

Classical topomythopoiesis: the origins of some spatial types

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Defining Classical topomythopoiesis

Topomythopoiesis is a term I propose to describe a way of landscape place-making that deliberately evokes myths.¹ To invoke John Dixon Hunt, such places ‘allow ourselves to be drawn’ into pre-existing ‘mythological ... languages’.²

The meaning of the place is thus not authored by the designer, but emanates from a vast, fantastic and polyvalent semiotic system³ that is disseminated through oral and written stories, and represented visually by artefacts ranging from paintings to sculptures. Both the verbal and visual incarnations of myths form a virtual landscape⁴ that can be summoned by symbolic and somatic elements in the material landscape.⁵

The depth of this imagined world that we can be ‘drawn into’, depends on our individual knowledge and appreciation of the mythological tradition that is being evoked.⁶ But we must not only think of the virtual landscape as a place in the clouds to which our minds ascend like vapour, for it pours down on the soil, plants, water and statues that become, momentarily, transubstantiated⁷ — meaning is not thought, but felt. Although, only if we *participate* in this imaginative act of grafting the real-and-the-imagined, do we find *enchantment*.⁸ Then we become, to use a trendy term, co-creators of landscapes, as the writer Joseph Forsyth (1763–1815) mused two centuries ago on the manner in which ruins invite imaginative collaboration:

But we must fancy what a ruin has been; we trace and we lose its design, we rebuild and re-people it, we call in history, we compose, we animate, we create; and man ever delights in his own creation.⁹

The designer working in this way shies away from seeking originality at all cost — or to use Owen Barfield’s description of the literary climate of the twentieth century — shies away from creating landscapes that are ‘all signature and no archetype’.¹⁰

Classical topomythopoiesis is a place-making tradition that involves both imitation (*mimesis*) and imaginative creation (*phantasia*),¹¹ emerging in Ancient Greece and Rome and waning from the beginning of the nineteenth century, yet survives in the shadow of landscape’s modernity.¹² Gardens in this tradition are most evidently characterised by the presence of *statue types* from a family of anthropomorphic gods like Venus and Apollo derived from Hellenic and Hellenistic models, and by *spatial types* like the fountain and grove derived from sacred natural *topoi* like the spring and forest. Some examples contain less explicit references to the myths, but rather conjure their invisible presence through verbal and abstract cues, like the toponymy of settings, and sculptural gestures in the contemporary gardens at Plaz Metaxu in North Devon.¹³ We may also venture to describe the gardens like those of Fernando Caruncho — that contain no explicit references to myths, yet are cultivated by a philo-sophy steeped in Arcadia — as examples of *latent* classical topomythopoiesis.¹⁴

The periodic renewal of interest in Classical myths as source-material for the iconography of gardens is often preceded, and inspired, by their reincarnation in verbal and visual art. For example, much of the topomythopoiesis of the Renaissance was not in direct dialogue with Hesiod's *Theogony*, but with contemporaneous sources like the *Hypnerotomachia poliphili*. Often, it is not the verbal content of myths that inspires garden creations, but their visual interpretations, either found in illustrated works or in garden catalogues.¹⁵ Irrespective of the designer's source material or intentions, the mere inclusion of, say a Venus or a vale, evokes a 'dense network of metaphorical relationships'¹⁶ between all the verbal and visual incarnations of the goddess of love and her haunts — stretching across time — that live within the intellect and imagination of the individual garden dweller and, sometimes, shared within a community. Classical topomythopoiesis from the Roman Imperial period onwards regard these myths less as part of a religious system or practice, but rather as 'a free-standing repertoire of narratives and names'¹⁷ that can be represented independently and without fear of idolatry or blasphemy; the gods and their milieux became the fertile subject matter for (sometimes whimsical and capricious) garden creations that are bereft of the sacred and ritualistic character of landscapes that evoke mythologies that have not been stripped of their religious role.¹⁸

Viewed as such, gardens that include the gods and settings of Classical mythology can be regarded as part of the same tradition, much like buildings with traces of the five orders are regarded as 'classical' per John Summerson's basic definition,¹⁹ albeit the stark difference between the Parthenon in Athens and the Disney headquarters in Orlando. The duality of descriptors like 'formal versus informal'²⁰ that casts a wall between, say, the Baroque and the picturesque, disintegrates to reveal a continuous tradition not defined by the overall language of garden layouts, but rather by the language of the topomythopoetic *encounters* found within them.²¹

The aim of this article is to discuss the origins of this tradition in Greek and Roman antiquity, with specific emphasis on the *topoi* of mountain and cave that gradually transformed from sacred, natural settings of ritual to artificial places of delight. I will highlight throughout some of the characteristics of Classical topomythopoiesis as they emerge from the discussion.

Granted the limited archaeological record of designed landscapes of the periods under discussion, and the lack of expositions that reveal their creators' precedents and intentions, it is impossible to create something akin to a phylogenetic diagram that maps the origin and evolution of the spatial types and their mythological associations. Even if evidence abounded, such a structuralist schematic analysis will be futile since the relationship between designed landscapes and myths is like the internet: an untameable and near endless network of hyperlinks. Indeed, the impossibility of a taxonomy of Classical topomythopoiesis befits the tradition, for even the Ancient (and later) mythographers did not care much to codify and structure the myths, and actually 'encouraged intermingling and disorder'.²²

That said, I have attempted to discuss the origins of this tradition by highlighting exemplar landscape artefacts, more-or-less chronologically from Greece to Rome, that share morphological traits; their precedents and mythological associations are sometimes known or obvious, and other times conjectural.

Myth and the strangeness of sanctuaries

The role of mythology in the experience of landscape was not initially aimed at mere aesthetic experience, but rather religious: the participant in ritual within a cult sanctuary sought to experience an invisible divine presence in the form of a ‘personal opposite’²³ — an anthropomorphic god, not a theological abstraction, who was sometimes represented by a cult statue. The stories of these gods, with dim echoes of tales from the Near East and Neolithic times, provided details of their lives and the geography within which their actions took place; an imagined landscape that both reflected and refracted everyday life.²⁴ These biographies of the gods — myths — thus dramatised the settings of ritual. Yet, the myths do not account for the morphology of the spatial types. For this, we must turn to the cult sites of the Greeks.

The sites for sanctuaries were chosen not for pragmatic reasons such as accessibility, but for their *difference* from the level plains on which the Greeks settled: wooded areas shaded from the sun, mountains that rise from the plains punctuated by dark and damp hollows, and water that rill over thirsty soil.²⁵ These were strange places that interrupted the general grain of the environment, much like the hierophanies that occurred there disrupted the predictable rhythm of mortal life.²⁶ Although there is no equivalent in Greek religion to the liturgical prescriptions found in, for example, the Vedas, each sanctuary did demand of its participants to act in a certain manner. It is in the performance of rituals where the distinction between Greek settings and the ensuing garden design tradition is most marked. True to the disorderly nature of Greek myth, there is no fixed pattern of god-site associations: there were mountain cults for Zeus, but so too for Hera or Aphrodite; Pan was found in caves, but so was Zeus.

From peak to mound

Let me begin to sing of the Muses of Helikon, who abide on the great and holy Mount Helikon. Around the deep-blue spring, with dainty feet, they dance, and around the altar of the mighty son of Kronos. Washing their tender skin in the waters of the Permessos or of the Horse’s Spring or of holy Olmeios, they set up their choral songs-and-dances on the highest point of Helikon.²⁷

The inclusion of artificial mountains in Classical topomythopoiesis only became common from the Renaissance onwards, yet their form and iconography can be traced back to Antiquity. There are two main types: the freestanding mound, often conical in form, and either mountable (like the Parnassus at Villa d’ Medici in Rome) or as a fountain (like the Pegasus fountain at Bomarzo), and the terraced slope, often on the side of an existing hill (like the ‘Praeneste’ at Rousham). There are examples of freestanding, terraced mounds (like the mound at New College, Oxford). The materiality of either type ranges from the refined abstraction of nature to the rustic imitation of it.

Bronze Age peak sanctuaries

As with Greek religion in general, the peak sanctuary has its roots in the Minoan-Mycenaean age. Bronze Age peak sanctuaries emerged around 2000 BC in view from settlements (and other peaks) as places of sacrifice and fire. There is no certainty to which gods these were dedicated. Walter Burkert speculates that these sites were closely linked with Eastern cultic rituals such as the Canaanite fire sacrifices to Baal on mountains, notably on Mt Sapan²⁸ — the ‘Mount Olympus of the Near East’.²⁹ This serves as a reminder that Classical topomythopoiesis originated from a syncretism of diverse Mediterranean cultures. With the

lack of literary evidence from the Minoan civilisation, we cannot assume they regarded the peak sanctuaries as the *abodes* of the gods, as indeed the Akkadians regarded Mt Sapan as the throne of Baal.³⁰

The characteristic topography of a mountain as an ascent to the sky thrusts itself on the imagination as an obvious sacred *topos*, and the prominence of such lofty spaces of ritual in, especially Cretan civilisation, seems to not require much explanation: there on the low-lying hills outside the cities, above the drudgery of daily life, the Minoans encountered higher-beings in states of ecstatic vision.³¹ However, one must be careful to not overemphasise the role of the natural environment (and its strangeness) in the enchanted experience of the peak sanctuaries. Burkert and Briault warn against the environmental determinist formula, which I paraphrase: ‘since a location surely *felt* sacred due to its distinctive geographic identity, it became the site for a sanctuary’ — rather, they argue, it is the presence of artefacts such as the myriad of figurines of animals, humans and human votive limbs, pebbles and clay pottery that sacralises space.³² Yet, the pattern of sanctuaries that consistently occur on distinct sites like peaks and caves suggests that, albeit perhaps not for the felt sacredness of the environment *au naturel*, such sites were chosen for their aptness for ritual. Indeed, according to Nixon the natural milieu, not constructed interventions, was more important in setting the scene of rural sanctuaries for Minoan palatial religion,³³ and Marinatos has argued that trees and stones may have ‘designated a holy spot.’³⁴ Such natural objects were possibly used as ritualistic devices: worshippers shaking trees — a common theme in Minoan representations of epiphany — may have served to evoke the presence of the deity, while stones may have been used for lounging to enter a dream state.³⁵

Minoan peak sanctuaries did not include images of gods, but images of the worshippers³⁶: ‘A most interesting coincidence between Homer and the Minoan world is the absence of cult statues. Votive gifts ... are intended to delight and not represent or incorporate [the gods]’.³⁷ Early Classical topomythopoiesis thus relied on the invisible presence of gods, albeit they were not *faced*.³⁸

The presence of a constructed altar was limited to exceptional cases such as Juktas. Other built interventions, none essential or consistently present, are processional paths and rock-hewn ramps, and low stone-wall boundaries like those at Atsipades and Zou Prinias.³⁹ During the Second Palace Period (1700–1450 BC) some peak sanctuaries included temples.⁴⁰ Some were located near springs or other distinctive natural features: Juktas, according to Soetens, was chosen for its chasms on the peak, thus creating an *axis mundi* between the underworld, earth and sky, and due to the location of nearby springs, a place for rituals that beg for rain.⁴¹ Similar sites are found on the Greek mainland in the Late Bronze Age Mycenaean civilisation, sharing similarities with their Cretan forebears, yet research is lacking.

Hellenic origins of the conical mound type

Greek religion took on its recognisable, Hellenic form in the ninth and eighth centuries BC following the hypothetical (and mytho-historical) attacks from the Sea Peoples around 1200 BC and the north-south ‘Dorian’ migration that brought an assimilation of the Indo-Europeans into native, Mycenaean language and culture. The mountain (*oros*) of Olympus became mythologised as the abode of the twelve anthropomorphic and universal gods. Place-bound nature deities such as nymphs survived. Although the famous snowy, inaccessible peak of Olympus was (probably) not itself a setting for ritual and its iconography never truly

absorbed into the tradition of Classical topomythopoesis, its divine inhabitants were venerated in other lofty liminal spaces between earth and sky.

