonance. This is particularly true in the case of the visitor to the Sacro Bosco, who is confronted by a vast array of surreal scenes and characters that, through their grotesqueness, shirk the bonds of interpretive meaning more fiercely than the average garden *poesia*. Walking through Vicino's oneiric *bosco*, the visitor takes on a mediatory role in the creation of meaning that bears a certain resemblance to the Cardanesque dreamer, ascribing significance to bizarre and seemingly unrelated imagery and spaces. It is the visitor's presence in the Sacro Bosco that creates a meaningful center, that temporarily awakens the site's floating signifiers from their state of semiological hibernation, imbuing the hallucinatory, dreamlike *poesie* with meaning, however transitory it may be. The active role of the visitor is the heart of the Sacro Bosco and the only stable source of signification, for the park itself does not and cannot produce or maintain any manner of collected and lasting meaning, given its fluctuating dialogue of dream-logic, the grotesque and the poetic.⁵⁴

Deprived of the more recognizable iconographic schemes and poetic discourses utilized by its contemporaries, the Sacro Bosco stands apart as it engages in a dialogue of superlative wonder, with the visitor's astonishment taking center stage, frequently deferring or even arresting the pilgrim's ability to make meaning. Cast adrift, one must move through the site much like the visitor to the various *boschi* and *selve* of Bomarzo, forced to choose one of many routes through the forest, and all but stumbling upon various carvings and monuments, blindly ascribing

⁵⁴ Bélanger 15-17, 114.

meaning to the works based on whichever particular elements capture interest or spark some degree of recognition or resonance. With one's senses ravaged, the visitor has few points of reference to help frame the experience of the Sacro Bosco. The closest parallel comes in the form of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and its protagonist's encounters with a similarly eccentric assemblage of marvels, with Poliphilo's reactions to and experiences of the dreamworld's otherworldly sights and phenomena providing both a foundation and structural parameters to the visitor's journey through the wood. Part "authentic distillation" of contemporary humanist thought,⁵⁵ part guide to the experience of landscapes and found antiquities, familiarity with the *Hypnerotomachia* and Poliphilo's ekphrastic approach provided an accessible framing device to shape and inform the visitor's pilgrimage through the Sacro Bosco.

The organization of the Sacro Bosco, with its interactive nature that ultimately puts meaning in the hands of the viewer, seems to invite such structural comparisons to the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, particularly given the reader's identification with Poliphilo throughout his oneiric journey. Lacking in any particularly strong personal characteristics, Poliphilo merely stands as the everyman antiquarian, his identity all but melting into the background of Colonna's text, allowing the learned humanist reader to inhabit the loosely-defined viewpoint of the protagonist. Poliphilo's eye becomes the viewer's I, as his journey through the fantastic dreamland becomes the viewer's own, the attitudes, allusions and ideals expressed by Poliphilo mirroring those of the informed, erudite reader. The reader becomes more than a mere "co-dreamer"⁵⁶ to Poliphilo, and instead inhabits the person of Poliphilo himself, analyzing, interpreting and musing over every site and artifact encountered along the pilgrimage through the dreamscape. As Poliphilo's dream

⁵⁵ Morgan 2011, 171.

⁵⁶ P. Wilson 416.

becomes one's own, the text transforms into a process or performance to which the reader must add meaning and significance, with Poliphilo's words merely painting the descriptive features of the marvels which one must endeavor to unpack and illuminate. Thus, the erudite visitor to the Sacro Bosco should be able to project this experiential reading of a dreamlike and enigmatic environment onto Vicino's *bosco*, once again taking on the role of Poliphilo and charting a course through a hypnogogic space in the same vein as the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*.

The Epic Made Manifest

Comparisons have frequently been made between the surreal, oneiric imagery of the Sacro Bosco and the bizarre creatures, architecture and garden spaces encountered within the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, and while the *bosco* does indeed appear to court such linkages, the site resists a wholesale iconographic interpretation/translation of Colonna's texts. Scholars have attempted to draw parallels between the imagery of the novel and that of the Sacro Bosco—namely due to the occurrence of certain figures in both the park and Colonna's epic, including an elephant, a dragon, a pegasus, nymphs and a sleeping female nude—but their interpretations remain largely unconvincing, due in large part to the lack of visual or iconographic similarity between the engravings and sculptures that have been purported to match.⁵⁷ Colonna's elephant, for example, carries an Egyptian obelisk atop its back (Figure 114), while Vicino's elephant is outfitted with a war turret (Figure 21). Similarly, the pegasus encountered by Poliphilo is a bronze colossus besieged by mischievous *putti* (Figure 115), while the mythical winged horse of the Sacro Bosco alights atop a rough stone fountain which was once encircled by sculptural Muses (Figure 39). Despite a number of these similar forms being common garden tropes—the pegasus, the sleeping nude and the nymph all figure prominently in the decorative scheme of

⁵⁷ Attempts to visually connect the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* and the Sacro Bosco may be found in Calvesi 2009, 122-124; Kretzulesco-Quaranta 286-288; Godwin 172; Guidoni 69; Althoff 23-28, 30-32, 44.

Renaissance gardens, and can hardly be considered a unique or characteristic image to the *Hypnerotomachia*—the statues flirt with a certain recognizability.

The sculpted figures read as uniquely specific, as though meant to reference particular narratives, figures or concepts, and yet the intended referents are always on the tip of one's tongue, as it were, intentionally bordering, but never crossing into the territory of stable iconographic resonance. The effect, as described by Hervé Brunon, is less one of *déjà vu* and more "*déjà lu*,"⁵⁸ wherein the forms of the Sacro Bosco appear to allude to a very specific literary or visual source, tugging at the corners of the imagination through their insistent suggestion of familiarity. The park's gigantic turreted war elephant and tortoise surmounted by a trumpeting *ninfa* figure (Figure 36)⁵⁹ stand out as particularly strong examples of this needling sensation that the particular imagery has been encountered before. This impression of *déjà lu*, oddly enough, was described by Cardano in his treatise on dreams, as he discussed liminal states between wakefulness and sleeping, wherein the dreamer is unable to determine if "a certain experience occurred in waking reality, or in a dream, or was read in a book or seen in a picture,"⁶⁰ a sensation that the floating signifiers of the Sacro Bosco openly court. It is in this situation that the framing devices recalled from the *Hypnerotomachia* are of particular use to the pilgrim in the *bosco*, the curious sculptural emblems of which seem to have been tailored to fit an interpretive approach similar to that taken by Poliphilo in his journey through the dreamlands. The strong flavor of the *Hypnerotomachia* that pervades the Sacro Bosco seems to have been

⁵⁸ Brunon 2008, 26-27.

⁵⁹ The elephant and tortoise sculptures have long been the subject of raging iconographic debate within the field of Bomarziana. The most extensive and creative discussions of the tortoise may be found in Calvesi 2009, 150-157; Berberi 86-99; Jensen 211; Darnall and Weil 15-20; Lang 427. Discussion of the elephant casts an even wider net, and includes Bosch 101-102; Lang 427; Guidoni 61; Berberi 222-229; Bury 215-217; Darnall and Weill 47-48.

⁶⁰ Browne 130.

intentionally designed to cultivate just such an experience for the visitor, functioning as an interactive and fully realized Poliphilesque dreamscape ripe for ekphrastic exploration.

In terms of the various components that make up the *bosco*'s artistic program, the site bears a great many surface similarities to the world of the *Hypnerotomachia*. The setting, a cross between First Nature and Third interspersed with monsters, nymphs, strange beasts, mysterious antiquities, and capricious architectural spaces, invites instant comparison, particularly in terms of both works' liberal usage of curious, declamatory epigrams. The insistent presence of epigraphy throughout the Sacro Bosco is unique to the site, a feature lacking in nearly all its contemporaries, as though Vicino were specifically drawing on or referencing the text-heavy precedent set by Colonna.⁶¹ Like those found in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, the inscriptions of Vicino's *bosco* are not limited to solely one language, nor are they straightforward explanations of the accompanying marvels,⁶² instead speaking the sphinxes' silver-tongued language of riddles and hyperbolic equivocalities. In both cases, the inscriptions only heighten the aura of mystery and occulted meaning projected by their respective dreamscapes.

Similarly, the repeated epigraphic comparison of the Sacro Bosco to Herodotus' Seven Wonders of the World fashions an ancient pedigree for the park, once again drawing comparisons between Vicino's *meraviglie* and those encountered by Poliphilo, which include pyramids, colossi, gardens and classicizing structures of epic proportions, clearly meant to evoke and engage in a type of *paragone* with the Seven Wonders.⁶³ Indeed, the invocation and presentation of the Antique in the Sacro Bosco largely mirrors that of Colonna's novel, juxtaposing ruins with architectural spaces meant to astonish the visitor, as well as more conventional garden structures, like the classicizing *ninfeo*. The dream pilgrim, whether reading

⁶¹ Bruschi 1963b, 37.

⁶² Bélanger 250.

⁶³ Bury 1998, 56; Curran 175.

Colonna's novel, or exploring the Sacro Bosco, is transported to a poetic realm "suspended between reality and dream,"⁶⁴ a place outside the bonds of linear time, where the spirit and mythological figures of Antiquity continue to flourish. The Sacro Bosco presents itself as a world apart—as though a twin to the dream-realm of Queen Eleuterylida as described in the *Hypnerotomachia*—a verdant oasis where the inhabitants of Classical antiquity have taken refuge from the Christian world, only in their isolation to have transformed over time into monstrous sizes and new hybrid variations.

This particular scenario, wherein the visitor is transported to a world apart, where Antiquity and literature come alive, extends beyond the implementation of *Hypnerotomachia*-flavored constructs and imagery, as the Sacro Bosco appears to bear allusions to other key works of Renaissance fiction. In keeping with this sense of *déjà lu* is the "*Lasciate ogni pensiero voi ch'entrate*" inscription that graces the mouth of the *orco*, which, while easily the most transparent literary reference in the *bosco*, playfully inverts the famed epigram described by Dante at the gates of Hell, signaling that the park carries a multiplicity of valences wholly unattached to the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. While parallels have been drawn between the visitor's path through the Sacro Bosco, and Dante's allegorical journey through the metaphysical realms,⁶⁵ scholars have often aligned this leitmotif of the epic pilgrimage with the period chivalric romance, and the hero who must journey through strange and unhomely forests to ultimately find himself.⁶⁶ Maurizio Calvesi in particular has emphasized potential—albeit subtle—allusions to Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Matteo Maria Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato*, Bernardo Tasso's *L'Amadigi*, and Luigi Pulci's *Morgante*, especially in terms of the

⁶⁴ Bredekamp vol. I, 104.

⁶⁵ Rowland and Bélanger discuss these similarities on a more structural level, while Darnall and Weil explore the *Bosco*'s connections to Dante on a much more programmatic, moralistic and iconographic level. See Rowland 1998, 61; Bélanger 253 and 282; Darnall and Weil 5-6, 65, 70.