The practice of rituals on mountains thus continued from the Minoan-Mycenaean into the Hellenic period, but the location of sanctuaries shifted from the hills in close proximity to cities, to the far-off high peaks — physically and conceptually separate from the plains and cities.⁴² Here, as at other Hellenic sanctuaries, the worshippers *faced* the material representation of gods⁴³ — the presence of an anthropomorphic statue, often of a singular deity, thus emerges as a characteristic of Classical topomythopoesis. Unlike the later Roman sculptural showcases, the gods were not exposed, but veiled behind the colonnades and screens of temples. The cult statue was not generally believed to have been the host for the god (who shared the same ontological space with humans), and it was only until late Antiquity that rituals were performed to ensoul or animate statues⁴⁴ — this art of *telestike* was revived during the Renaissance by the neo-Platonists and caused some garden statues to be viewed with suspicion.⁴⁵

Mountain sanctuaries were not only dedicated to the obvious gods of heights such as Zeus, but to almost all of the pantheon. Notable deities associated with peaks were the nymphs, Pan Artemis Agrotera (the huntress), Apollo and Hermes. Some sanctuaries were densely populated with furnishings for ritual drinking and dining. Some were approached on processional paths passing fountains and cisterns. As with their Minoan forebears, these sanctuaries were populated with votive offerings, but contained very little in the form of architectural interventions.⁴⁶ The altar (often only being an accumulated heap of ash) is often the only visible remnant of the sanctuary.⁴⁷ Some of the ash heaps became formalised over time, like the one outside the temple of Zeus at Olympia. These mountable, conical ash altars can opportunistically be interpreted as prototypes for the artificial, conical mounds of later Classical topomythopoesis.

Another, perhaps more plausible, prototype is the tumulus⁴⁸: earthen mounds, some with internal chambers, used as settings for burial (and rarely sacrifice) found throughout the Neolithic and Bronze Age Mediterranean region.⁴⁹ On mainland Greece, such funeral mounds were used from the Helladic period and forms part of the milieu of epic poetry:

Then they traced the compass of the barrow and set forth the foundations thereof round about the pyre, and forthwith they piled the up-piled earth. And when they had piled the barrow, they set them to go back again.⁵⁰

This description of the making of the tumulus of Patroklos in the *Iliad* sets the scene for Achilles circulating the tomb while dragging Hector's dead body behind his chariot at the start of book 24. McGowan uses this episode as an example of the violent acts that were often associated with tumuli in Greek myth.⁵¹ A trope that recurs within the tumulus milieu is the mourning for a deceased hero, often someone at the peak of their youth; dead before their time.⁵² The use of such mounds for burial waned by the Archaic period, and were no longer fashionable by the time young blood stained the field of Marathon in 490 BC. Yet, to heroize the fallen, the Athenians created two tumuli that still stand today. Whitley argues that this outdated burial practice points towards a deliberate evocation of the Homeric burial practices of the *Iliad*.⁵³ As an artificial landform born from a religious prototype and created to evoke a myth, the mounds of Marathon can be identified as early examples of Classical topomythopoesis.

Regarding the virtual landscape of the mound, it was not this image of mourning that was evoked by later Classical topomythopoiesis, neither the genus of the mountain characterised as dangerous, wild, dark, violent, deadly and irrational.⁵⁴ Rather, it was the literary mountain as a poetic wilderness for quiet reflection and inspiration that was mostly translated to gardens. Hesiod describes, in the very opening of his *Theogony* (c. 700 BC), the Muses in a mountaintop sanctuary on Helicon singing and dancing around a deep spring and altar, from where they frolicked to bathe in the fountain forged by Pegasus. On nearby Mt Parnassus — later intermingled with Helicon⁵⁵ — above the oracle of Delphi, did the god of music and poetry dwell in his ‘lovely place’⁵⁶ overlooking the springs of the nymphs Cassotis and Castalia from which, by Roman times, poets quenched their thirst for verse.⁵⁷ This cheerful and lofty locus of creative inspiration, real-and-imagined, was evoked in the gardens of Classical topomythopoiesis, especially during the Renaissance, by metaphor, statues and artificial mounds.⁵⁸

Hellenistic monumentalisation

He has every snowy crest and the mountain peaks and rocky crests for his domain; hither and thither he goes through the close thickets, now lured by soft streams, and now he presses on amongst towering crags and climbs up to the highest peak that overlooks the flocks. Often he courses through the glistening high mountains, and often on the shouldered hills he speeds along slaying wild beasts, this keen-eyed god.⁵⁹

The artificial mounds of the Helladic and Hellenic periods were created within or as sacred settings of ritual. To find such mythical *topoi* in gardens, we need to turn to the Hellenistic period during which mythopoetic spaces became subsumed as delineated *encounters* within larger designed landscapes.⁶⁰ The turn towards a topomythopoiesis that sought delight beyond the light of divinity, can be ascribed to the changing reception of the myths from around the fourth century before Christ when scepticism, widespread literacy and abstract thinking toppled the Olympian gods as the bearers of truth, yet keeping them alive as subjects for poetry and, by extension, the art of place-making.⁶¹

It needn't be overstated here that the expansion of the Greek world towards the East following Alexander's conquests resulted in growing wealth, ambitious city-building and the monumentalisation and geometrisation of gardens and parks following Persian examples. Within one such park, the royal gardens of Alexandria, stood a hill ascended by a spiral path dedicated to the god Pan, hence called Paneion.⁶² The horned goat-god roamed the wilderness where, during the Hellenic period, his sanctuaries were found in rustic settings such as Mt Lykaion. Within the grid of Alexandria we now find him on a civilised mountain — a simulacrum of his native ‘towering crags’.⁶³ Although the mound may have been constructed as a religious space for sacrifice and mantic dancing, our only historic description of it recounts a rather more secular experience:

In short, the city of Alexandria abounds with public and sacred buildings. The most beautiful of the former is the Gymnasium, with porticos exceeding a stadium in extent. In the middle of it are the court of justice and groves. Here also is a Paneium, an artificial mound of the shape of a fir-cone, resembling a pile of rock, to the top of which there is an ascent by a spiral path. From the summit may be seen the whole city lying all around and beneath it.⁶⁴

This account from the first century BC by the Greek geographer Strabo (64 BC–AD 24), who had a penchant for describing views from mountains, has been interpreted by Bowe to indicate that the mound satisfied the ‘desire to look beyond the enclosure of a garden’.⁶⁵ If so, we thus see a shift in the experience of mythopoetic places from religious epiphany to aesthetic delight.⁶⁶

Rome: monumentalisation of the burial mound

Strabo also scribed a rare account of an artificial, Roman mound. Describing the verdurous Campus Martius in Rome, he noted the presence of a number of burial mounds, highlighting one in particular:

The most remarkable of these is that designated as the Mausoleum, which consists of a mound of earth raised upon a high foundation of white marble, situated near the river, and covered to the top with ever-green shrubs. Upon the summit is a bronze statue of Augustus Cæsar, and beneath the mound are the ashes⁴ of himself, his relatives, and friends. Behind is a large grove containing charming promenades.⁶⁷

Like the Paneion, the Mausoleum of Augustus stood in a public park. Based on the description, this artificial mound was more for looking at, than for looking from. Also, the text makes no reference to myth, yet we cannot dismiss it as an example of topomythopoiesis too easily. Constructed during Augustus’ lifetime on the eve of Empire in 28 BC, the structure is a synthesis of the tumulus and the tholos: a conical mound of earth (supported on a drum) topped by a circular temple with an earthen roof crowned by a statue⁶⁸ — a dim reflection of the temple-topped hills of mythopoetic gardens from Stourhead to Dessau-Wörlitz. According to R. Ross Holloway, the tomb was unprecedented in Rome and *not* based on Etruscan tumuli, but rather a deliberate evocation of the Trojan burial mounds featured in the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, the latter composed by Virgil in the years directly preceding the construction of the Mausoleum⁶⁹:

High o’er the field there stood a hilly mound, Sacred the place, and spread with oaks around, Where, in a marble tomb, Dercennus lay, A king that once in Latium bore the sway.⁷⁰

The mythopoiesis of Virgil was the culmination of a long history of gods travelling from Greece to Rome: historically, Greek mythology was transplanted to Italy at the beginning of the eighth century BC by the establishment of Greek colonies in Sicily and southern Italy, heralding ‘the development of an impressive store of legendary narratives and mythographic constructions linking the heroic world of the Greeks with local Italian traditions, either by mixing them or by linking them’.⁷¹ Thus, the myths that were to become part of the Roman religious and literary traditions — and find their way into Virgil — were largely derived from the Greek tradition. By evoking these stories in designed landscapes like the Mausoleum, Roman topomythopoiesis can be understood as a continuation of the Classical tradition.

If Holloway’s theory holds, then the mound was meant to deliberately evoke the myth that sought to establish Augustus as the semi-divine ancestor of Aeneas and torch-bearer of Greek civilization; Classical topomythopoiesis imbued with political propaganda as employed later by popes, princes and poets.⁷²

Thus understood, Augustus ‘as gardener’ created the mound as an addition to the fabric of sacred groves and trees of the city that hark back to the very mytho-historic foundations of the city: Strabo, again, reported of the myth that the city of Rome was, even before Romulus and Remus, an Arcadian colony established by King Evander who, amongst other things, consecrated a grove for Hercules and whose mother, Carmentis, was worshipped by the Romans as a nymph in a grove.⁷³ Such sacred topomythopoiesis continued throughout the city’s history and by the Late Republic elites deliberately ‘embraced new and pre-existing sacred sites and tombs in urban and rural estates, and tried to seem attentive gardeners of historic trees at Rome’s ancient holy spots’.⁷⁴ Fifteen hundred years later, when Julius II (a neo-Augustus) commissioned the Belvedere Court as an artificial Parnassus on the Vatican hill where Apollo’s cult flourished in Antiquity, he was heir to a long tradition of rulers who stewarded the mythopoeic gardenscape of Rome.

The Mausoleum was used for various purposes throughout its history. During the sixteenth century, it was turned into a garden of statues ‘frequented by artists as well as antiquarians and other devotees of classical antiquity’.⁷⁵ It is satisfying to imagine that the ruins of the Mausoleum, much like the sculptures of gods in the Vatican Belvedere, influenced the Renaissance making of mythical garden mounds such as the Parnassus in the Villa d’ Medici. Unfortunately for such a neat hypothesis, the Mausoleum was rid of its earthen roof by then and was experienced as an open-air, cylindrical walled garden. However, the reconstruction drawings (varied as they are) of the time show an awareness of its mount-like past, so perhaps the theory is not too far-fetched.⁷⁶

The Romans not only created *topoi* to evoke their mythical past, but also the mythical realms of the conquered Hellenistic world: Hadrian’s villa famously contains ‘contrived and allusive landscapes’⁷⁷ like the Serapeum and Canopus, that recalled scenes from his travels. The iconography of such geographic souvenirs would often be revealed by their names, like the propensity to call water channels in gardens ‘Nile’.⁷⁸ A rare example of a mound-like memento is the stepped fountain at the garden of Octavius Quarto in Pompeii. Giesecke speculates that this may evoke the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, Egyptian pyramids or ziggurats.⁷⁹

Apart from such oddities and burial mounds like the Mausoleum, free-standing artificial mounds evoking myths remained, as during preceding ages, a rare feature of Roman place-making.⁸⁰ Perhaps this was due to the Romans’ ambivalence towards mountain scenery, of which they were rather silent in comparison to the Greeks — even the loose meaning of the word *mons*, anything with great height, betrays a disinterest.⁸¹ Or perhaps the views towards real hills and mountains were so common in the undulating Italian landscape that there was no need to re-create them. A case in point is the view from a room in the House of P. Fannius Synistor at Boscoreal through a window to faraway hills, framed by a painted craggy mountainscape enveloping a numinous grotto; a real-and-imagined scene in which ‘art and nature collided’⁸² — mountain mythopoiesis through a *trompe-l’œil* with a view.

Rome: origins of the terraced slope

The morphology of the terraced type has its roots in the structured terraces and stairways of Egyptian and Hellenistic monumental precincts built on steep sites.⁸³ However, it is the Roman hillside temple complex of Fortuna Primigenia in Praeneste that was fortunate to become the primary precedent for the terraces of Classical topomythopoiesis. Built in the second century BC on the site of an older cave sanctuary outside Rome in Latium, this

monumental composition in itself reflects how Classical topomythopoiesis in Antiquity developed from earlier natural sanctuaries with limited architectural interventions, to artificial architectural showcases subsuming nature.

The series of parallel terrace walls perpendicular to the main axis, punctured with arched niches (sometimes as grottoes), double staircases and ramps became staple elements of Renaissance and ensuing gardens — for example, Herbert Baker’s design of a terraced garden in front of the Union Buildings in Pretoria, South Africa (1910). More specifically, Hunt has shown how the uppermost ensemble (beneath the crowning circular temple) of a colonnaded hemicycle approached by a set of convex and concave stairs became a popular garden feature after it had been incorporated into the Belvedere Court and documented in Sebastian Serlio’s influential treatise on architecture.⁸⁴ Not all terraced slopes — freestanding or on hillsides — have explicit mythical associations, but there are some striking examples such as the theatre in the gardens of the Isola Bella, Lake Maggiore⁸⁵: its prancing Pegasus betrays its aspirations to be a Parnassus of creativity.

Ovid and the beauty of tragedy

The Roman artefact that had the greatest lasting influence on the tradition of Classical topomythopoiesis was not a monumentalised *topos*, but rather a collection of Greek myths retold in the first decade of the first century during the reign of Augustus: Ovid created a series of aetiologies of things formed from unwilling bodies.

The *Metamorphoses* surpassed Virgil’s pastoral *Aeneid* and *Georgics* as a source-book for topomythopoiesis,⁸⁶ in spite of the violence and rape that arbitrarily and constantly penetrates Ovid’s peaceful landscape.⁸⁷ Or perhaps it is because of this emphasis on individual tragedy over collective triumph that ensured its allure⁸⁸: unlike Virgil, Ovid did not create a metapoetic epic that attempted to guide the Romans towards the moral and patriotic society that Augustus sought to engineer. With its emphasis on ‘private experience’ rather than ‘themes of social and cosmic order’⁸⁹ Ovid represented the myths in a new light: by enlightening the myths of their moral and religious gravity, he stamped on them a ‘quality of secular grace and sensuous freedom’⁹⁰ that was to inspire the artists and garden-makers of late Antiquity, through the Middle Ages, and from the Renaissance onwards to mimic the encounters between hapless individuals and the gods, enframed by natural settings — mirrors of our fragile existence in a cruel, chaotic, but beautiful world.⁹¹

Yet, these tragic moments of terror are interrupted by moments of whimsy and humour, such as the image in the first book of someone that catches a fish in an elm tree whilst the great, universal flood is busy destroying mankind as punishment by Jove. This image of the flood was evoked at Villa d’ Este, as was Parnassus with its twin-peaks whereupon Deucalion and Pyrrha, according to Ovid’s tale, survived to become the progenitors of all mankind.⁹²

Most of his descriptions of topoi were not particularly original, and he parroted the tropes of the pastoral tradition: springs, caves, vales and, relevant for the present discussion, mountains. In the encounter of Minerva with the Muses the mountain is merely named as a milieu:

To Helicon, where the Muses lived, and landing
On the sacred mountain ...⁹³

The emphasis quickly shifts to other landscape types (fountain, grove, grotto, flowery meadow) found within the mountain-setting. Ovid thus maintained the Roman ambivalence towards mountain-descriptions, although they feature frequently in the *Metamorphoses*. They are given general descriptors like ‘sacred’ (see above) ‘rough’ (the ranges whereupon Hyacinthus roamed with hunters; book 10, 177) and ‘bleak’ (Caucasus; book 8, 800). Yet nowhere do we find a description elucidating the sensory qualities of the mountain *itself*; nothing like the ‘towering crags’ as found in the *Homeric Hymn to Pan*. However, in the above episode on Helicon, an ekphrasis by Urania of the Hippocrene Spring ensures that the myth of the mountain and its font is conserved:

‘And the tale is really true: Pegasus did, Indeed, produce our fountain.’ She led the goddess
To the sacred water, and Minerva stood there, Admiring long, and looked at
woods and grottoes And lawns, bejeweled with unnumbered flowers⁹⁴

Indeed, according to Cellauro⁹⁵ Ovid’s account of the Hippocrene is the source of the very first depiction of a ‘mount of the Muses in garden architecture’ in the, now vanished, gardens of Antonio del Bufalo in Rome; both as a scene in a fresco painting and later constructed as a small Parnassus fountain.⁹⁶

Whereas the *morphology* of artificial mounts in Classical topomythopoiesis can be traced back to actual peaks, ash heaps, burial mounds and terraced temples, the virtual landscape they evoke — which contained little of the blood-soaked rituals of the mountain sanctuaries — was cultivated by the poets like Homer, Hesiod and Ovid.

From cave to grotto

‘Would it not be a pretty cool habitation in summer, Dr. Johnson? “I think it would, Madam, for a toad.”’⁹⁷

The origin of grottoes, like garden mounds, can be traced back to Minoan and Hellenic natural settings for ritual, taking on their recognisable artificial form through a process of architectural translation and monumentalisation from the Hellenistic period onwards.⁹⁸ For the purposes of this essay, I make the distinction between the *spatial* type and the *facade* type: the former can be entered (like the Stourhead grotto) and the latter is for looking at (like the *teatro dell’acqua* at Villa Aldobrandini).⁹⁹ Both types can either appear naturalistic (Stourhead) or architectonic (Aldobrandini), or a combination.

The spatial type can be considered the genetic offspring of cave sanctuaries — places of descent into *darkness* (an interior experience); the facade type is the genetic offspring of the cave entrance and a celebration of the water spring, gushing forth from the earth into the *light* (an outside, and sometimes civic, experience). The two types are sometimes combined.

Bronze Age cave sanctuaries

On the Island of Crete, the Minoans enacted their rituals not only on peaks, but on the opposite end of the *axis mundi* in the depths of the earth where in ‘these weird, dark, and barely accessible places an encounter with the sacred was sought’.¹⁰⁰ Like the peak sanctuaries, these caves (especially during the Palatial Period) were some distance from settlements, and likewise differentiated from the plains: moments of shadowy strangeness in the sunburnt landscape. There too the worshippers did not commune with the gods in the

presence of a cult statue, but sought their invisible presence. The rituals (of which little detail is known) within the cave were often performed in spaces of darkness and coolth; places sculpted with falling spires and bubbling cave formations, shimmering in pools of water.¹⁰¹ These places of chiseled shadows are proto-typical of the naturalistic grottoes of Classical topomythopoeiesis: for example, Alexander Pope's description of his grotto at Twickenham in a letter to Lord Bolingbroke, may as well be of the Psychro cave on Crete:

Where ling'ring drops from min'ral roofs distil,And pointed crystals break the
sparkling rill;Unpolish'd gems no ray on pride bestow,And latent metals innocently
glow¹⁰²

Other notable examples of Bronze Age ritual caves are found at Skotino, Vernopheto and Mount Ida. No singular 'cave deity' has been identified, although numerous gods were associated with the cave.¹⁰³ These natural settings were largely left unaltered and unadorned. Only some have built altars, and artefacts were limited to crudely packed rubble in the shape of animals and, sometimes, drawings like that of the Mistress of the Animals at Vernopheto.¹⁰⁴ Most archaeological remains are limited to votive offerings: clay pots, golden double axes, animal bones and tables for libation.¹⁰⁵ Minoan topomythopoeiesis thus largely consisted of furnishing natural spaces, not of mimicking nature.

A possible exception may be the *adyton* (previously known as 'lustral basins') found in the Minoan palaces like Knossos.¹⁰⁶ Following an argument first made by Spyridon Marinatos in 1941, Campbell speculates that these sunken, rectilinear rooms were used for cleansing rituals (not bathing as was initially thought) and spatially symbolise the descent into the earth related to chthonic religion.¹⁰⁷ If the *adyton* were indeed architectonic abstractions of caves, then they are an early example of artificial, indoor and spatial grottoes within the tradition, and loosely similar in conception to the indoor nymphaea of Hellenistic and Roman houses.

The use, sacredness and renown of some of the Minoan caves survived into the Greek Archaic period (and beyond into Hellenistic and Roman times at places like Sphakia) and were written into the mythical topography of Ancient Greece: the cave of Mt Ida (and others) became the birthplace of Zeus, and his daughter Eileithyia (the Greek goddess of birth) came to dwell in the chthonic womb of Amnisos near Knossos. The Minoan caves of ritual were thus partially absorbed into the virtual landscape of Classical topomythopoeiesis.

Hellenic origins of the bucolic cave

Worship in caves continued into the Hellenic period on mainland Greece, albeit playing only a 'marginal role' in Greek religion.¹⁰⁸ There is no clear evidence of artificially constructed caves during this time,¹⁰⁹ but caves became increasingly artificial: the construction of loose or rock-hewn furniture, steps between levels, floors for dancing, water troughs and altars served as functional additions. Cultic activity included animal sacrifice and the dedication of offerings, including plants, libations, ceramic pottery (cheaply made), jewellery and terracotta figures. Based on existing evidence, the main difference between the Hellenic and the earlier Minoan cave sanctuaries is the presence of images of deities, outside or within the cave. These, although not always present, were sculpted or painted 'presumably, with the intention of assisting visitors in summoning a divine presence'.¹¹⁰ Participation with the virtual landscape of the cave is further prompted by inscriptions.¹¹¹ The presence of text to evoke the virtual within the material landscape became a common device within Classical

topomythopoiesis, from the conjuring of nymphs with the words of Pope in the Stourhead grotto to Ian Hamilton Finlay's Latin quips.

As with all Greek sanctuaries, the cave was not dedicated to a specific set of deities, neither limited to those with a 'chthonic aura',¹¹² and yet the most frequent dedications were to those gods that came to populate the grottoes of Classical topomythopoiesis: Apollo and the Muses, Pan and Poseidon.¹¹³ However, the earliest cave sanctuaries were not dedicated to these Olympian gods, but to the nymphs,¹¹⁴ representing '... partly the moral neutrality of the intermediate world of nature and partly a world of mystery which is glimpsed but never seen, and which retreats when approached ...'¹¹⁵

The physical and literary cave sanctuaries of the nymphs were, already from the time of writing *The Odyssey*, associated with a bucolic and even gardened setting enframing a *retreat*: as the irrigation channels and trained vine outside Calypso's home testify (5.50–5.80), the milieu of the nymph-cave is not one of untamed nature as conjured by the Pan-cave on the slopes of the Athenian acropolis.¹¹⁶ Rather, the cave of Homer's nymph is a literary prototype for the garden-cave as a sexualised topography¹¹⁷: partially hidden amidst the cultivated verdure of thriving plants and bird-life lies the moist and sheltered space promising domestic care and divine seduction.¹¹⁸ Whereas sex with the Olympian goddesses was hubris, such erotic encounters between mortal men and nymphs, often in caves, abound in Greek literature: 'unlike the Olympian gods, one could feel an intimate bond, and the nymphs had a sensual, sexual aura shared by none of the Olympian goddesses except Aphrodite'¹¹⁹ — the erotic dimension of the grotto remains part of its enchantment, as it was for Mary Delaney and Margaret Harley at Bulstrode in the eighteenth century.¹²⁰ The presence of nymphs seem to both domesticate nature and ennoble its wildness with a calm air of order and delight, blowing through the trees, meadows and rivers of the landscape outside the *polis*. Such was the enchantment on the banks of the Ilissos River that intoxicated Socrates:

By Hera, it is a charming resting place. For this plane tree is very spreading and lofty, and the tall and shady willow is very beautiful, and it is in full bloom, so as to make the place most fragrant; then, too, the spring is very pretty as it flows under the plane tree, and its water is very cool, to judge by my foot. And it seems to be a sacred place of some nymphs and of Achelous, judging by the figurines and statues. Then again, if you please, how lovely and perfectly charming the breeziness of the place is! and it resounds with the shrill summer music of the chorus of cicadas.¹²¹

This oft cited description of a *locus amoenus* from Plato's *Phaedrus* (c. 370 BC), in which Socrates later in the dialogue 'pulls extremes of free and controlled sexuality into the picture and implicitly hints at a tension between civic and rustic order',¹²² enshrined the nymphs as inhabitants of spaces 'intermediate between the untamed wild and the carefully tended field of grain or pruned orchard'.¹²³ Socrates is brought to a state of nympholepsy into an almost poetic style of speech.¹²⁴ The poetic spell of the nymphs and the literary trope of the nymph-cave in the garden was literally imitated by nympholepts like Archedemos and Pantalkes who dedicated their lives towards tending and adorning cave sanctuaries, including by cultivating gardens outside the entrances.¹²⁵ The reasons for visiting these cult caves of the nymphs were various: from rituals around marriage, birth and healing (in association with Asklepios), hunting, divination and personal devotion.¹²⁶ Most of these were to fade from the repertoire of acts performed within the grottoes of Classical topomythopoiesis. Yet, their function as a space to receive wisdom, as at Delphi, endures. Perhaps it is because such spaces *actually* do alter our states of consciousness, as Ustinova has argued using modern neuroscience.¹²⁷

Thus, the Hellenic contribution to the grotto in Classical topomythopoiesis was not so much morphological, but the literary image of the cave set within bucolic serenity; a strange place promising to fulfil the desire for love and wisdom.