⁶⁶ Bélanger 253, 257, 282; Calvesi 1989, 142; Brunon 2008, 24; Polizzi 1998, 63; Bruschi 1963a, 104.

wording used for the *bosco*'s epigrams, and their resonance with key passages in chivalric epics.⁶⁷

As in the case of the *Hypnerotomachia*, *Orlando Furioso* has been frequently linked to the Sacro Bosco, due in large part to the novel's fantastic imagery, and while attempts have been made to iconographically connect the park's artistic program to the novel, such linkages have ultimately proven unfruitful.⁶⁸ Yet to a certain extent the *bosco* seems to court such interpretations. The battling colossi (Figure 32) operate within the same dialogue of *déjà lu* as the turtle and elephant sculptures, the sculptural group being frequently compared to a scene in *Orlando Furioso* in which the titular character, in a fit of madness, rends an innocent woodsman in half with his bare hands.⁶⁹ While the figures bear a pointed resemblance to the scene in question, the lack of concrete iconography aligns the composition with the rest of the *bosco*'s floating signifiers. The statue's identification with Orlando persists, however, on account of a letter from Vicino to his friend Jean Drouet, in which the Duke made an offhand comment concerning the *boschetto* and his "mad Orlando," whom he soon hoped would turn human again.⁷⁰ The linkage of the statue with Ariosto's hero is further supported by an inscription in the direct vicinity of the sculptural group which, although now largely fragmentary, appears to read "Anglante," a telling detail, given Orlando's title as the Lord of Anglante.⁷¹ In the absence of the remaining sections of the epigram, it must be assumed that the text was included not to narrate the tableau or definitively tie it to a specific passage in Ariosto, but instead to urge

⁶⁷ Calvesi 1989, 142-147.

⁶⁸ Darnall and Weil used Ariosto's epic as an iconographic master-key for their programmatic reading of the *bosco*, with decidedly poor results. When faced with a sculptural figure that did not correspond to their heavy-handed, literal reading, Darnall and Weil's interpretive skills falter. Take, for example, their reading of the *bosco*'s elephant as a symbol of Orlando, who, as articulated by Darnall and Weil, in his insanity and longing for Angelica no doubt behaved as bestially as an elephant.

⁶⁹ These authors include, but are not limited to Sheeler 47; Quartermaine 78; Darnall and Weil 13-14.

⁷⁰ Bredekamp vol. II, 46; Bruschi 1963b, 37-38.

⁷¹ Sheeler 47.

visitors to interact with the scenes before them on a fundamentally literary level, to draw comparisons between the denizens of the *bosco* and the multitude of fictional characters at the forefront of period imagination. As the colossi are located near what is presumed by some to be an original entrance to the Sacro Bosco,⁷² their placement, coupled with the leading epigraphy, seems to be a signal that the visitor has stepped out of the realm of the mundane and factual, and into a world that is primarily fictive, where the exploits and excitements of period literature are brought to life and actively experienced.

The visitor's intellectual and emotional interaction with the sculptures and structures are key in establishing this interactive fiction. When confronted with the *bosco*'s oversized wonders and hallucinatory imagery, the visitor is expected to react with the same mixture of delight, horror, confusion and fascination as experienced by Poliphilo in the course of his travels.⁷³ The element of surprise compounds this Poliphilesque mixture of heightened emotions, as one is unable to predict what manner of marvel or monstrosity awaits around the next bend of the Sacro Bosco's winding alleys, creating a pervasive air of suspense and surprise. The meandering, circuitous paths neither point the visitor toward any particular destination, nor offer any cues to guide one's journey, creating a labyrinthine network of choices through which one must wander as blindly as Poliphilo, taking in the sights, but never able to fully discern or pinpoint one's position in the larger scheme of the planned landscape.⁷⁴ Unlike the gardens of Villa Lante or Villa d'Este, the visitor to the Sacro Bosco is unable to visually establish a clear destination toward which to proceed, and is left to drift amid the trees, monsters and assorted curiosities, unable to place or pace one's self in either "movement or thinking," just as the disoriented Poliphilo roves aimlessly from locale to locale, appreciating the *meraviglie* before him, but never able to

⁷² Darnall and Weil 11.

⁷³ Bélanger 254.

⁷⁴ Lefaiivre 165; Hunt 110.

determine his exact location or ultimate destination in the dreamlands.⁷⁵ Both Poliphilo and the visitor to the *bosco* are thwarted by the piecemeal, unprogrammatic structure of the respective works' surreal tableaux, and in both cases the subject—the reader/dreamer/pilgrim—must take time to reflect, to grasp the experience as a whole, before analysis and the individualized ascription of meaning can be complete, a task that largely replicates the methods set down by Cardano for the examination and interpretation of dreams. In both cases, meaning is transient, and subsequent readings or visitations may result in new or reshaped interpretations.⁷⁶

The Sacro Bosco and the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* function as epistemological labyrinths, testing the reader/participant's intellectual mettle through similarly referential thought processes that rely on both interpretive and imaginative faculties. Attempting to unravel the Gordian Knot of the enigmatic dreamscape, the pilgrim of either work must draw upon a number of interpretive and mnemonic strategies to navigate the spaces that defy straightforward readings, occupying a place between visual and verbal, textual and experiential. Individualized analysis is paired with the synthesis of larger cultural dialogues and references, particularly in the realm of the Sacro Bosco, as the ever shifting experience of the natural environment is projected back onto the visitor's accumulated knowledge of the material, literary and philosophical world existing outside the *bosco*. With its multitude of ideological and structural correspondences between the Sacro Bosco and the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, the approach required from the reader of the site is more hermetic in character than that expected of the visitor to the traditional poetic garden of Vicino's contemporaries.

The dream-pilgrim of the *bosco* must embrace the site as a puzzle or riddle that may or may not prove solvable, with emphasis placed not on the end result, but rather the mental exercise and

⁷⁵ Hunt 110.

⁷⁶ Hunt 110.

display of erudition prompted by the site, with pleasure derived from dissecting and discussing the “contradictions and non-resolutions” of a tangled and multicursal aporetic knot.⁷⁷ Not only was such an approach to meaning becoming increasingly common in early modern artistic expression, but the task of unraveling the significance of an enigmatic object would also have been familiar to the period humanist or antiquarian, who was often estranged from either the context or key interpretive details of a found antiquity or text.⁷⁸ This certain openness in learned circles—not dissimilar to those in which Vicino traveled—to potential pluralities, unclear signification and the irretrievability of meaning⁷⁹ lends the *bosco* the air of a mind game, one that tests the period intellectual’s cultural sophistication and powers of deduction. The act of moving through the grounds and engaging with the archaizing oddities within has been described as a Poliphilesque physicalization of the Renaissance humanist’s initiation into the mysteries of Antiquity,⁸⁰ as though the methods of inquiry and thought patterns required by the *Sacro Bosco* and the *Hypnerotomachia* encapsulated and distilled the proper approach to enigmatic fragments of the ancient world.

Indeed, this combination of erudition and circular hermeneutics is reminiscent of the tautological discourses of Annio da Viterbo, whose esoteric writings overflowed with references to lost texts and epigrams, mysterious artifacts, and a hidden world of Antiquity, elements that no doubt would have proved captivating to readers of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*.⁸¹ Annio’s writings portrayed Etruria as an alternate sphere of the ancient world, a place removed from the memory and shadow of Rome, an untouched and astonishing oasis of Antiquity that, like the

⁷⁷ Nagel and Pericolo 10.

⁷⁸ Barkan 128.

⁷⁹ Barkan 128.

⁸⁰ Battisti 127-128. Similar references to the ‘initiatory’ overtones of the *bosco* may also be found in Polizzi 2009, 109; Brunon 2008, 24; Bélanger 283.

⁸¹ Grafton 1990, 12.

dreamlands of Queen Eleuterylida, remained ripe for exploration by the Poliphilesque pilgrim. The mysteries presented by the Etruscan world—whether filtered through the lens of Annio’s inventive interpretations or approached on their own terms—represent something even more Other and fantastic than the distinctly Roman version of Golden Age Antiquity as represented in the *Hypnerotomachia*. Thus, the use of Etruscan imagery in the park as a reference to Antiquity, instead of the more classically Roman imagery found in garden landscapes contemporary to the Sacro Bosco, appears to be a very calculated and deliberate privileging of localized history and topography, as though a customization of the structures offered up by the *Hypnerotomachia*.⁸² As the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* may be read as both a metaphor and a controlled exercise in the exploration of Antiquity, the Sacro Bosco may likewise be understood in such a vein, as an emblematic journey through time and space, representative of period perceptions and interactions with the Etruscan past.

The manner in which the *Hypnerotomachia* re-presents Antiquity as an entity resuscitated and repopulated by fantastic beasts, characters and structures, is mirrored in the Sacro Bosco, which seems to hold to Colonna’s central tenet that the ancient world is a concluded, inaccessible place that can never be understood or unpacked in its totality, and can only be entered through the imaginative space of the dream.⁸³ The Sacro Bosco, through the ludic and quixotic language of the dream, reinvests and re-fleshes the world of the Etruscans, drawing heavily on the aura of mystery that permeates the surrounding lands and their ancient peoples, to create a dreamscape that reads more as a piece of speculative fiction, a reinterpretation of the past, peopled with *meraviglie*, *bizzarie*, and *scherzi* that feel oddly consistent with the *genius loci* of Bomarzo. This re-presentation and fantastical othering of Etruscan Antiquity as a true Pagan mystery seamlessly

⁸² It is also possible that the inclusion of certain Romanizing elements, such as the Three Graces and the river god, were intended to be an Annian reclamation of Roman motifs as Etruscan.

⁸³ Brown 221.

aligns with the structuration of the Sacro Bosco, which is itself as slippery, bizarre and open to interpretation as the Etruscan past was to period minds, making the Poliphilesque denizens of the dreamlands seem all the more thoroughly suited to the park. As in the case of the *Hypnerotomachia*, the depictions of the ancient world in the Sacro Bosco vacillate between the devastated and the intact;⁸⁴ as though the slippages in times were just another grotesquification, another example of the site's chaotic instability and ambivalent approach to meaning, operating on a particular brand of freeform dream logic that encourages heterogeneous thought patterns and interpretive methods. The dream pilgrim is ultimately caught between two worlds: the lush, Arcadian revisitation/reimagining of the Etruscan past, and the reality of localized Antiquity, as experienced through contact with the abundant ruins and monuments in the surrounding *boschi*.

The Interactive Epic

Detached from the linearity of Poliphilo's narration, the dream pilgrim moves through the wood as an experiential *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, interacting with its wonders on a heightened sensorial level, taking the experience of the novel a step further by physically inhabiting the dreamland. The Sacro Bosco goes beyond mere compendium of archaizing *poesie*; it stands as a Poliphilization of the Etruscan world, a reimagining and fictionalization of the region's enigmatic past in the style of the *Hypnerotomachia*. The site is not an imitation of Colonna's novel, nor is it a parody or inversion, as claimed by landscape architectural historian Michel Baridon;⁸⁵ the Sacro Bosco falls into the realm of pastiche, a work not only drawing on the imagery of Colonna and the Etruscans of Alto Lazio, but also synthesizing their respective styles, creating a space that while not the product of either creative force, might plausibly have been the

⁸⁴ Brown 214.