Hellenistic development of the spatial type

It was only the Hellenistic period that saw the emergence of the artificial and semi-secularised grotto, both in its spatial and frontal guises. Bowe interprets the construction of an entrance to the cave of Hercules in Delos (in the form of granite boulders forming a pitched roof) as ‘a transitional point to a practice of creating a fully artificial cave’.¹²⁸

Cave sanctuaries were *constructed* on the acropolis of Rhodes in the third and second centuries BC, marking a departure from the Minoan and Hellenic practice of merely furnishing and adorning natural caves. However, the Rhodian caves were not wholly artificial, but cut and built into the rocky cliffs of the existing geology.¹²⁹

Although not proven by the archaeological findings, Rice infers that some of the niches in the walls of the grottoes probably housed sculptures of nymphs similar to other Rhodian examples.¹³⁰ In her discussion of Greek garden sculpture, Brunilde S. Ridgway identified Rhodes as a setting with special significance where some Hellenistic statues of gods had been found that were seemingly custom-made for water settings, for example a nymph slipping from rocks into water and a Pan-fountain.¹³¹ However, all interpretations of the meaning and setting of these sculptures are conjectural, since no information exists on their settings or purposes.¹³² What is certain, is the continuation of the importance of the presence of nymphs in watery, cavernous spaces. From the likely presence of their statues (and that of Pan), Rice argued that the artificial grottoes of Rhodes can be interpreted as an attempt to re-create the rural cave sanctuaries of the nymphs for ritualistic purposes.¹³³

In addition to the probable presence of anthropomorphic statues, the simulation of the rustic cave sanctuary was achieved by structural form and surface decoration: The grottoes of Rhodes consisted of rock-cut barrel vaulted passages and semi-domed and apsidal spaces, and contained pools of water and arched niches within walls for votive offerings. The use of the arch in the construction of artificial caves can be interpreted as a *geometrisation* of the structure of the natural cave ceiling. This is echoed in the arches depicted in the contemporaneous clay models of artificial grottoes found in the *Grotta Caruso* at Locri in southern Italy, which Bowe interprets as ‘a new formalism or geometric purism in cave depiction’.¹³⁴ Possibly, the models depict *rock-cut* grottoes such as those at Rhodes and not ones constructed with stone masonry. (One of the models depicts parabolic arches for which there is no known precedent in Greek architecture.)

The materiality of the natural cave was simulated at Rhodes with ‘painted plaster inlaid with pebbles and shells’,¹³⁵ reminiscent of the conchophilia evident in later garden grottoes.¹³⁶

These sanctuaries, as part of a series of landscape spaces on the acropolis in Rhodes, became used as public places of respite,¹³⁷ much like the cemeteries in the USA were used for recreation during the nineteenth century. As with the latter example, this does not imply a complete secularisation of the cave sanctuary: granted the finding of votive artefacts, Rice argues against the hypothesis that the landscape spaces of Rhodes were purely ‘features of ornamental urban landscaping’.¹³⁸ Like the Paneion in Alexandria, the Rhodian grottoes

represent a new chapter in Classical topomythopoiesis: the making of artificial *topoi* in mimesis of nature that evoke myth to enchant an experience of ritual *and* delight.

Hellenistic development of the facade type

During the Renaissance, the facade type grotto became a common (sometimes automated) backdrop for garden theatres.¹³⁹ The origin of the grotto as the *object* of theatrical spectacle, can be traced back to the pomp of the Ptolemies: a procession through the streets of Alexandria in c. 275 BC in celebration of the enthronement of Ptolemy II Philadelphus over Egypt featured a cart

drawn by five hundred men; in it was a deep cavern profusely shaded with ivy and yew. From this pigeons, ring-doves, and turtle-doves flew forth along the whole route ... And from it also gushed forth two fountains, one of milk, the other of wine. And all the nymphs standing round him ...¹⁴⁰

The imagery has been interpreted by Dunan as celebrating, as part of a series of displays, the life of Dionysos.¹⁴¹ At Alexandria, the Ptolemaic kings used the image of the benefactor god of wine to propagate the ideal of *tryphe*¹⁴² — as Dionysos blessed us with wine and its pleasures, so doth the excessive and effeminate Lagid king soak his people drunk with the good-life.

We therefore see a shift from the dark, sacred, oracular and erotic natural spaces of the rustic grotto sanctuary, to a visual spectacle in civic light serving political propaganda. Whereas the cult images of the Hellenic period were deliberately veiled within the temple, here they are fully *exposed* in the open, public realm; the *demos* no longer left the city to search for an encounter with the gods within their strange haunts; the gods came to the people in the city. However, the grotto as a religious *setting* is flattened as a *scene* to be viewed, not entered. During the same festival, in the proto-basilica banqueting tent, caves were made in-between the columns of the upper-level of the nave ‘to house symposium-scenes with figures in dramatic costumes’,¹⁴³ deliberately meant to be watched over dinner from below. The iconography of the abundance, manifested in the drinking of wine, bestowed upon the people by the king is thus extended. Such visual spectacle was not only reserved for temporary grotto displays: Trümper refers to a third century BC description of a decorative grotto-fountain in Alexandria (with a statue of queen Arsinoë) that is seemingly a permanent tableau without any use for ritual.¹⁴⁴

The construction of facade-type grottoes was not reserved for royal reverie, but can be witnessed in a series of domestic grottoes found within the densely packed houses of the elite at Delos that also ‘symbolized *tryphe* and luxury as well as pleasures, happiness, and enjoyment of an idyllic, bucolic-rural ambience’.¹⁴⁵ These grottoes were typically constructed adjacent to peristyle courtyards (the dense urban fabric left no room for gardens) in the form of niches, often arched, containing sculptures (a nymph has been found) and running water (even milk). As with the Rhodian grottoes, these were often constructed into and onto natural rock features, to achieve a ‘deliberately explored combination of the natural rock and artificial features, such as stucco, built elements and sculpture’.¹⁴⁶ Most probably, it was these domesticated grottoes — and not those of the Ptolemies — that were emulated by Roman elites in their gardens and houses during the Late Republic.¹⁴⁷

Rome: private facade type grottos

Domestic nymphaea¹⁴⁸ within architectural rather than garden settings, such as those at Delos, were constructed in houses in the Roman coastal town of Herculaneum during the first century for ‘looking outside inside’.¹⁴⁹ A good example can be found in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite, owned by a wealthy shopkeeper, who seemingly sought to ‘keep up’ with the more spacious and verdurous villa gardens of nearby Pompeii.¹⁵⁰ The facade type grotto adjoins an open-to-air court space *within* the house that served as a ‘precious substitute for a peristyle and garden’.¹⁵¹ Housed within a triumphal arch-like structure,¹⁵² the cave is represented by a vaulted niche that was possibly inhabited by a nymph-statue and flanked by rectangular niches that contained other statues or fountains.¹⁵³ This purely architectonic cave is situated within a sacro-idyllic milieu represented by garland patterns and hunting scenes in mosaic.¹⁵⁴ Unlike the Delian examples, there is no visible *in situ* rock, nor any attempt to mimic the appearance of natural caves. The cave simulacrum is rendered by the granular texture of the inner surfaces of the niches and the strings of shells that articulate various edges of the composition.

This folly¹⁵⁵ functioned as a pilastered facade screening a water cistern that fed a fountain in the court emerging from a water basin around which two or three guests could laze and dine on the couches of a triclinium.¹⁵⁶ There, as in Ptolemy II’s banqueting tent, the guests were entertained by the nymphaeum facade showcasing a ‘wistful tableau of the haunts of the nymphs’,¹⁵⁷ further enlivened by the Dionysiac theme enshrined in the statue heads of bearded satyrs and a tragic theatre mask that crown the nymphaeum; Silenus sneers over the show from high on the wall above the nymphaeum.¹⁵⁸

The wall perpendicular to the nymphaeum was painted (in the Fourth Style) to further enhance the illusion of a garden. Amidst the flat foliage stands a painted aedicula — a flattened architectural frame wherein the titular gods of Neptune and Amphitrite pose in *contrapposto*. This two-dimensional architectural framework resembles, perhaps consciously, another type of domestic nymphaeum constructed around the same time in nearby Pompeii: sacella in gardens housed gods like miniature temples, for example in the House of the Large Fountain. These also often formed a spatial unit with a triclinium. The shopkeeper and his company could thus imitate the social habits of garden-owning Romans: in their wine-soaked reverie they could discuss with pleasure the iconographic programme of the court — nymph, satyrs, sea gods, grotto — and engage in an ‘ongoing game of memory and storytelling’.¹⁵⁹ Cicero testifies that the Romans took pleasure in both the physical enjoyment (*usus*) and mental reflection (*cogitatio*) of their gardens; experiences of the real and the imagined, prompted by somatic and symbolic stimuli.¹⁶⁰

The facade-type grotto as a freestanding aedicula in a private setting (whether built or painted) was ultimately derived from monumental, public fountains that were built to terminate aqueducts such as the Fountain of Neptune constructed in Roman Corinth at the dawn of the first millennium.¹⁶¹ Robinson interpreted the structure¹⁶² — a fountain covered by a barrel vault and capped by a pediment, housing a statue of the trident god — as a ‘formalized version of numinous caves in the limestone landscapes of Greece and Italy’,¹⁶³ thus supporting the argument that topomythopoiesis went through a developmental stage during which natural, sacred *topoi* were translated to architectonic compositions.

The topomythopoiesis in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite thus rendered the court as a physical threshold into a virtual landscape cultivated by a network of myths that reach back

into the rustic and sacred caves of Greece. Or, perhaps, the diners simply found delight in being transported to the villas of their betters, or the grand squares of far-off cities; or both. Whether to enchant the imagination or the ego, the role of the grotto during the Roman Imperial period had shifted further away from being a strange setting for religious encounters to a visual prop in a playful performance; a diorama to spark dinner conversation.¹⁶⁴

Rome: public facade-type grottos

The theatrical nature of the nymphaeum in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite is, according to Aken's analysis no mere coincidence: '... the whole structure, the monumental front, the shape of the niches, and the crowning with theatre-masks bears witness to a growing influence of the *scenae-frons* in the nymphaeum architecture'.¹⁶⁵

As with the aedicula, the private nymphaeum probably imitated its public counterpart. These were built in Roman cities and emphasised the *display* of water and sculpture over the dominant infrastructural role of their Hellenic forebears¹⁶⁶ — not the cave sanctuaries, but fountain-houses. These had humble origins in the Archaic period as simple encased standpipes with spouts, that were elaborated during the Classical period to include colonnaded structures providing shade and some decorative displays.¹⁶⁷ Following the further architectural elaboration of Hellenistic fountains, the Romans refined the building type by borrowing from the architectural language of the theatre — a fitting precedent for a public *screen*

The *scaenae frons* of Roman theatres developed from the second century BC in Italy and elaborated in the eastern Empire due to Hellenistic influence.¹⁶⁸ Thus derived, the nymphaea typically 'comprised a columnar facade forming *exedrae* and *aediculae*, niches in the back, and was sometimes supplemented with lateral wings'.¹⁶⁹ These grandiose screens towered above the water body below and were populated by statues. The iconographic programme varied widely, and stretched far beyond the *dramatis personae* of 'grotto and water gods', although it does appear like the nymphaea differed from theatres by accommodating deities 'closely related to water and nature'.¹⁷⁰ For example, the nymphaeum of Miletus contained the old 'cave deities' like the nymphs, Poseidon, Dionysos and Muses. A third storey addition by Emperor Gordian III (225–244) displayed the Emperor himself and his family. Many fountains were built for such political ends, since their monumental delightfulness made them 'primary candidates for civic euergetism'.¹⁷¹ Facing the Emperor or some other elite benefactor amidst the show of water, fantasy and power must have, again, been an experience rather far removed from entering an eerie, dark hollow in the earth — stealing a glance of a nymph in the flickering light. Yet, perhaps the bustle and swelter of the Roman civic square was momentarily enchanted with a brief escape into a rustic cave in Arcadia.

Indeed, the topomyth of the cave was not entirely erased by embellishment for the onlookers of Roman Antiquity: in his ekphrastic description of the fountain in Corinth — welled by the tears of Peirene the nymph¹⁷² — Pausanias (AD 110–180) describes the spring screen: 'ornamented with white marble, and there have been made chambers like caves, out of which the water flows into an open-air well'.¹⁷³ Although the Roman facade prevented access to the original 'subterranean springhouse',¹⁷⁴ the metaphor of the cave thus remained as a remnant of the ancient sacro-infrastructural space, and so too its resident nymph.¹⁷⁵

Roman spatial grottoes

Roman grottoes were not limited to the facade-type. Littlewood provides a garden description by Diodorus Siculus from the first century BC as a literary source, mimicking the bucolic cave of Greek myth, for the Roman spatial grotto: a space sheltered by plants, circular and furnished with couches for nymphs.¹⁷⁶ The topomyth of the cave as an ominous setting for mystery and erotic encounters from the Greek literary tradition endured in other Roman authors, and was a more commonplace *topos* than the mountain. Ovid exploits the trope of the cave as a sheltered space to introduce sudden episodes of rude violence that shatter idyllic love as when the cyclops Polyphemus hurled a rock to kill the lover of the nymph Galatea.¹⁷⁷

The one-eyed giant also features in a physical grotto that became a precedent for Roman grottoes, at least in terms of iconography: a well-known example of a spatial grotto that is an intermediary between the natural cave and the artificial grotto is the one at Sperlonga, near Naples, where the natural cave roof arches over a constructed, geometric pool and island-triclinium where the Emperor Tiberius (42 BC–AD 37) entertained his guests with a view towards sculpted scenes from the *Odyssey*: the blinding of Polyphemus (book 9) and the encounter with Scylla (book 12); the myths were evoked more for entertainment than enchantment.¹⁷⁸ The performance of the statues were supported by scenography: ‘The display was designed to emphasize the sculptures’ illusionistic qualities, so the blinding of Polyphemus was set in a dark recess to the back of the cave, while the Scylla group rose out of the pool at the grotto’s centre, transforming its calm waters into a spectacular struggle between monster and hero’¹⁷⁹ — the intellectual experience of reading the myth is intertwined with the somatic experience of the cave setting. Thus, the material space seeks to manifest the geography of the virtual landscape, unlike the identical niches and aedicula of the facade-type, which enframe sculptures irrespective of their associated myths. This comparison reveals two opposing statue-setting relationships in Classical topomythopoiesis: in the one the setting serves to heighten the phenomenology of the myth by *naturalising* the god in its location; in the other the setting serves to heighten the allegory of the myth by *universalising* the god. Sperlonga’s ‘vivid theatrical tableau’¹⁸⁰ was further contextualised on a broader scale: across the bay from the cave is where Odysseus and company were held company by Circe.

These episodes from their adventures recur in later Imperial grottoes which, Carey argues, deliberately quoted the iconography of Sperlonga as a ‘delineation of imperial space’¹⁸¹ — in a way, Sperlonga becomes the topomyth that is evoked, not the grottoes of Homer. This is another important characteristic of Classical topomythopoiesis: the designed encounters not only evoke myths or cult sanctuaries from Greece, but also other *topoi* constructed within the tradition itself; these thus form part of an ever-growing ‘metaphorical network’ of the virtual landscape, and one may add a ‘morphological network’.

The spatial grottoes that Carey cite are a nymphaeum-triclinium at Baiae (c. AD 45, Emperor Claudius), the nymphaeum of the grotto in the Golden House in Rome (c. AD 65, Emperor Nero) and the grotto-triclinium in Hadrian’s villa (often called the Serapeum, c. 120).¹⁸²

The grottoes at Baiae and Rome are examples of the rectangular, barrel vaulted apsidal halls that Aken likened to the basilica,¹⁸³ and reminiscent of the rock-hewn vaults of Rhodes. Other Roman examples include the nymphaea at the Ciceronian Villa at Formia (with coffered vault and columns) and the rock-hewn nymphaeum, without columns, at Castel Gandolfo (Villa of

Emperor Domitian, AD 81–96). As the facade-type grottoes, these mark a complete artificial translation of the natural cave.

The nymphaeum at Hadrian's villa is exemplar of the exedra spatial type consisting of a triclinium covered by a semi-dome. A similar fountain structure was built for the Olympic Games c. 150 AD by Herodes Atticus in Olympia. This type can be seen in exedra structures for musical performance, designed in the nineteenth century, at Villa Giulia, Palermo. Fully dome nymphaea are rare, but one impressive example was constructed in the Horti Liciniani in Rome during the fourth century.

The imperial, spatial grottoes with their triclinia echo the interior grottoes of Herculaneum: assemblages of sculpted and painted representations of myths within architectural spaces that dimly recall the sacro-natural milieu of a Golden Age, affording a 'combined physical and intellectual experience'¹⁸⁴ — whether the company of a shopkeeper or an Emperor, visitors within these spaces could count on a shared semiotic system¹⁸⁵ that enabled a collective participation of seeing the invisible in the visible.

Centuries later, Bartolomeo Taegio encountered a grotto in a sixteenth-century topomythopoetic garden from which clear water flowed into a fishpond, surrounded by statues and stirring a brief moment of enchantment: '... sometimes in the rising and the setting of the sun I have seen things so wonderful and beautiful in the aforementioned fishpond that it seems to me there could be another world ...'¹⁸⁶

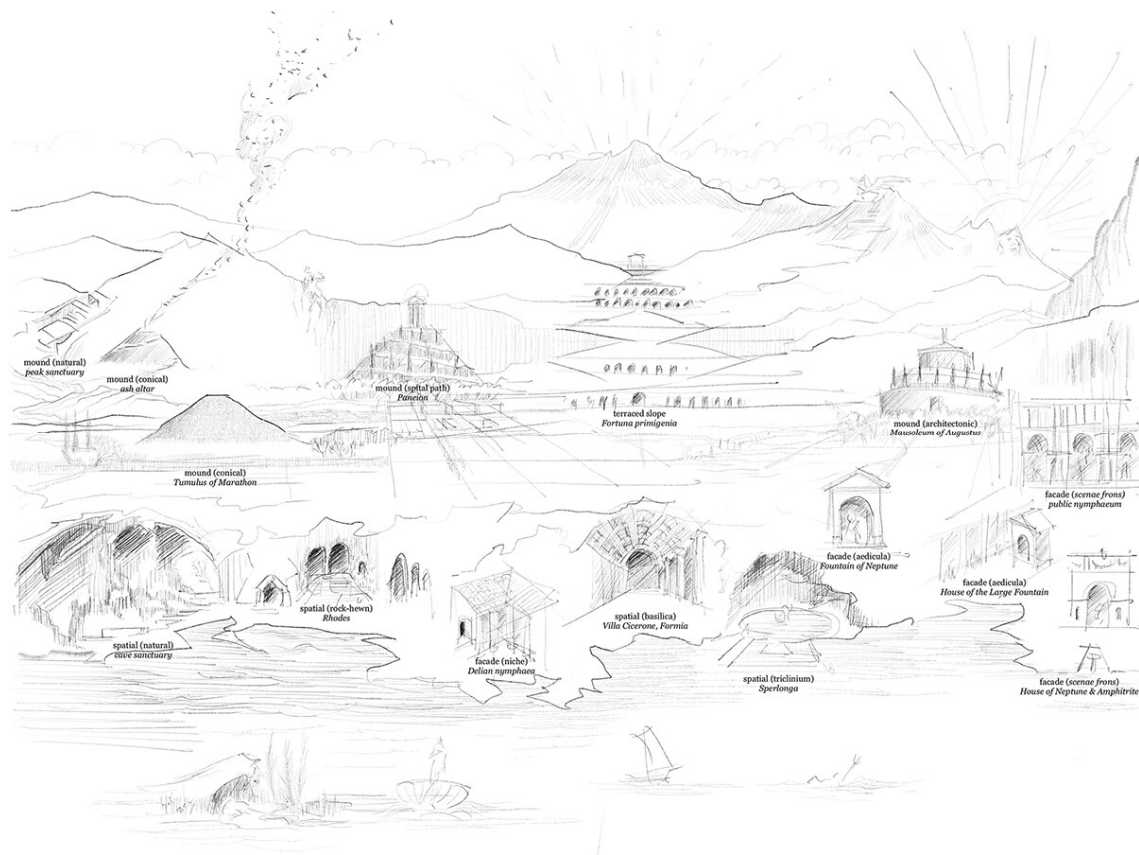


Figure 1. An imagined view of the origins of some spatial types of Classical topomythopoiesis. Source: Drawing by the author, Pretoria, 2021

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes

1. This neologism was first used in a paper entitled ‘The resurrection of Adonis: Towards a mythopoetics for contemporary landscape architecture’ presented at the Space and Place conference in Oxford, September 2014. It is derived from the Greek *topos* (place) and the term *mythopoeia* (making of myths) and thus refers to the ‘making of myth-related places’.
2. John Dixon Hunt, *The Afterlife of Gardens* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), pp. 37–38.
3. I borrow these terms from Walter Burkert’s definition of myth and epic in his *Greek Religion*, translated by John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 120–121, which reads: ‘If myth is defined as a complex of traditional tales in which significant human situations are united in fantastic combinations to form a polyvalent semiotic system which is used in multifarious ways to illuminate reality, then Greek epic is both less than this and more than this.’ For the purpose of this article, the terms ‘myth’ and ‘epic’ will be used interchangeably.
4. The term is inspired by John Dixon Hunt’s reference to the ‘virtual reality’ of gardens, op. cit.
5. In my conception of topomythopoeia, the experience of meaning is not limited to an intellectual decoding of symbols, but extends to a felt, sensory experience: for these terms, I am indebted to Miriam Bay in her study of the mytho-poetics of Villa d’Este. See her *Cultivating Myth and Composing Landscape at the Villa d’Este, Tivoli* (PhD dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2018), p. 50. Plants play a significant role in experience of mythopoetic landscapes, although not discussed in this essay; for the associations between plants and Classical mythology, see Annette Gesiecke, *The Mythology of Plants: Botanical Lore from Ancient Greece and Rome* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2014).
6. The symbolist approach to mythology, famously argued by the likes of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, would extend this to include those universal archetypes that resonate with us irrespective of our familiarity with a specific story.
7. Metaphorically referring to the Catholic idea that, during the Eucharist, the bread and wine are no mere symbols of the body and blood of Christ, but becomes Christ; in rare moments of enchantment, the landscape is no mere symbol of the virtual landscape, but its very embodiment.
8. ‘Participation’ refers to our creative contribution in translating the ‘actual structure of the universe’ to perceived phenomena. That participation can range from the unconscious process of conceiving matter, to the conscious act of viewing a work of art as more than what ‘meets the eye’. Following Owen Barfield, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), p. 12. Somewhat similar is Ernst Gombrich’s use of the ‘beholder’s share’ when referring to our participation in viewing art. ‘Enchantment’ here refers to seeing or sensing an invisible presence in the visible landscape through unconscious or conscious participation.