⁸⁵ Baridon 617.

result of such a collaboration.⁸⁶ Due in part to this reliance on a number of literary conventions—eschewing mere references to particular narratives or literary imagery in favor of employing stylistic structures and approaches to meaning consistent with period literature—the *Sacro Bosco* must be read as fiction, as an interactive and physically manifest epic novel of the visitor’s own creation.

The possibility that the *Sacro Bosco* differs from its contemporaries through its unique status as a work of fiction has gained increasing support and momentum in the field of Bomarziana within the last several years, as numerous scholars have recognized the its structural discourses and literary qualities to be far more complex than a simple matter of iconographic correspondence. Referring to the *bosco* as an “elliptical” lyrical poem, Brunon unpacked the site’s glancing and ambivalent play with referentiality,⁸⁷ while Anne Bélanger has characterized the site as a “mysterious relative” of the *Hypnerotomachia*, operating within the same dialogues of wonder and astonishment, through near identical usage of the narrative frame that is the epic journey.⁸⁸ Although the *Sacro Bosco*’s usage of literary devices has received significant scholarly attention, the park itself has never previously been examined as an interactive literary epic which draws its meaning and structure from the visitor’s progress through the grounds. This concept of the individualized journey is key to understanding the *Sacro Bosco*, as it is the viewer’s entry into and movements throughout the site—this “fictional universe” removed from the normative and comprehensible world⁸⁹—that make the process personally relevant and imbue the site with any semblance of meaning. The visitor’s journey is of particular importance

⁸⁶ Nagel and Wood 289.

⁸⁷ Brunon 2008, 25.

⁸⁸ Bélanger 250, 283.

⁸⁹ Bélanger 282.

as the site ultimately lacks a subject, unifying theme or defining center; the Poliphilesque dream-pilgrim must provide one.

In journeying through the park, the visitor is transported to a place that, like the *Hypnerotomachia*, is part Antiquity and part dream, where the ancient world can be approached as a game or puzzle to unravel, and the visitor inhabits and explores the ludic space as if the protagonist in one's own personalized epic. The *déjà lu*-like qualities of the naggingly familiar imagery invite the visitor to extrapolate, to weave together corresponding schools of thought and period literature in an effort to flesh out and make accessible the fictional realm at hand. An invitation to a game of referentiality and association, the site plumbs the depths of the visitor's familiarity with and knowledge of a wide array of ideologies and sources, ranging from the literary works of Colonna and Sannazaro, to the celebrated texts of Antiquity, or the treatises of Annio da Viterbo. The apparent goal is for the visitor to think critically across a number of disciplines and texts, to display the breadth and width of their erudition and cultural sophistication as a veritable performance while navigating through the *bosco*. This performative element implies that a journey through the grounds was not meant to be a solitary one, nor was it intended to be a revelation of one's own particular thought processes in the manner of Cardano's dream journaling. Instead, the act of discussing and sharing one's own interpretation of the Sacro Bosco's open-ended dream epic with other visitors/pilgrims becomes the outdoor equivalent of period *studiolo* culture, a litmus test of sorts, designed to reveal and evaluate a visitor's erudition and cultural literacy.⁹⁰

Should such be the case, the Sacro Bosco ontologically falls somewhere between conversation piece and Rorschach test, a site for Vicino Orsini to both gauge and engage with the

⁹⁰ While *studioli* are often discussed in terms of what they reveal about the character and interests of the individuals who compiled, commissioned and utilized the specific rooms, their role in determining a visitor's learnedness, taste and *gentilezza* was also significant. See Thornton 7; Clark 11; Campbell 86.

intellect, wit and cultural sophistication of his visitors, as though he himself were perusing their Cardanesque dream ledgers, or privy to their interpretive thought processes whilst reading the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. As a collection of disparate floating signifiers, any given reading of the Sacro Bosco would reveal to Vicino more about his visitor's mindset and aggregate cultural knowledge than the site would disclose about its patron. The possibility for topics of conversation within the *bosco* are practically limitless; depending on his companions, their interests, and the route chosen, Vicino could potentially discuss period literature, poetic discourse, the mythology of Antiquity, pastoral longings for Arcadia, the Annian lineage of the region, the strange Etruscan monuments of the surrounding countryside... all while observing the intellectual and discursive strengths of his chosen guest/co-dreamer.

Such a reading recalls Quartermaine and Von Henneberg's comparison of the *bosco* to erudite courtly games, as if Vicino had purposely constructed a conversation piece meant to both amaze his guests and stimulate their intellectual or creative mettle. Indeed, such an open-ended approach to meaning would be consistent with the *bosco*'s ability to attract all manner of iconographic or programmatic readings while ultimately partaking of none, seemingly explaining the near total lack of analytical or interpretive consensus within the last sixty years of scholarly inquiry. Thus, the park's function is twofold: while the visitor narrated his own individualized *Hypnerotomachia*, indicative of his own tastes, experiences and cultural literacy, Vicino could engage in lively, erudite conversation, all while gathering other's interpretations of his surreal brainchild.

This type of scenario would appear to be consistent with Vicino's tastes and scholarly interests, given not only his celebrated erudition within his circle of friends,⁹¹ but also his correspondences with Annibale Caro concerning a potential artistic program for a frescoed

⁹¹ Bruschi 1963a, 96; Bruschi 1963b, 34.

loggia in Palazzo Orsini. Although the project was never completed, letters between the two reveal a complex and multivalent scheme that drew upon multiple literary sources, emblem books, and poetic equivocation.⁹² The unifying theme of the frescoes was to be the Fall of the Giants—a particularly intriguing choice, given giants' central role in the founding and cultural ascendancy of Annian Etruria—yet in his letters, Caro stressed the importance of *invenzione* and *poesie*, suggesting he and Vicino pull imagery and details from a variety of diverse sources, so as to heighten the viewer's enjoyment and experience of the paintings.⁹³ Caro's comments imply a certain predisposition and predilection on Vicino's part toward poetic and referential approaches to meaning, particularly in regard to their imaginative and conversational potential.

Vicino's circle of friends and peers were clearly accustomed to and proficient in such courtly modes of multivalent wit, as Caro himself designed a similarly complex fresco cycle for the *Camera dell'Aurora* of the Farnese villa at Caprarola, home to Vicino's friend, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.⁹⁴ In a letter to the Cardinal dating from 1561, Vicino assured his friend that as an educated man, Farnese would not be surprised or unnerved by the *meraviglie* of the *bosco*, as it was purely ignorance from which such trepidation was born,⁹⁵ thus effectively acknowledging the park's hermeneutic complexities. Indeed, Vicino's words imply that he expected visitors to the *bosco* would either regard the site as a bizarre and tangled mystery, or instantly grasp the type of approach necessary to best appreciate its peculiar evocations and seemingly-nonsensical compositions.⁹⁶ Truly, the Sacro Bosco appears to have been expressly designed to suit the astute intellectual tastes and perspectives of those with whom Vicino most closely associated, a network of learned companions, refined *cortegiani*, and neighboring

⁹² Robertson 164-165; MacDougall 1985, 129.

⁹³ Robertson 165.

⁹⁴ Robertson 161.

⁹⁵ Theurillat 41.

⁹⁶ Jensen 209.

cognoscenti, who counted among their ranks Annibale Caro, Francesco Sansovino, Cardinal Madruzzo, Cardinal Gambara, Fulvio Orsini and a host of Farnese. As the most likely visitors to Vicino's *bosco*, their ability to shrewdly and playfully interact with the site would have made the heterotopia of the park come alive, as the glancing, teasing references to local history, period literature, and the ancient world would have been lost on lesser pilgrims to the dreamscape. Rewarding the erudition, intertextuality, creativity, and passion for Antiquity that is practically synonymous with the Renaissance polymath, the Sacro Bosco stands as both a product of and product specifically aimed at its particular hothouse cultural climate, encompassing a variety of period schools of thought, literature, and phenomena to present a veritable distillation of Cinquecento culture in Alto Lazio.

Conclusion, or Why the Sacro Bosco Matters

In many ways the Sacro Bosco defies cultural expectations of what a garden is meant to be. Not only does the *bosco* court profound ugliness and chaos, but it also stands as an ideological entity far greater than the sum of its statues, flora and fountains. It is more than just a pleasing retreat or cultivation of attractive foliage; instead, it is an epistemological time capsule. If the *bosco* truly carries its multitude of salient period valences—if indeed it is an interactive, personalized epic that tests the visitor’s erudition and knowledge of local history and cultural topography—then this revelation signals the need for a profound shift in several spheres of Renaissance art historical inquiry.

Of primary importance is what this new reading of the site heralds for the study of Renaissance gardens and built environments, for if the Sacro Bosco possesses such a degree of ideological sophistication and intricacy, then surely its contemporaries must subscribe to programs of similar complexity. It is possible that the canonical gardens of Renaissance Italy may need to be reexamined in a new light, with emphasis removed from the iconographic sphere, to be focused instead on matters of a more experiential and holistic nature. How would this affect readings of sites such as Villa Lante, Villa d’Este, Villa Medici at Pratolino, and Palazzo Farnese at Caprarola?

Discussions of definitive iconographic meaning must be set aside in favor of a more poetic and indeterminate methodology which privileges the display of erudition and imaginative wit so closely associated with both the courtly and villa cultures of the era. A more nuanced approach to period landscape architecture would take into account somatic experiences of the sites, reading the gardens as immersive environments akin to massive art installations, with greater emphasis placed on visitors’ discussion of and interaction with their surroundings than previously

afforded. As a habitable heuristic space in a constant state of subtle, seasonal flux, the Renaissance garden offered visitors a completely different understanding and experience of Antiquity—however romanticized or glorified it may have been—than what could be garnered from literature, poetry or painting. This experience of Antiquity as filtered through the interactive period landscape goes beyond anything presented in a painting or poem, as the sites allowed visitors to effectively step into and become a participant in a mythical world not dissimilar from Sannazaro’s *Arcadia* or a painting by Dosso Dossi. The built environment fully realized the type of space that could only be implied by the other art forms, and the period visitor’s experience of such a site should not be under-emphasized, particularly given the prevailing climate of Poliphilism, which fostered both a scholarly fascination with and a romantic nostalgia for the irretrievable past.