9. Joseph Forsyth, *Remarks on Antiquities, Arts and Letters During an Excursion in Italy in the Years 1802 and 1803* (Geneva: P.G. Ledouble, 1820), p. 353.
10. Owen Barfield, *A Barfield Reader: Selections from the Writings of Owen Barfield*, edited by Georg Bernhard Tennyson (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), p. 56.
11. The duality between imitation of things seen (*mimesis*) and the creation of things never seen (*phantasia*) was cited by Philostratus (c. 170–250) in *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* to claim that the Greeks sculptors ‘invented’ the appearance of the gods through the faculty of the imagination — models that became the object for imitation. Throughout the tradition of Classical topomythopoiesis, the balance between mimesis and fantasy fluctuates: from mass-produced sculptures of Venus (hyper-*mimesis*) to the fantastical images in the *Hypnerotomachia poliphili*.
12. John Dixon Hunt marks 1800 as the birth of ‘landscape’s modernity’ which privileged individual, private over shared, public experiences. The shift away from ‘emblematic’ towards ‘expressive’ landscape design, invariably resulted in the decline of Classical topomythopoiesis. John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), pp. 286–289. However, the tradition survived, even during the twentieth century, in the works of designers like Harold Peto, Ferdinand Bac and Ian Hamilton Finlay, not to speak of its popular life in amusement parks, video games and films.
13. See John Dixon Hunt’s discussion of the garden in his review of Alasdair Forbes, *On Psyche’s Lawn: The Gardens of Plaz Metaxu*. The review was published online: ‘Opportunity and plausibility in landscape meanings’, *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 2021. DOI: 10.1080/14601176.2021.1923996.
14. Borrowed from Robert A.M. Stern’s use of ‘latent classicism’ in his book *Modern Classicism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p. 113.
15. An example of the role of drawings is the possible influence of Renaissance illustrations of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* on the design of Giambologna’s sculpture of the Apennines at Pratolino. See John Dixon Hunt ‘Ovid in the garden’, *AA Files*, 3, 1983, p. 9. Another example is the influence on Renaissance, and later, garden statues of Cesar Ripa’s *Iconologia* (Rome, 1593; illustrated version published in 1603). Garden treatises such as Dezallier d’Argenville’s *La Theorie et la Pratique du Jardinage* (Paris, 1709) include drawings of statue-gods, almost reduced to mere ornament.
16. From Claude Calame’s essay on the trope of meadows in a poem by Sappho, ‘Gardens of Love and Meadows of the Beyond: Ritual Encounters with the Gods and Poetical Performances in Ancient Greece’, in Michel Conan (ed.), *Sacred Gardens and Landscapes: Ritual and Agency* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2007), p. 49.
17. Ingo Gildenhard, Michael Silk, and Rosemary Barrow, *The Classical Tradition: Art, Literature, Thought* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), p. 303.
18. The theme of idolatry in topomythopoiesis is worth a separate essay, but for now it suffices to say that the use of pagan statues from the Christian period onwards, and even earlier, did not go unchallenged. However, it was the neo-Platonist Proclus (412–485) who

‘saved’ the myths as subjects for art by stressing in his commentary on Plato’s *Republic* that a symbol must not be confused with that which it symbolizes; myth must be read allegorically.

19. John Summerson, *The classical language of architecture* (London: Methuen, 1963), p. 7.

20. One of John Dixon Hunt’s principles of garden historiography is to avoid such dualisms, as summarised by Michel Conan in his introduction as editor to *Perspectives on Garden Histories* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1999), p. 10.

21. Throughout this essay, ‘mythopoetic’ is used to describe the poetic quality of a landscape within the tradition for which ‘mythopoeic’ would not be accurate since it has bearing on the ‘making of’ such landscapes and not their potential characteristics.

22. Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, translated by Barbara F Sessions (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 241.

23. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 8.

24. In Richard Buxton’s discussion of mythical mountains, he interprets them as curated and intensified versions of the ‘real thing’. For example, in myth Megaros sought refuge from Deukalion’s flood on Mt Parnassus; in reality, mountains were places for refuge from war and other threats. In myth, we find Endymion hunting in the moonlight when Selene fell in love with him; in reality, mountains were hunting grounds. Richard Buxton, ‘Imaginary Greek mountains’, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 112, 1992, p. 7.

25. In his discussion on Greek groves (*alsos*), Rod Barnett affirms this position: ‘Classical literary accounts of the sacred often suggest that within the vast zones beyond the agrarian planes there were interstitial terrains that held a special meaning because their geomorphological qualities marked them out as different’, in his ‘Sacred groves: sacrifice and the order of nature in Ancient Greek landscapes’, *Landscape Journal*, 26/2, 2007, p. 257.

26. For the poetics of strangeness in the landscape, see my essay ‘Dramatic transitions for poetic spaces: notes on the potential of public walled gardens in cities’, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 35/4, 2015, pp. 257–267. Topomythopoetic encounters in gardens are often spatially demarcated to heighten the enchantment.

27. These are the opening lines of Hesiod, *Theogony* (c. 730–700 BC), translated by Gregory Nagy (Harvard University: The Center for Hellenic Studies, 2020), accessed 8 September 2020. <https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/5289>.

28. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p.28.

29. The quote is from Robin Lane Fox’s chapter ‘A travelling mountain’ in his *Travelling Heroes in the Epic Age of Homer* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), p. 246. For a full discussion of the Near Eastern sacred mountain, see Richard J. Clifford’s *The cosmic mountain in the Near East and Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

30. Belis speculates that the Minoans may have regarded the higher mountains — not the lower peaks nearby settlements — as sacred in themselves. Further evidence for the

significance of mountains in Minoan iconography, is the famous ‘horns of consecration’ statues found at Minoan palaces: commonly understood as abstracted bull’s horns, yet these may rather be a symbol of twin peaks framing the rising sun, as found in Ancient Egypt and the Near East. See Alexis Marie Belis. *Fire on the Mountain: A Comprehensive Study of Greek Mountaintop Sanctuaries* (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2015), p.32.

31. Christine Morris and Alan Peatfield, ‘Dynamic Spirituality on Minoan Peak Sanctuaries’, in Kathryn Rountree, Christine Morris and Alan Peatfield (eds), *Archaeology of Spiritualities* (New York: Springer, 2012), pp. 227–245.

32. Camilla Briault has shown that sites, not on peaks, were used similarly and thus inferred that the geographic location was not a fixed criteria for these sites, in her ‘Making mountains out of molehills in the Bronze Age Aegean: Visibility, ritual kits, and the idea of a peak sanctuary’, *World Archaeology*, 39/1, 2007, pp. 122–141.

33. Lucia Nixon, ‘Investigating Minoan sacred landscapes’, *Hesperia Supplements: Essays on Ritual and Cult in Crete in Honor of Geraldine C. Gesell*, 42, 2009, pp. 269–275.

34. Nanno Marinatos, ‘The character of Minoan epiphanies’, *Illinois Classical Studies: Divine Epiphanies in the Ancient World*, 29, 2004, p. 35.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

36. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 27. Archaeological findings after Burkert may have proven otherwise, but this author has not found any literature indicating such. See also Morris and Peatfield, ‘Dynamic spirituality’, p. 229.

37. Bernard C. Dietrich, ‘Theology and theophany in Homer and Minoan Crete’, *Kernos*, 7, 1994, p. 64.

38. Marinatos notes that, on golden rings representing epiphanies, the worshipper (shaking a tree, for example) does not look directly at the apparition of the god, perhaps out of fear, in her ‘Minoan epiphanies’, p. 31.

39. Belis, *Fire on the Mountain*, p. 27.

40. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 27.

41. Steven Soetens, ‘Juktas and Kophinas: Two ritual landscapes out of the ordinary’, *Hesperia Supplements: Essays on Ritual and Cult in Crete in Honor of Geraldine C. Gesell*, 42, 2009, pp. 261–268.

42. Buxton, ‘Imaginary mountains’, p. 2.

43. For a full discussion of Greek religious experience in relation to the cult statue, see Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation in Graeco-Roman Art, Literature and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

44. Sarah Iles Johnston, ‘Animating Statues: A Case Study in Ritual’, *Arethusa*, 41, 2008, pp. 445–477.

45. An example is the disgust experienced by Gianfrancesco Pico in 1512 upon viewing the statue of pagan Venus in the Belvedere Court at the heart of the Christian Vatican, inspiring his poem *De Venere et Cupidine expellendis carmen* in which he railed against such idolatry. For a full discussion, see Marco Piana, *Fallax Antiquitas: Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's Critique of Antiquity* (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 2017). For an abridged discussion, see Marco Piana, 'Gods in the garden: visions of the pagan other in the Rome of Julius II', *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 12, 2019, pp. 285–309.

46. Belis, *Fire on the Mountain*, p. 55.

47. Belis, *Fire on the Mountain*, p. 1.

48. An interesting example of a garden mound that originated as a Neolithic tumulus is the Marlborough Mound in Wiltshire, England, that was appropriated as a garden mound in the sixteenth century, complete with a grotto.

49. For a conjectural discussion on the origins of tumuli in mainland Greece during the Helladic period and their relation to the Neolithic burial practices of the wider Mediterranean region, see Sylvie Müller Celka, 'Burial mounds and "ritual tumuli" of the Aegean Early Bronze Age', *Ancestral landscapes*, 58, 2012, pp. 415–428.

50. Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Augustus T. Murray (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), book 23, lines 255–256.

51. Elizabeth McGowan, 'Tumulus and memory. The *tumulus* as a *locus* for ritual action in the Greek imagination', in Olivier Henry and Ute Kelp (eds), *Tumulus as sema* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), p. 173.

52. *Ibid.*, p.175.

53. James Whitley, 'The monuments that stood before marathón: Tomb cult and hero cult in Archaic Attica', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 98/2, 1994, p. 228.

54. In mythology, mountains were often places of violent encounters between mortals and gods or monsters like the Sphinx of Mt. Phikion. The god is often 'caught off guard', for example when a lone wanderer — to his demise — stumbles upon a goddess bathing.

55. Louis Cellauro, 'Iconographical aspects of the Renaissance villa and garden: Mount Parnassus, Pegasus and the Muses', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 23/1, 2012, p. 42.

56. Anonymous, 'To Delian Apollo', *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), hymn 3, line 520.

57. Parke cites a number of examples from Roman literature that shows that the Castalian spring had become a topomyth symbolic of poetic inspiration. See Herbert W. Parke, 'Castalia', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, 102/1, 1978, p. 206.

58. Throughout Taegio's *La Villa* (1559), he refers to the villas under discussion as 'Parnassus' — a metaphor for a setting of poetic inspiration; topomythonymy is thus used to

establish the overall *genius loci* of the estate. See Bartolomeo Taegio, *La Villa*, translated by Thomas E. Beck (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). For a discussion of a number of examples of Parnassian statues and mounds, including the famous Pegasus fountain at Villa d' Este, see Cellauro, 'Iconographical aspects'.

59. Anonymous, 'To Pan', *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), hymn 19.

60. References to myth were included in earlier, Hellenic gardens, but only in the form of iconographic elements such as masks 'representing gods associated with the soil...often hung temporarily during annual festivals such as those of the sowing season'. See Patrick Bowe, 'The evolution of the ancient Greek garden', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 30/3, 2010, p. 214.