This rewriting of the Sacro Bosco also predicated a reexamination of Renaissance interaction with Etruscan Antiquity, especially in terms of the cultural and artistic impact of the rock-cut architectural aesthetic of southern Etruria. While much has been made in recent years of rediscoveries and reappropriations of Etruscan heritage and imagery in Renaissance Tuscany, the situation has little bearing on the particular case of Alto Lazio, wherein the majority of Etruscan remnants were architectural and relatively organic in form, differing dramatically from artifacts like the celebrated Chimera of Arezzo. A closer look at perceptions of the localized Etruscan past in Alto Lazio would also necessitate a greater examination of the role played by *tuffo* as a material characteristic to and representative of the region, and its near exclusive usage in the landscape architectural projects of the Orsini and their circle of friends and peers. A cultural history of the volcanic stone would not only illuminate its powerful Etruscan valences, but also

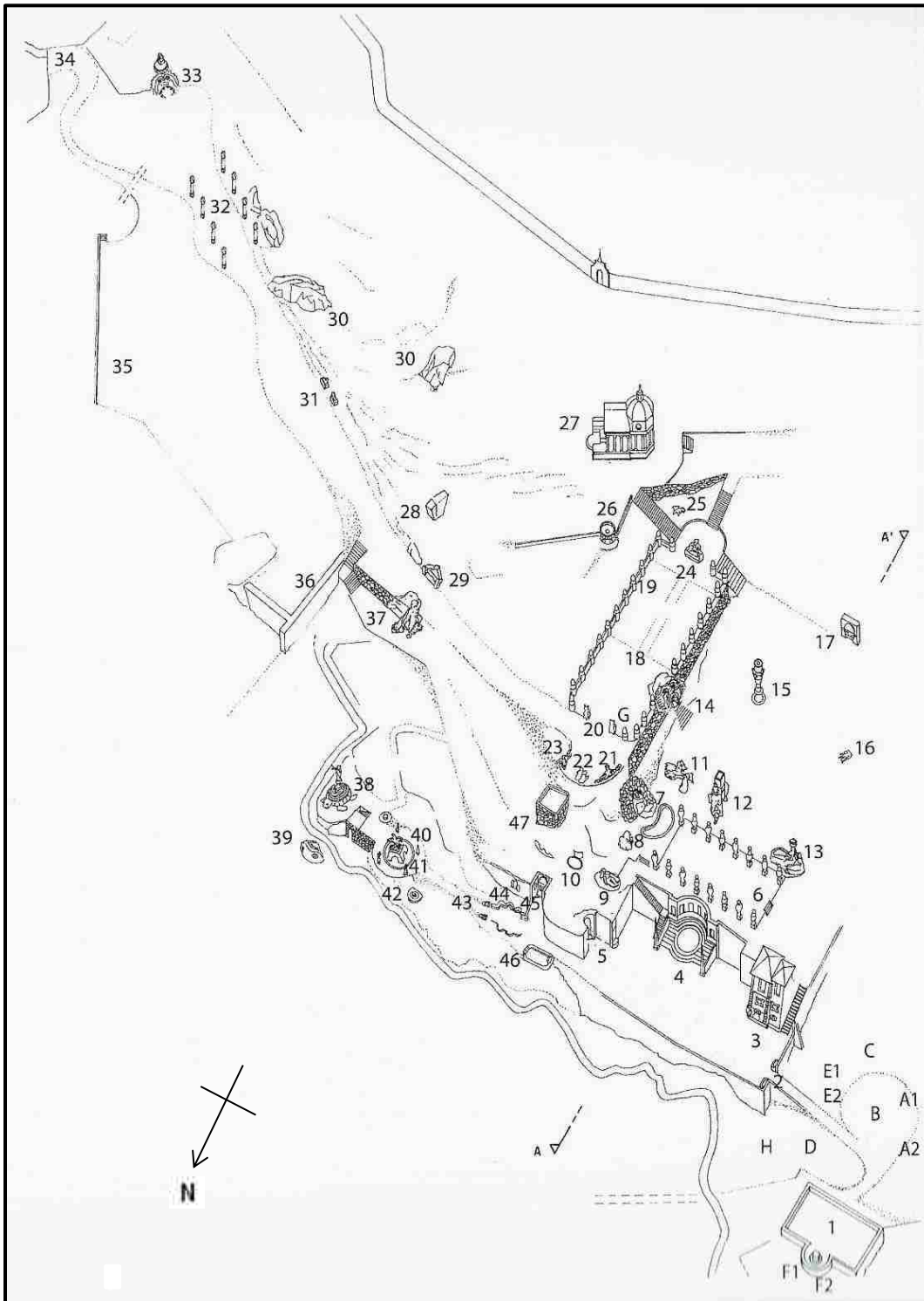
highlight its connections to the regionalized aesthetic of Alto Lazio, much as the use of travertine has been linked in scholarly literature to the expression of *romanità*.

Of equal importance is the role of Annio da Viterbo in the establishment of a regional character and aesthetic of Alto Lazio. While his texts and theories have garnered considerable attention as an example of complex Renaissance hermeneutics and epistemologies, his influence on the art and cultural identity of the region has been relatively ignored by scholars. This dearth of academic inquiry is surely on account of Annio's status as a relative oddity to modern readers—his theories debunked and ostensibly laughable—yet his impact on Cinquecento Viterbo is undeniable, and undoubtedly extended beyond the reaches of Vicino's *bosco*. Annio's Viterbo-centric history of the world was a point of pride for Cinquecento residents of Alto Lazio, and a number of period works must surely carry yet-unexplored Annian valences, making necessary a reconsideration and revaluation of not only the gardens of Villa Lante and the extensively frescoed Farnese palace at Caprarola, but also all manner of painting and sculpture produced in the region during the later years of the Renaissance.

This call for a reexamination of the larger oeuvre of Viterbese art and architectural spaces is directly linked to a third foreseeable shift in scholarship as signaled by this rereading of the Bosco: the need for a different approach to and greater valuation of provincial art within Cinquecento Italy. The Sacro Bosco's remote location, removed from the major cultural and population centers of its day, may perhaps have been a contributing factor in the overly-simplistic readings of the site. The semiological complexity of the *bosco* may have been discounted in favor of more one-dimensional interpretive programs of meaning due to the park's location in a rural backwater, removed from the learned metropolitan spheres. As a product of elite court culture, the Sacro Bosco stands apart from the vast majority of provincial Renaissance

art, yet its connection to the localized history, landscape, and identity undoubtedly distances the site from the cultural sphere of Cinquecento Rome.

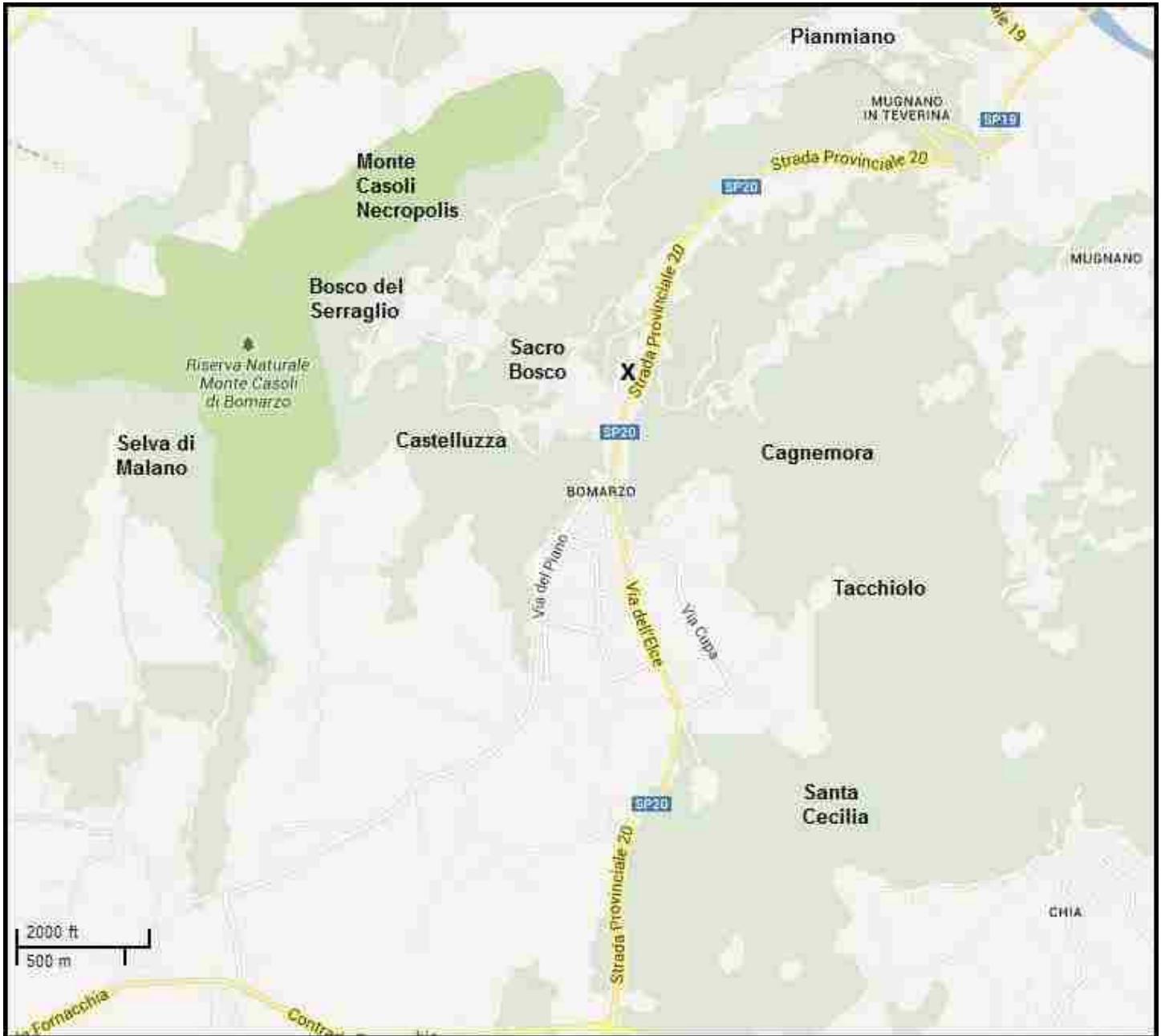
The Sacro Bosco furnishes proof that distance from a major cultural center in no way diminishes ideological sophistication; indeed, it makes clear that a particular and individualized Viterban identity existed and flourished in the wake of Annio da Viterbo. This matter of *campanilismo* and the fashioning of regionalized group identity—so visible in the intricate web of valences within the *bosco*—reaches far beyond Alto Lazio, indicating the necessity of greater sensitivity to issues of regional identity. Much consideration has been given the construction of Florentine, Roman and Venetian identities during the Renaissance, especially in regard to the implementation, appropriation and construction of Ancient lineages and histories, yet many more localized perspectives remain to be unraveled and examined, moving toward a model of Renaissance cultural geography that reflects smaller, idiosyncratic pockets of regional ‘vernaculars.’ While analysis of the *bosco* is but one step in revealing how Renaissance inhabitants of Alto Lazio approached local antiquities, topography and history, and how these elements coalesced to create an identity peculiar to the region, it is the case of the Sacro Bosco which makes clear that the specific experience and character of a place must not be overlooked, nor its histories, texts or landscape. It is Bomarzo’s *genius loci*—simultaneously serving as anchor and ineffable muse—that reveals and gives voice to a site that strays far from the reaches of the well-defined center, into a territory of both geographic and semiological liminality.



LEGENDA

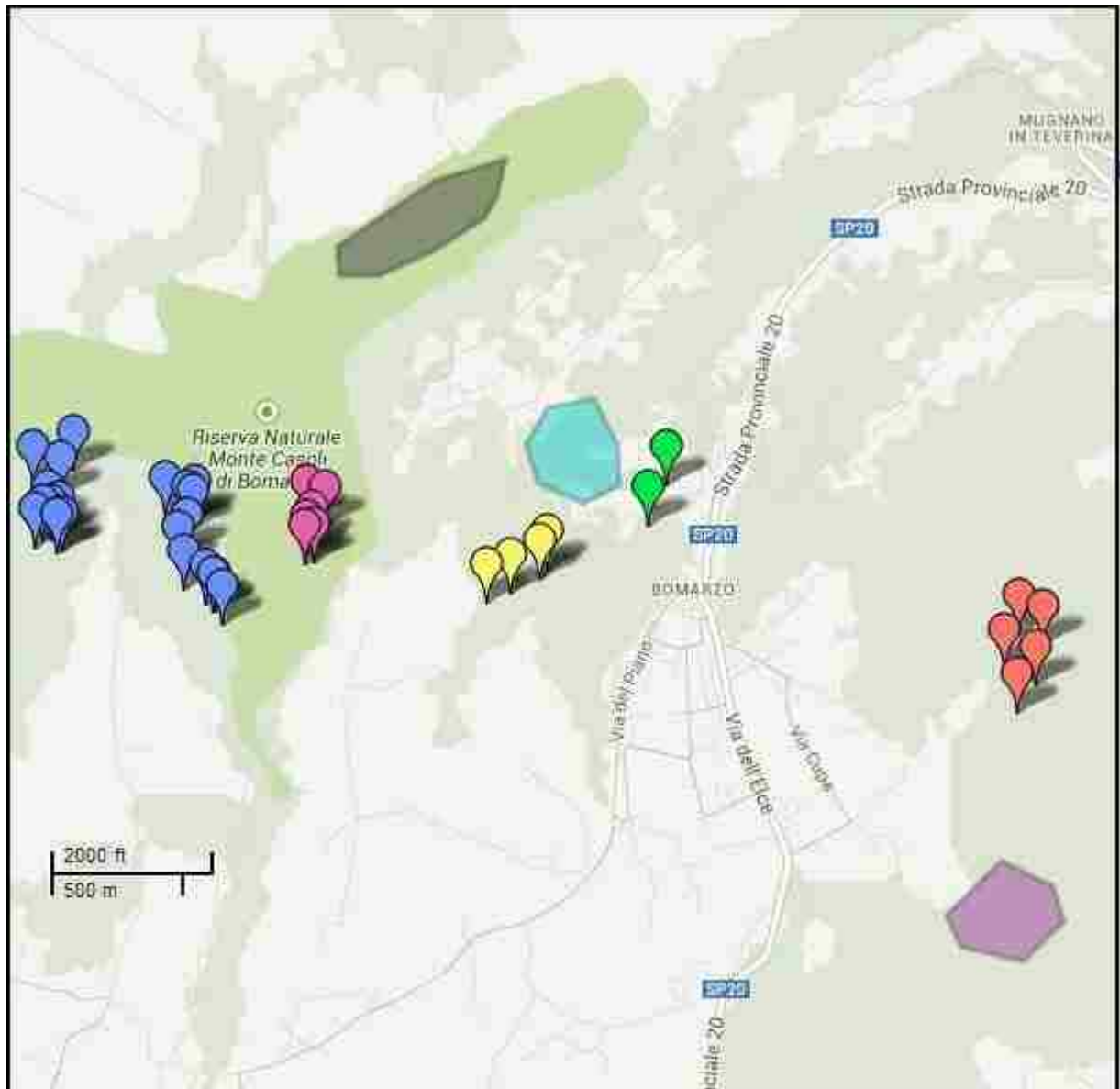
1. Bacno
 2. Vasche
 3. Casotta pendente
 4. Teatro
 5. *Dama nella grotta*
 6. Platea dei vasi
 7. *Dio barbuto*
 8. Mostro acquatico
 9. *Donna giacente*
 10. *Mascherone cornuto*
 11. *Drago in lotta con i leoni*
 12. *Elefante turrato*
 13. *Dea col vaso*
 14. *Mascherone infernale*
 15. Vaso gigante
 16. *Capro*
 17. Nicchia con panca
 18. *Xystus*
 19. Clippi a forma di pigne e ghiande
 20. Orsi araldici
 21. *Sirena*
 22. *Famiglia di leoni*
 23. *Arpia*
 24. *Dea con corona*
 25. *Cerbero*
 26. Belvedere
 27. Tempietto
 28. Pseudo-tomba etrusca
 29. Panca araldica
 30. Rocce scolpite
 31. *Sfingi*
 32. *Erme monofronti, bifronti e quadrifronti*
 33. *Mascherone araldico*
 34. Diga superiore
 35. Lago artificiale
 36. Diga
 37. *Colossi in lotta*
 38. *Tartaruga con la donna eretta*
 39. *Orca*
 40. Fontana del *Pegaso*
 41. Tronco d'albero
 42. Colonna spezzata
 43. *Leoni con globo*
 44. *Le tre Grazie*
 45. *Antro*
 46. Fontana a forma di barca
 47. Torre
- A1. *Mascherone cornuto* (esemplare 1a)*
 A2. *Mascherone cornuto* (esemplare 2a)*
 B. Reperti b*
 C. Reperti c*
 D. Reperti d*
 E1. Reperti 1e*
 E2. Reperti 2e*
 F1. Reperto 1f*
 F2. Reperto 2f*
 G. *Satiro*
 H. *Scimmia* (?)*

MAP 2
The Sacro Bosco



MAP 3

Bomarzo and environs
Palazzo Orsini is marked with an 'X'



MAP 4

The Sacro Bosco in relation to surrounding inscriptions and stone oddities of Bomarzo

Note: In addition to the monuments, stones and epigrams discussed within the thesis, the map displays other Etruscan remnants of lesser note in order to demonstrate the richness of archaeological finds in the area.

Blue pins indicate sites within the Selva di Malano, pink corresponds to the Bosco del Serraglio, yellow to Castelluzza, red to Tachiolo, and green to stones adjacent to the Sacro Bosco itself, which is indicated by the teal shape. The grey shape corresponds to the necropolis of Monte Casoli, while purple indicates the Santa Cecilia complex.



FIGURE 1
Tempietto
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 2
Tempietto, interior
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 3
Viewing platform, upper level
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 4
Viewing platform, lower level
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 5

Prospect from the viewing platform onto the hippodrome below
Also pictured: Cerberus, hybrid bench figure, acorns and pinecone
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 6

Inscription on the retaining wall abutting the hippodrome
Sacro Bosco



FIGURES 7 and 8
Heraldic *orsini*
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 9
Hybrid bench figure
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 10
Two-finned mermaid
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 11
Female monster
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 12
Lioness and Lion
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 13
Satyr (?)
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 14
Covered Bench
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 15
Vase (with modern supports)
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 16
Vase detail
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 17
Maned quadruped
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 18
Faux Tomba a fossa
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 19
Seated female figure (front)
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 20
Seated female figure (back)
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 21
Elephant with turret
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 22
Dragon with lions
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 23
Orco grotto
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 24
Orco grotto (interior)
 Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 25
 Hippodrome with vases
 Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 26
River god
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 27
Disembodied animal face
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 28
Reclining female nude
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 29
Dry fountain with face
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 30
Brick tower
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 31
Rock-cut bench
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 32
Battling colossi
Sacro Bosco

FIGURE 33
Inscription near the
colossi
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 34
Clearing below the colossi
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 35
Water monster
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 36
Tortoise
Sacro Bosco