61. Beginning, already in the late sixth century, with the pre-Socratic philosophers (like Anaximandros and Anaximenes who started giving matter-of-fact descriptions of the *kosmos* — no longer poetic and storied, but prosaic and abstract. However, this is not to say that there was no religion in the Hellenistic period: private piety increased, hero cults were established and some mythical deities like Demeter became regarded as miracle workers. See Albert Henrichs, 'The Sophists and Hellenistic religion: Prodicus as the spiritual father of the Isis Aretalogies', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 88, 1984, pp. 139–158. Also, for some like the legendary Hermes Trismegitus Asclepius, the statues of gods were no mere objects of art, but were conscious and ensouled. For a discussion of the Olympians' fate as mere subjects for poetry, see Charles Segal, 'Ovid's Metamorphoses: Greek myth in Augustan Rome', *Studies in Philology*, 68/4, 1971, pp. 372–373.

62. Earthen funerary and commemorative mounds were typologies of Greek place-making, but this was a first for a garden or park. See Bowe, 'Greek garden', p. 218. Other examples of Hellenistic garden mounds are unknown to this author. The mausoleum of Alexander the Great, also in Alexandria, is also sometimes thought of as a man-made mountain based on the description by Lucan (39–65 AD) in his *Pharsalia* as an *extracto monte*. However, the literal translation of this as a 'constructed mountain' has, according to Chugg, wrongly been interpreted as an artificial mount, as the Latin *mons* simply referred to anything of great height; Chugg argues that the mausoleum probably resembled the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. See Andrew Chugg, 'The tomb of Alexander the Great in Alexandria', *American Journal of Ancient History*, 1/2, 2002, pp. 80–81.

63. Diana Spencer uses the term 'simulacrum' to refer to Roman landscapes that appear as representations of another place, yet is an illusory recreation of a non-real place, see her *Roman Landscape: Culture and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. xvi.

64. Strabo, *Geography*, translated by Hans Claude Hamilton and William Falconer (London: George Bell & Sons, 1903), book 17, chapter 1, section 10.

65. Bowe, 'Greek garden', p. 218.

66. This follows the general tendency of the Hellenistic period to value gardens for their 'aesthetic effect, rather than merely production'. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

67. Strabo, *Geography*, book 5, chapter 3, section 8.
68. This morphological analysis is from Jane Clark Reeder, 'Typology and ideology in the mausoleum of Augustus: Tumulus and tholos', *Classical Antiquity*, 11/2, 1992, pp. 265–307. A Medieval legend recorded in the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* explained the earth mound as the result of heaps of soil brought from all over the Empire as a means to memorialise the Emperor — on his instruction. See Anna Maria Riccomini, 'A garden of statues and marbles: The Soderini collection in the mausoleum of Augustus', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 58, 1995, pp. 265–284. 265
69. Robert Ross Holloway, 'The tomb of Augustus and the princes of Troy', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 70/2, 1966, pp. 171–173. Reeder (*ibid.*, p. 266) points out that Holloway's hypothesis that the tomb of Augustus was the earliest Roman round tomb does not hold, following a later study of Roman tomb *tumuli* in suburban Rome. However, this does not disqualify the possibility that a conceptual link was made with the tombs of the *Aeneid* — as Reeder also points out, influences beyond the Italian peninsula were likely. In short, the topomythopoeia of the tomb remains conjectural.
70. Virgil, *Aeneid*, translated by John Dryden (New York: P.F. Collier and Son, 1909), book 11, lines 852–855.
71. Massimo Pallottino, 'Religion in pre-Roman Italy', in Yves Bonnefoy (ed.), *Roman and European Mythologies*, translated by Danielle Beauvais. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 27.
72. For an example of papal propaganda, see the brief discussion of Julius II's Belvedere Court in this article. For a full discussion of the Parnassian iconography of the Vatican palace and Belvedere, see Paul F. Watson, 'On a Window in Parnassus', *Artibus et Historiae*, 8/16, 1987, pp. 127–148. As royal propaganda, Louis XIV's Versailles was conceptualised as the Palace of the Sun, perhaps based on Ovid's *regia solis* from book 2 of the *Metamorphoses*, inhabited by Apollo as the metaphor for the king commanding over art and nature. See Robert W. Berger, 'The earliest literary descriptions of the gardens of Versailles', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 28/3–4, 2008, p. 464. As a poet, Ian Hamilton Finlay's statue of Apollo at Little Sparta is inscribed with the words *Apollon terroriste* on his forehead: the god of music can be stirred to violence; perhaps a call to arms to fight for the survival of Classical mythology within the disenchanted world of Western modernity, which he wryly diagnosed: 'As public sex was embarrassing to the Victorians, public classicism is to us', quoted in Yves Abrioux, *Ian Hamilton Finlay: A Visual Primer* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), p. 40.
73. Strabo, *Geography*, book 5, chapter 3, section 3.
74. Ann Kuttner, 'Looking outside inside: ancient Roman garden rooms', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 19/1, 1999, pp. 7–35.
75. Riccomini, 'Garden of statues', p. 265.
76. See, for example, the engravings of the Mausoleum by Etienne Du Pérac, 1575 (*ibid.*, p. 267) and Alò Giovannoli, 1619 (*ibid.*, p. 271). It must be noted that there was no uncertainty that the Mausoleum used to be a towering structure, as can be seen in the reconstruction

drawing by Pirro Ligorio following excavations of the monument in 1549, albeit not as a planted tumulus, but a series of cylindrical, architectonic, terraces. However, Cellauro cites David R. Coffin's argument (from his *Gardens and Gardening in Papal Rome*, 1991) that, rather, the mounds of the Renaissance gardens were, formally speaking, the offspring of the Medieval garden mound. See Cellauro, 'Iconographical aspects', p. 43.

77. William L. MacDonald and John A. Pinto, *Hadrian's Villa and its Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 5.

78. *Ibid.*

79. Annette Giesecke, 'Autopsy and empire: temporal collapse in the designed landscapes of ancient Rome', *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 36/4, 2016, pp. 225–244.

80. Some private Roman gardens, on a less monumental scale, also contained burial mounds like the one found at Scafati, Italy — *tumuli* similar to those of Helladic Greece, but this author could not find any evidence for myths that were explicitly evoked by them. For a discussion, see John Bodel, 'Roman Tomb Gardens' pp. 199–242 in Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, Kathryn L. Gleason, Kim J. Hartswick and Amina-Aïcha Malek (eds), *Gardens of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 199–242.

81. Walter Woodburn Hyde, 'The ancient appreciation of mountain scenery', *The Classical Journal*, 11/2, 1915, pp. 70–84.

82. Kuttner, 'Looking outside inside', p. 19.

83. For an Egyptian example, see the temple of Hatshepsut. Although it is not certain whether it served as a precedent for terraced structures like the temple complex Fortuna Primigenia, but its influence is possible — the Roman fascination with Egypt is captured in the Nile mosaic found within a grotto at Praeneste. For a Hellenistic example, see the acropolis of Pergamon. Hellenistic craftsman influenced ornament in Rome, and with them came designers with knowledge of terrace construction. Ann Kuttner, 'Republican Rome Looks at Pergamon', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 97, 1995, pp. 157–178. 161

84. John Dixon Hunt, *Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden in the English Imagination 1600–1750* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 61.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

86. That is not to say that Virgil did not influence garden-making in later ages, one only has to think of the evocation of the *Aeneid* at Stourhead, and the numerous quotes that appear in the works of Ian Hamilton Finlay.

87. Charles Segal analysed how Ovid's landscape turns the peaceful refuge of the pastoral tradition on its head by 'metamorphosing' them into places of violent encounters, see his 'Landscape in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: A study in the transformations of a literary symbol', *Hermes: Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie*, 23, 1969.

88. Luke Morgan has noted that a similar juxtaposition between pleasantness and violence that Ovid employed (following Segal's interpretation, see note above), may also have been employed by Renaissance garden designers, such as those of Bomarzo, to evoke both the 'topophobic responses as well as topophilic ones (both terror and delight)'. See his *The Monster in the Garden: The Grotesque and the Gigantic in Renaissance Landscape Design* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), p. 6.
89. Segal, 'Ovid's Metamorphoses', p. 378.
90. Ibid., p. 387
91. For a discussion of Ovid's influence on Renaissance gardens, see Hunt, 'Ovid in the Garden'.
92. Cellauro, 'Iconographical aspects', p. 48 (citing Claudia Lazzaro's hypothesis).
93. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1955), book 5, lines 260–261.
94. Ibid., lines 274–8.
95. Ibid., p. 43.
96. Richard Hewlings identifies the conical *Meta Sudens* in Rome as the prototypical 'artificial mountain fountain' in his 'Chiswick House and gardens: Appearance and meaning' in Toby Barnard and Jane Clark (eds), *Lord Burlington: Art, Architecture and Life* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1995), p. 48.
97. Quoted in John Dixon Hunt, *Gardens and the Picturesque: Studies in the History of Landscape Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 77. Hunt cites this witty exchange to show that the mythopoeic quality of English grottoes was valued more than their function as cool places of respite; not all garden dwellers were impressed by this exotic import from sun-soaked Italy.
98. The argument for the type's origins in nature and its architectural translation during the Hellenistic and Roman periods was also made in this journal by Patrick Bowe in his 'The garden grotto: its origin in the ancient Greek perception of the natural cave', *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, 33/2, 2013, pp. 128–138. He describes this evolution as a 'gradual transition from natural cave to artificial construct'. The longer history of the type is thoroughly treated by Mosser and Brunon, *L'Imaginaire des grottes dans les jardins européens* (Paris: Hazan, 2014), and Naomi Miller in her ground-breaking *Heavenly caves: reflections on the garden grotto* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1994).
99. The term 'façade nymphaea' is also used by Georgia Aristodemou, 'Theatre façades and façade Nymphaea. The link between', *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, 135/1, 2011, pp. 163–197.
100. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 24.

101. For a full description of Minoan cave sanctuaries and their environmental characteristics, see Loeta Tyree's 'Defining Bronze Age ritual caves in Crete, in Fanis Mavridis and Jesper Tae Jensen (eds), *Stable Places and Changing Perceptions: Cave Archaeology in Greece* (Oxford: Archeopress, 2013), pp. 176–187.
102. Alexander Pope, *Verses on a Grotto by the River Thames at Twickenham, composed of Marbles, Spars and Minerals*, included in a letter to Lord Bolingbroke, dated 3 September 1740 (published January 1741).
103. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 26.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
106. Meaning 'off limits', also used to describe the innermost sanctuary of Greek temples.
107. Leanne Campbell, 'Bronze Age Adyta', *Eras Edition*, 14, 2013, pp.1–32.
108. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, p. 85.
109. In the cave of the nympholept Pantalkes in Thessaly an inscription states that '...Herakles gave [Pantalkes] strength and *aretē* and power with which he struck these stones and built them up', yet it is unlikely the cave was actually constructed by human hands. The English translation of the inscription appears in Walter Robert Connor, 'Seized by the nymphs: Nympholepsy and symbolic expression in Classical Greece', *Classical Antiquity*, 7/2, 1988, pp. 155–189. 163. Larson mentions that '...manmade caves were used only rarely', in Jenifer Larson, *Greek Nymphs: Myth, Cult, Lore* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 227. However, she does not mention examples and couldn't confirm any via personal communication, 2021. The clay votive models of grottoes found at Locri do seem to indicate some artificial caves, but these may merely be natural caves dressed with interior architectural elements like ribbed arches. For a discussion of the Greek's fascination with the geomorphology of caves, see Bowe, 'Garden grotto', pp. 128–129.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
111. *Ibid.*, p. 132.
112. Larson, *Greek Nymphs*, p. 227.
113. Often a number of gods are associated with a single cave. For example, in the previously mentioned inscription within the cave of Pantalkes, the cave is dedicated to Pan, Hermes, Apollo, Herakles, Chiron, Asklepios, Hygieia and the nymphs — each offering the worshipper a different gift in return for sacrifice and prayers. For example, Apollo gives health and Pan laughter.
114. Nadine Pierce, *The Archaeology Of Sacred Caves In Attica, Greece* (MA dissertation: McMaster University, 2006), p. 1.

115. Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 196.
116. Pan is also linked with caves. Buxton interprets the sanctuary to Pan on the slopes of Acropolis as a deliberate attempt to import something of the wild, rural primitive, pre-civilized Arcadia to the city. Richard Buxton, *The Complete World of Greek Mythology* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004), p. 184.
117. A phrase by James Turner that describes the erotic dimension of eighteenth century English gardens, in his 'The sexual politics of landscape: images of Venus in eighteenth-century English poetry and landscape gardening', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 11, 1982, pp. 343–366.
118. Although the description of Calypso's cave as a *locus amoenus* in book 5 of the *Odyssey* is usually accepted as part of her seductive allure, James C. Hogan counters that '...if the seductive qualities of garden and grotto were described to illuminate the temptation of Odysseus, it is strange that the poet puts Hermes rather than Odysseus in this landscape' in his 'The temptation of Odysseus', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 106, 1976, p. 191.
119. Larson, *Greek Nymphs*, p. 10. Exceptions of erotic liaisons between gods and men in caves occur, like in the story of the nightly visits of the moon god Selene to Endymion, lying eternally asleep in a cave on Mount Latmus.
120. Lisa L. Moore, 'Queer gardens: Mary Delany's flowers and friendships', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 39/1, 2005, p. 61.
121. Plato, *Phaedrus*, translated by Harold N. Fowler in *Plato in Twelve Volumes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1925), section 230b–230c.
122. Spencer argues that the invocation of Hera represents controlled sexuality, as opposed to the nymphs' more free associations, in *Roman Landscape*, p. 17.
123. Larson, *Greek Nymphs*, p. 58.
124. Nympholepsy means to be seized by the nymphs, as was Socrates — see Connor, 'Seized by the nymphs', p. 158.
125. The original excavator of the Vari cave, Richard Chandler, thought that the gardens of the Vari cave must have been like the 'gardens of Adonis' — those fleeting gardens planted in shallow soils and actually planted *within* the cave and not outside. *Ibid.*, p. 169 (fn. 43).
126. For more detailed description of cultic functions, see Larson, *Greek Nymphs*, p. 229.
127. Yulia Ustinova, *Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind: Descending Underground in the Search for Ultimate Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
128. Bowe, 'Garden grotto', p. 133.

129. Ellen E. Rice, 'Grottoes on the Acropolis of Hellenistic Rhodes', *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, 90, 1995, p. 386.
130. *Ibid.*, 399.
131. Brunilde Sismondo Ridgway, 'Greek Antecedents of Garden Sculpture' in Elisabeth B. Macdougall and Wilhelmina F. Jashemski (eds), *Ancient Roman Gardens: Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture VII* (Washington DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1981) pp. 12–13.
132. *Ibid.*
133. Rice, 'Grottoes of Rhodes', p. 402.
134. Bowe, 'The garden grotto', p. 133–134. Although there is no evidence that these models did indeed represent artificial caves, the presence of symmetric, vaulted structures strongly suggests so.
135. Rice, 'Grottoes of Rhodes', p. 397.
136. A neologism meaning 'love of shells' from Marisa Anne Bass, Anne Goldgar, Hanneke Grootenboer and Claudia Swan, *Conchophilia: Shells, Art, and Curiosity in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).
137. Rice, 'Grottoes of Rhodes', p. 403.
138. *Ibid.*
139. John Dixon Hunt also refers to some theatres *inside* grottoes, in *Garden and Grove*, p. 63.
140. Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophistae*, translated by Charles Burton Gulick (Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), volume 2, book 5, 200c–200d, p. 399. The text was based on Callixenus of Rhodes's book *Peri Alexandreias*. The date for the festival is debated. Yuri Kuzmin argues for the date of 274/275 BC in 'New perspectives on the date of the great festival of Ptolemy II', *Klio*, 99/2, 2017, pp. 513–527.
141. Françoise Dunand, 'The religious system at Alexandria', in Daniel Ogden (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 256–257. The importance of the Olympian gods waned during the Hellenistic period. However, those gods that were deemed to be benefactors, like Demeter and Dionysos, increased their influence. The agnosticism and even atheism of sophists like Prodicus (465–395 BC) influenced, via philosophers like Euhemerus, Hellenistic attitudes to the gods, stripping them of their divinity to some extent. Prodicus narrated Dionysos as a mortal who discovered viticulture and, by gifting this to mankind, became deified. Henrichs, 'The Sophists', p. 139.
142. Dunand, 'Religious Alexandria', p. 256.
143. Frederick E. Winter and Adrienne Christie, 'The symposium-tent of Ptolemy II: A new proposal', *Echos du monde classique*, 24/ 2, 1985, p. 293. In this source (p. 293, fn. 10), the

word ἄντρον (*andron*) is translated as ‘cave’, yet as ‘recesses’ in the Gulick translation (op. cit.).

144. Monika Trümper, ‘Artificial grottoes in late Hellenistic Delos’, in Stephan Faust, Martina Seifert und Leon Ziemer (eds), *Festschrift für Inge Nielsen zum 65.* (Aachen: Verlag, 2015), p. 201.

145. Ibid., p. 225.

146. Ibid., p. 220.

147. The houses within which the Delian grottoes were constructed, may have been used as clubhouses. Ibid., p. 207.

148. The word nymphaeum is an elusive one since it originally referred to the natural, sacred sanctuaries of the nymphs, but came to denote, towards the end of the Roman period, any fountain structure for the display of water and cool respite. See Andreas R. van Aken, ‘Some Aspects of Nymphaea in Pompeii, Herculaneum and Ostia’, *Mnemosyne*, 4/3, 1951, p. 273. For this essay, I have thus used ‘nymphaeum’ to refer to architectonic, façade type grottoes with fountains.

149. To borrow from Ann Kuttner’s title for her article ‘Looking outside inside’.

150. The homeowner may also have been involved with fishing or shipping, perhaps explaining the choice of Neptune as a patron deity for the house. See Isabella Jasad-Montinaro, ‘Utilizing the mosaic of Neptune and Amphitrite to identify its patron’s status’, *Prandium: The Journal of Historical Studies*, 8/1, 2019.

151. John R. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 BC — AD 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), p.255.

152. A similar comparison in connection with the nymphaeum of Wideville chateau (1635) is made by Naomi Miller, *Heavenly Caves*, p. 70.

153. John R. Clarke (op. cit. p. 164) describes all three niches as housing statues, whereas Aken (op. cit. p. 278) states that the side niches contained fountains identical to the one within the basin of the triclinium. All sources, and reconstructions, seem to indicate that the central niche contained a statue, probably of a nymph. (We can only guess that the statues in the three niches were nymphs or other water deities.)

154. I borrow the term ‘sacro-idyllic’ from Kuttner who used it to describe a mosaic in the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii, which also included garlands from which implements for Dionysiac rituals were hung. See Kuttner, ‘Looking inside outside’, p. 12.

155. Miniature versions of sacred or monumental architecture are commonly found in the gardens of Classical topomythopoesis, often with simplified detail and even clumsy proportions and construction.

156. The small triclinium would not have been able to accommodate large dinner parties. Clarke, *Houses of Italy*, p. 255.

157. Ibid.

158. The Dionysiac theme is identified by Clarke, *Houses of Italy*, pp. 256–257.

159. Bettina Bergmann, ‘Rhythms of recognition: mythological encounters in Roman landscape painting’, Francesco de Angelis and Susanne Muth (eds), *Im Spiegel des Mythos: Bilderwelt und Lebenswelt* (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1999), p. 106. Bergman here describes the way in which Romans took pleasure in their engagement with the mythical iconography of murals in rooms: ‘The strategies of that self-reflection, I believe, are comparable to the arrangements of myths in Roman rooms, where the abilities learned at school — to speak, listen, envision — became recreational pleasure.’ It may be noted that the examples she discusses, depict scenes from myths, whereas in the House of Neptune and Amphitrite the onlooker is asked to take a bigger ‘beholder’s share’ since the gods are merely put on display rather than presented as actors in a mythical drama.

160. The body-and-mind experience of place is testified by Cicero: ‘It is wonderful how not only the physical enjoyment [*usus*] of those [garden] places, but also thinking about them [*cogitatio*] somewhere else, gives pleasure’. From his *Epistulae ad Atticum*, I.II.3 (On this Tusculan garden). Quoted in Kuttner, ‘Looking inside outside’, p. 8.

161. A seventeenth century example of an aedicula type can be seen in an engraving by Francesco Fanelli for a grotto-portal in Paris, ca. 1690. See Miller, *Heavenly Caves*, p. 71.

162. The structure was, at the time, unprecedented in peninsular Greece. Betsey Robinson, ‘Playing in the sun: Hydraulic architecture and water displays in imperial Corinth’, *Hesperia*, 82, 2013, p. 355.

163. Ibid.

164. Aken states that the Herculaneum nymphaea, even more so than those found in Pompeii, had been deprived of their sacred character. Aken, ‘Nymphaea in Pompeii’, p. 281. Of course, religion was not banished from the Roman house, but centred around the lararium housing the Lares and Penates.

165. Ibid., 279.

166. Vitruvius dwelled upon both the usefulness *and* delightfulness of water (*De architectura*, book 8), from which we may infer that Romans took pleasure in viewing their public fountains.

167. Patrick Bowe, ‘The origin and development of the ancient Greek fountain’, *Studies in the History of Gardens & Designed Landscapes*, 32/3, 2012, p. 204.

168. Aristodemou, ‘Theatre facades’, p. 172.

169. Ibid., p. 165.

170. Ibid., p. 180.

171. Robinson, ‘Playing in the Sun’, p. 342.

172. A less common aetiology is that Pegasus formed this fountain, as he did the Hippocrene on Parnassus. Common was the story that Bellerophon tamed Pegasus at the fountain of Peirene. Ovid's version is as follows: After engineering the death of king Pelias (the thrown belonging to Jason), the sorceress Medea fled to Corinth. On her way there she passed the spring Peirene where, since time began, humans sprung from rain-soaked mushrooms.

173. Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, translated by William H.S. Jones and Henry A. Ormerod (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), book 2 (Corinth), chapter 3, section 3.

174. Robinson, 'Playing in the Sun', p. 349.

175. Apart from the association of the nymph (Peirene), there may have also stood a statue of one — moving from the invisible presence of the nymph as a numinous being, to being represented by a statue. No statue of a nymph has been confirmed, although one found nearby. See Robinson, Robinson, 'Playing in the Sun', p. 366 (fn. 95).

176. Anthony Littlewood, 'Greek literary evidence for Roman gardens', in Wilhelmina F. Jashemski, Kathryn L. Gleason, Kim J. Hartswick and Amina-Aïcha Malek (eds), *Gardens of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 245–257.

177. Segal, 'Landscape in Ovid', p. 21.

178. There is disagreement as to why these episodes were used and what meaning they were supposed to convey — see Sorcha Carey, 'A tradition of adventures in the imperial grotto', *Greece & Rome*, 49/1, 2002, p. 45 (fn. 5). Although the origins of this cave is disputed, the sculptures have been dated with some confidence between 4 and 26 AD.

179. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

180. *Ibid.*

181. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

182. Carey follows the terminology used by Pinto and MacDonald in their *Hadrian's Villa* arguing against the artefacts being identified as Serapeum and Canopus.

183. Aken, 'Nymphaea in Pompeii', p. 273.

184. Bergman, 'Rhythms of recognition', p. 106.

185. The term 'shared semiotic system' is borrowed from Spencer, *Roman Landscape*, p. 8.

186. Bartolomeo Taegio, *La Villa*, translated by Thomas E. Beck (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011; originally published in 1559), p. 163.