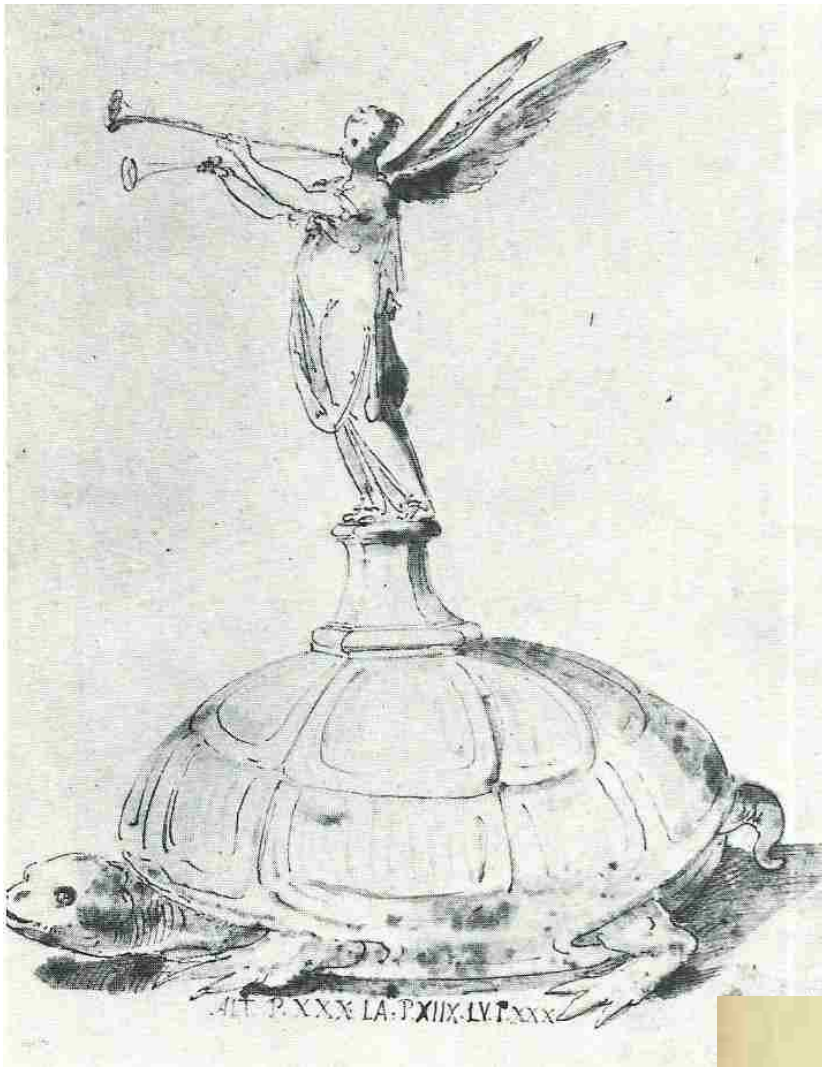


FIGURE 37
Tortoise, Sacro Bosco
Giovanni Guerra
Drawing
1604

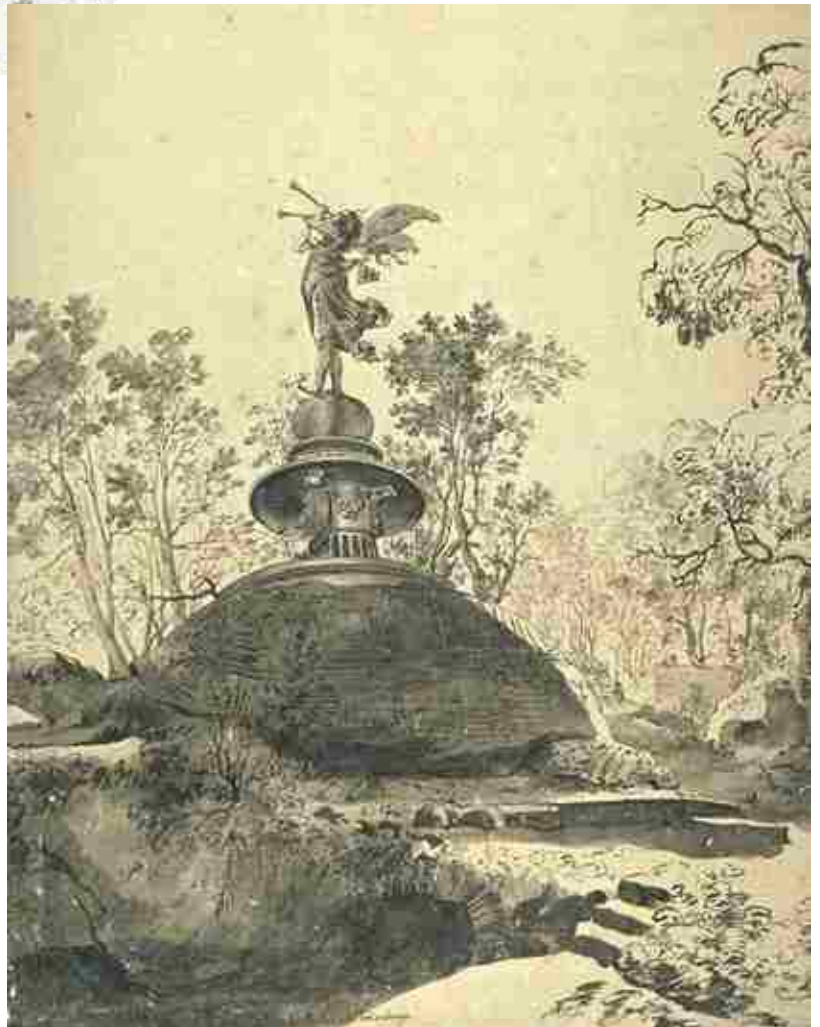


FIGURE 38
Tortoise, Sacro Bosco
Bartholomäus Breenbergh
Drawing
1625



FIGURE 39
Pegasus fountain
Sacro Bosco

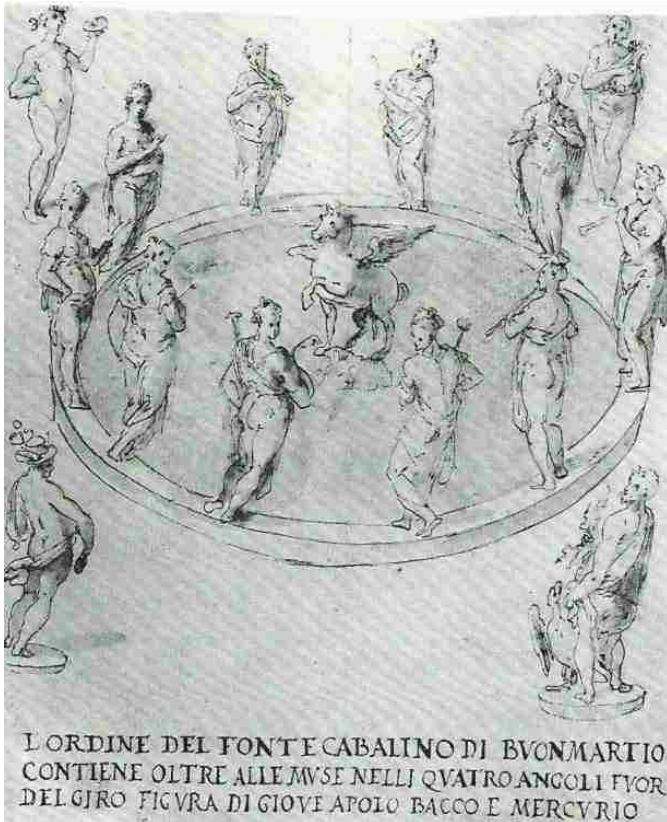


FIGURE 40
Pegasus fountain, Sacro Bosco
Giovanni Guerra
Drawing
1604



FIGURE 41
Pegasus fountain, Sacro Bosco
Bartholomäus Breenbergh
Drawing
1625



FIGURE 42
Broken column
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 43
Bas-relief tree
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 44
Stone lion, benches, and the Three Graces
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 45
Stone benches
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 46
Stone bench (detail)
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 47
Ninfeo
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 48
Female nude
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 49
Bearded and horned male face
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 50
Theater with cippi
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 51
Casa Pendente
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 52
Altar
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 53
Faux-Etruscan tomb
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 54
Faux-tomb
Detail of pediment
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 55
Stone bench
Sacro Bosco



FIGURES 56 and 57
Sphinxes
Sacro Bosco



FIGURES 58 and 59
Multi-faced herms
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 60
Open-mouthed monster
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 61
Santa Maria della Valle
Bomarzo



FIGURE 62
Tomba della Sirena
Sovana
4th – 2nd cen BCE



FIGURE 63
Tomba dei Demoni Alati
Sovana
Circa 3rd cen BCE



FIGURE 64
Monte Casoli
Rock-cut necropolis

FIGURE 65
Monte Casoli
Rock-cut necropolis, detail



FIGURE 66
Monte Casoli
Columbarium



FIGURE 67
Monte Casoli
Columbarium



FIGURE 68
Shaped boulder near the Sacro Bosco
Palazzo Orsini in background



FIGURE 69
Shaped boulder near the Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 70
Sasso delle Madonelle
Bosco del Serraglio



FIGURE 71
Monument to Lucius Roscius
Bosco del Serraglio



FIGURE 72
Sasso Bucato
 Bosco del Serraglio



FIGURE 73
 Unnamed formation/monument
 Bosco del Serraglio



FIGURE 74
Half-carved mass of *tuff*
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 75
Half-carved mass of *tuff*
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 76
Monument to Lucius Arlenus Strabo
Altarone or Sasso Quadrato
Bosco del Serraglio



FIGURE 77
Rock-cut tombs of the San Nicolao area
Selva di Malano

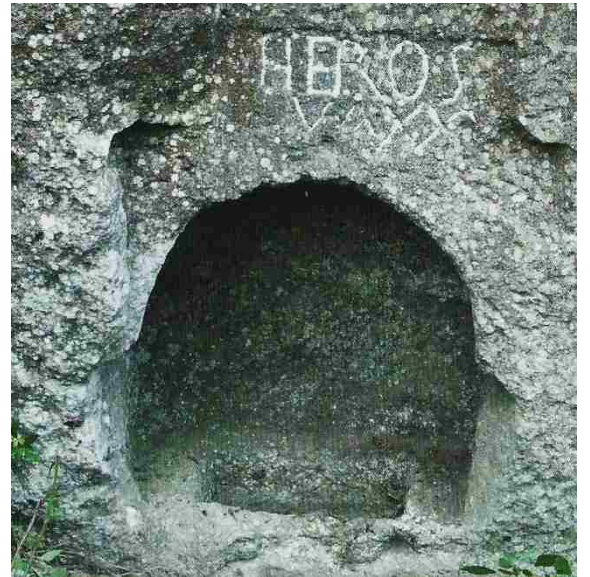


FIGURE 78
“Heros” tomb, San Nicolao area
Selva di Malano



FIGURE 79
Tombe a fossa
Selva di Malano



FIGURE 80
D. Coelius monument
Selva di Malano

FIGURE 81
The First *Sasso del Predicatore*
Selva di Malano

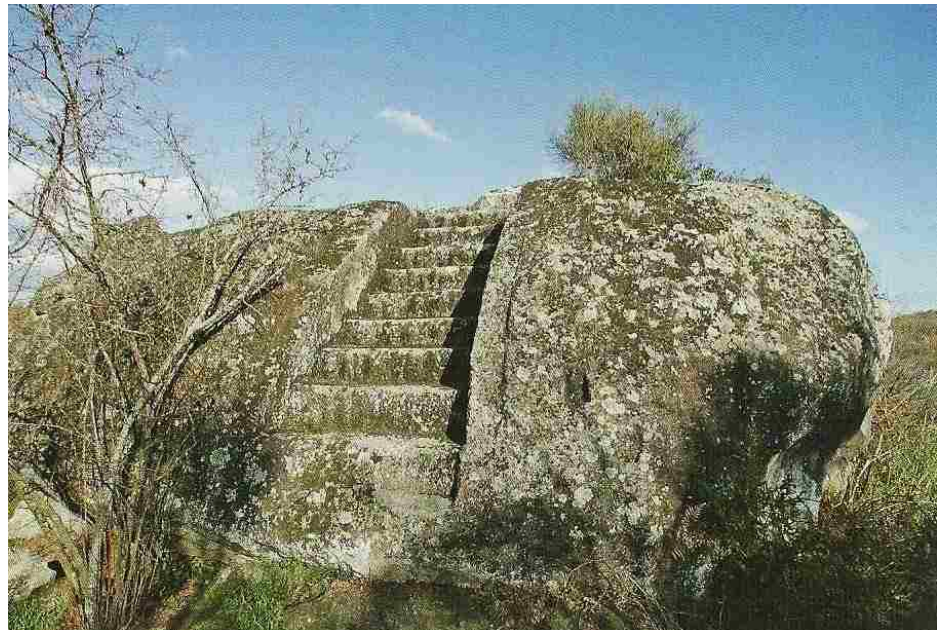




FIGURE 82
Brick tower, detail
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 83
Ara Cubica
Selva di Malano

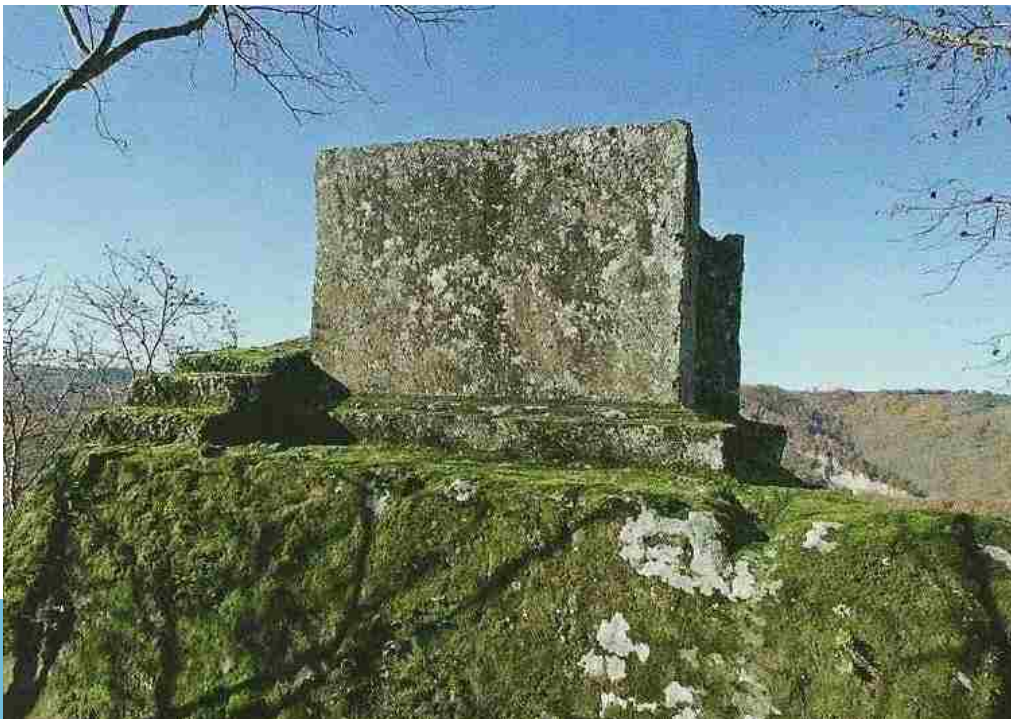


FIGURE 84
The Second *Sasso del Predicatore*
Selva di Malano



FIGURE 85
Baldassare Peruzzi
Bomarzo, CIL: VI, 560 suppl.
Sketch, date unknown (1519-1535?)

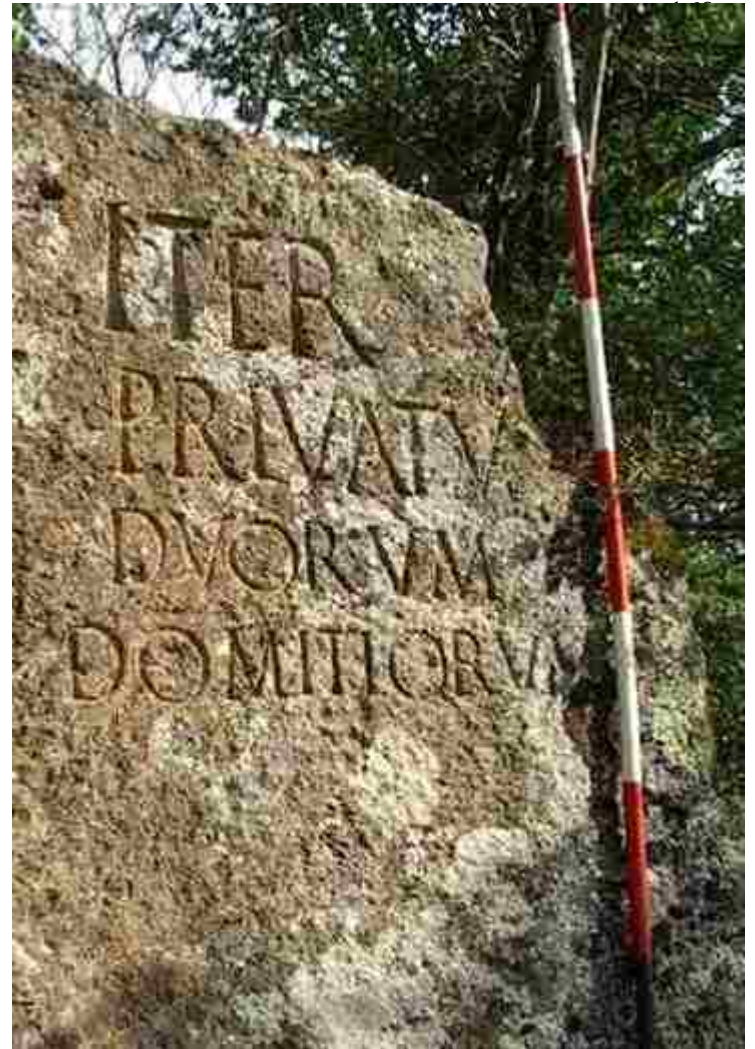


FIGURE 86
Tagliata delle Rochette
 Cagnemora/Tacchiolo

FIGURE 87
 “Iter Privatm Dvorvm Domitiorvm”
Tagliata delle Rochette
 “TER” is carved directly to the left
 Cagnemora/Tacchiolo



FIGURE 88
 The second “TER”
Tagliata delle Rochette
 Cagnemora/Tacchiolo

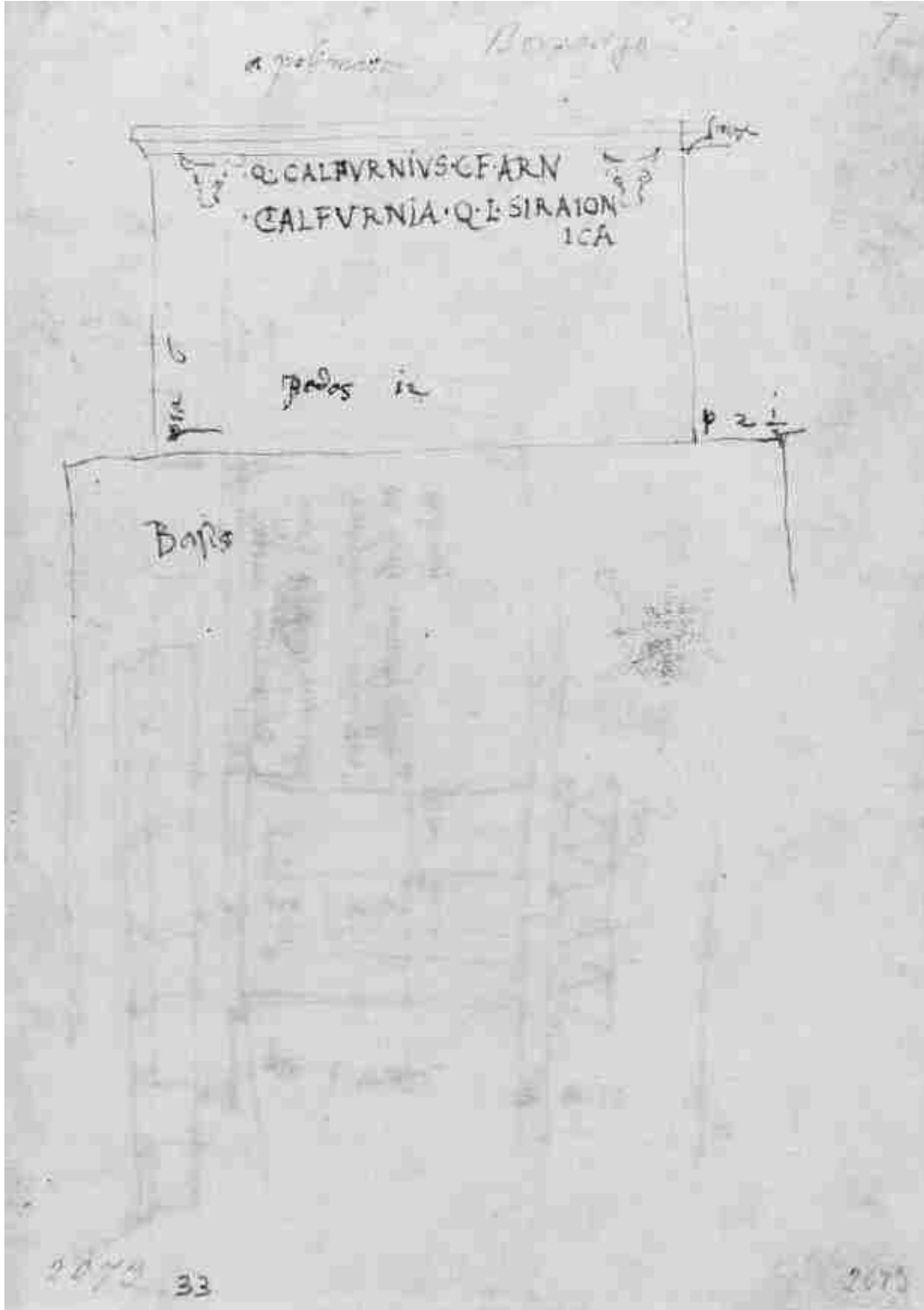


FIGURE 89
Baldassare Peruzzi
Bomarzo, CIL: XI, 3045
Sketch, date unknown (1519-1535?)



FIGURE 90
Unnamed monument
Cagnemora



FIGURE 91
Finestraccia
Tacchiolo



FIGURE 92
The *Piramide Etrusca*
Tacchiolo



FIGURE 93
Rock-cut ruins
Santa Cecilia



FIGURE 94
Rock-cut dwelling
Santa Cecilia



FIGURE 95
Rock-cut ruins
Santa Cecilia



FIGURE 96
Rock-cut ruins
Santa Cecilia



FIGURE 97
Tombe a fossa
Santa Cecilia



FIGURE 98
Rock-cut ruins
Santa Cecilia



FIGURE 99
Rock-cut ruins
Santa Cecilia



FIGURE 100
Rock-cut bench
Sacro Bosco



FIGURE 101
Rock-cut benches and *belvedere*
Parco degli Orsini, Pitigliano



FIGURE 102
Rock-cut benches
Parco degli Orsini, Pitigliano



FIGURE 103
Rock-cut covered bench
Parco degli Orsini, Pitigliano



FIGURE 104
Reclining female figure
Parco degli Orsini, Pitigliano



FIGURE 105
Reclining male nude
Parco degli Orsini,
Pitigliano

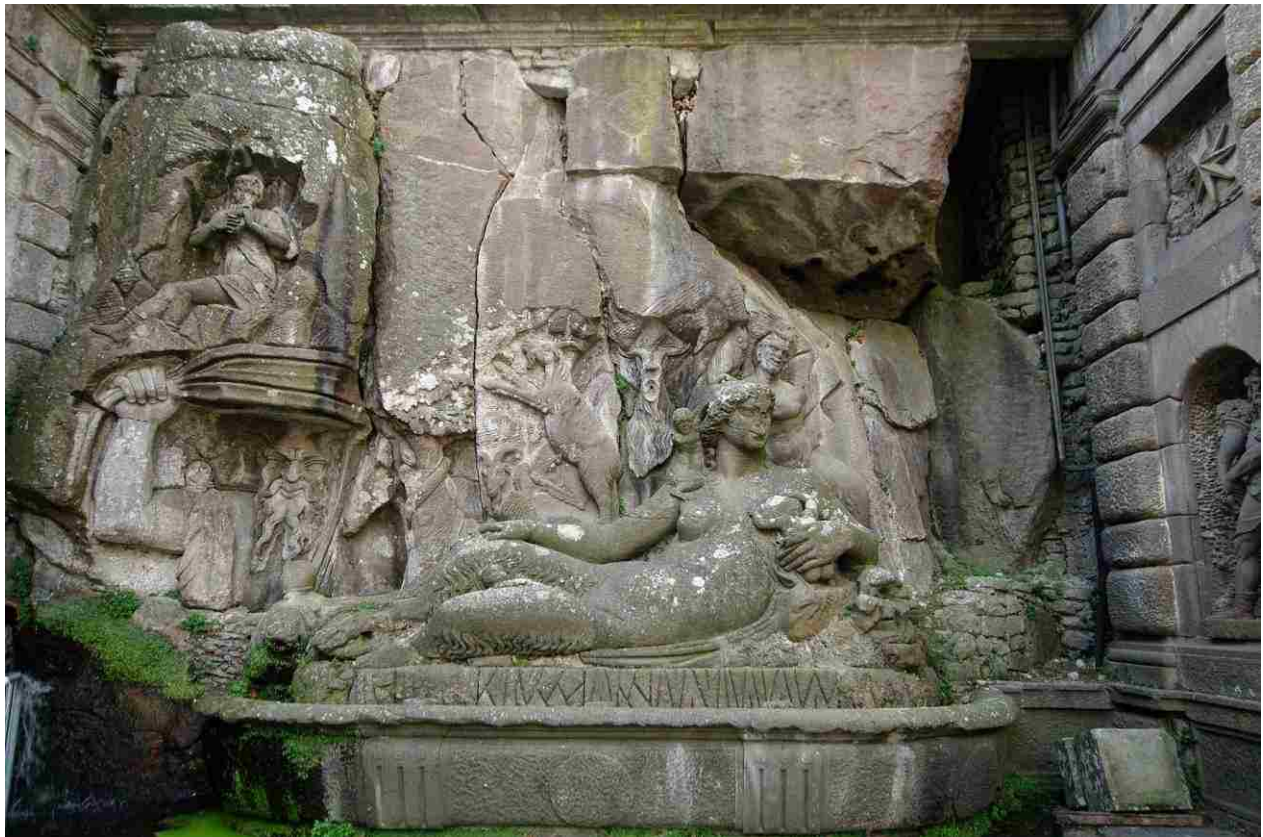


FIGURE 106
Papacqua Fountain, back wall
Soriano nel Cimino

FIGURE 107
Papacqua Fountain, back wall, detail
Soriano nel Cimino



FIGURE 108
Papacqua Fountain, back wall, detail
Soriano nel Cimino



FIGURE 109
Pseudo-Etruscan script
Papacqua Fountain, back wall, detail
Soriano nel Cimino



FIGURE 110
Moses Striking the Rock
Papacqua Fountain
Soriano nel Cimino



FIGURE 111
Grotto of the Deluge
Villa Lante, Bagnaia

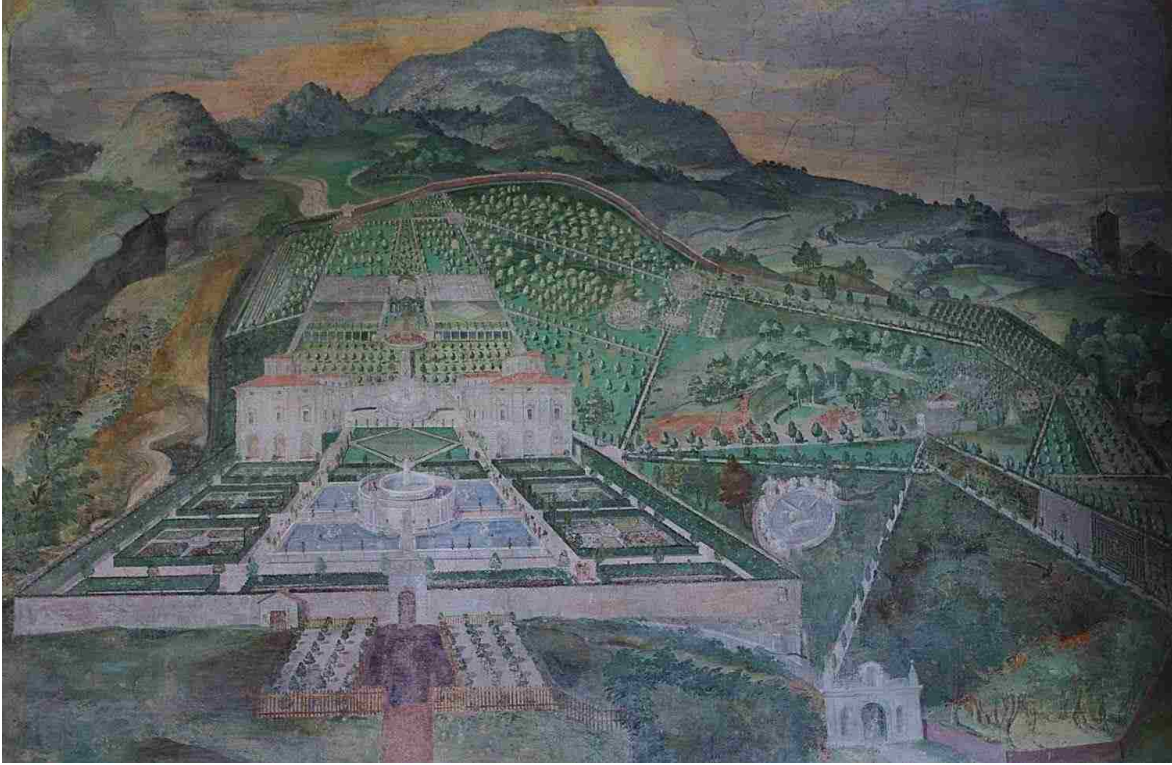


FIGURE 112

Frescoed plan of Villa Lante (with the *bosco* to the right of the *giardino all'italiana*)
 Palazzina Gambara, Villa Lante, Bagnaia
 Fresco, 1574-1578



FIGURE 113

Winged double-tailed mermaid
 Fountain of the River Gods, detail
 Villa Lante, Bagnaia

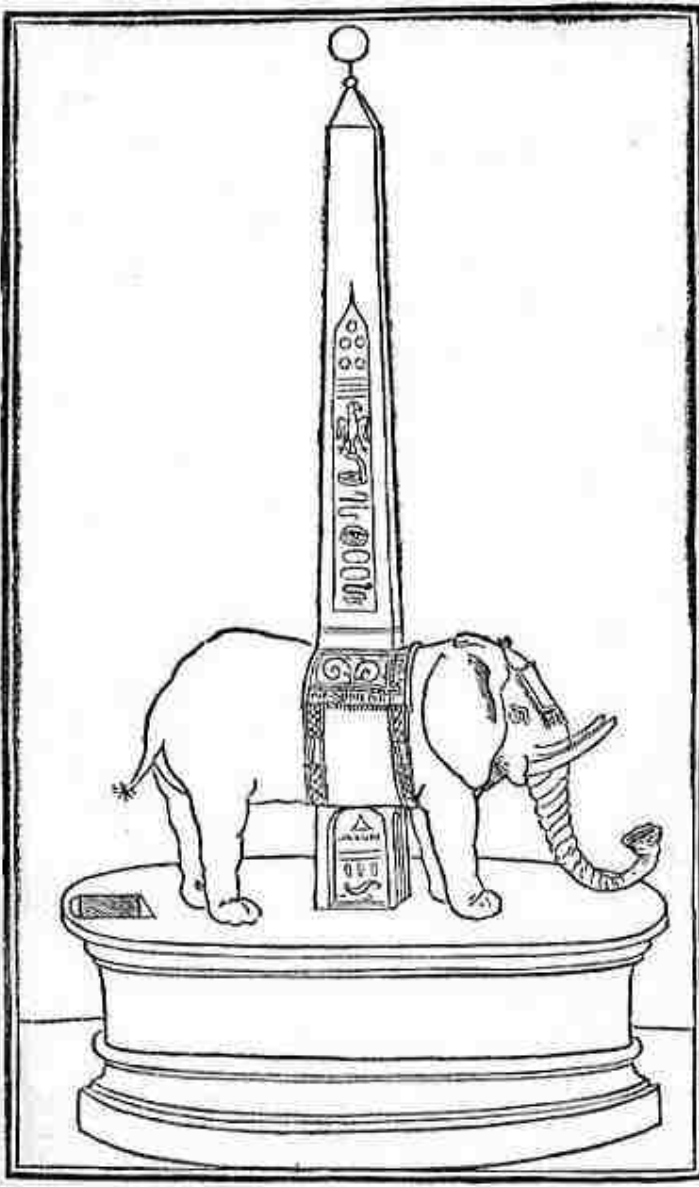


FIGURE 114
Elephant statue with obelisk
Hypnerotomachia Poliphili
Francesco Colonna (?), 1499

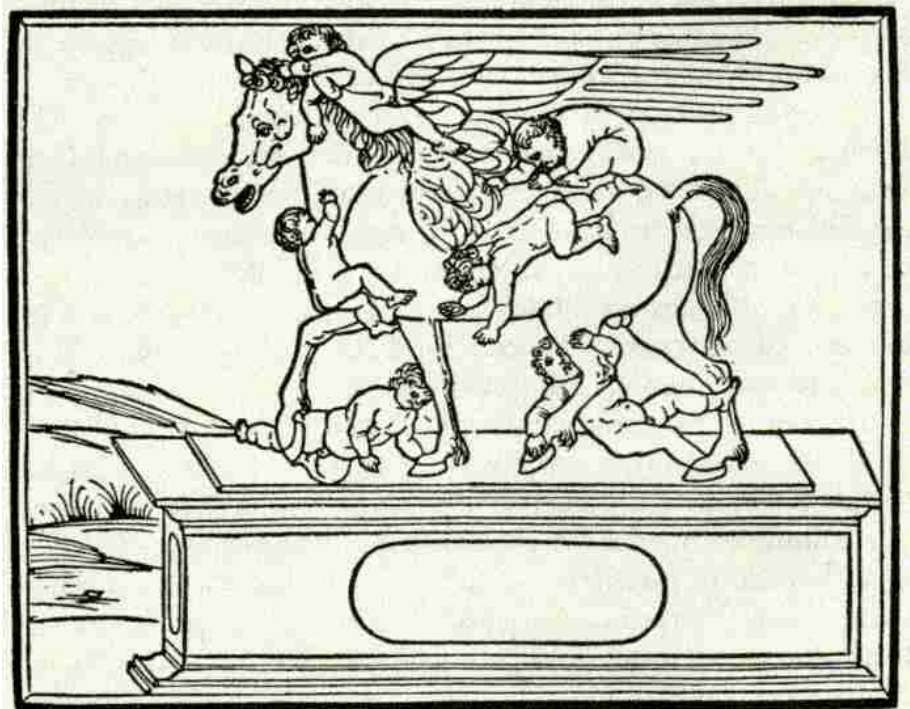


FIGURE 115
Colossal winged horse statue
Hypnerotomachia Poliphili
Francesco Colonna (?), 1499

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