

Viterbo as a Model of Rome in the Work of Annius of Viterbo

Ingrid D. Rowland

Before the ancient Romans began to settle on their Seven Hills, the primordial Roman landscape resembled the wilder stretches of this region of central Italy, where streams and rivers have gradually cut through the hardened lava deposits of ancient volcanoes to create sheer cliffs of the volcanic rock called *tufa* (or, in English, tuff). The earliest known human settlements in the terrain of Latium and southern Etruria, including the scattered villages that would combine to create the city of Rome, clung to high ground, which afforded protection from invaders and seasonal floods. With time, the hilltops and cliffs of Rome's highlands have eroded, smoothing out their angular profiles, while human efforts have cut away spurs of rock and filled in streambeds. Yet there are places on every one of the Seven Hills where a part of Rome's ancient landscape still shows through, sometimes in dramatic shifts in level, as on the Palatine, Esquiline, Caelian, Quirinal, and Viminal Hills, and sometimes in outcrops of bare rock like the riverside cliffs of the Aventine or the Tarpeian Rock of the Capitol.

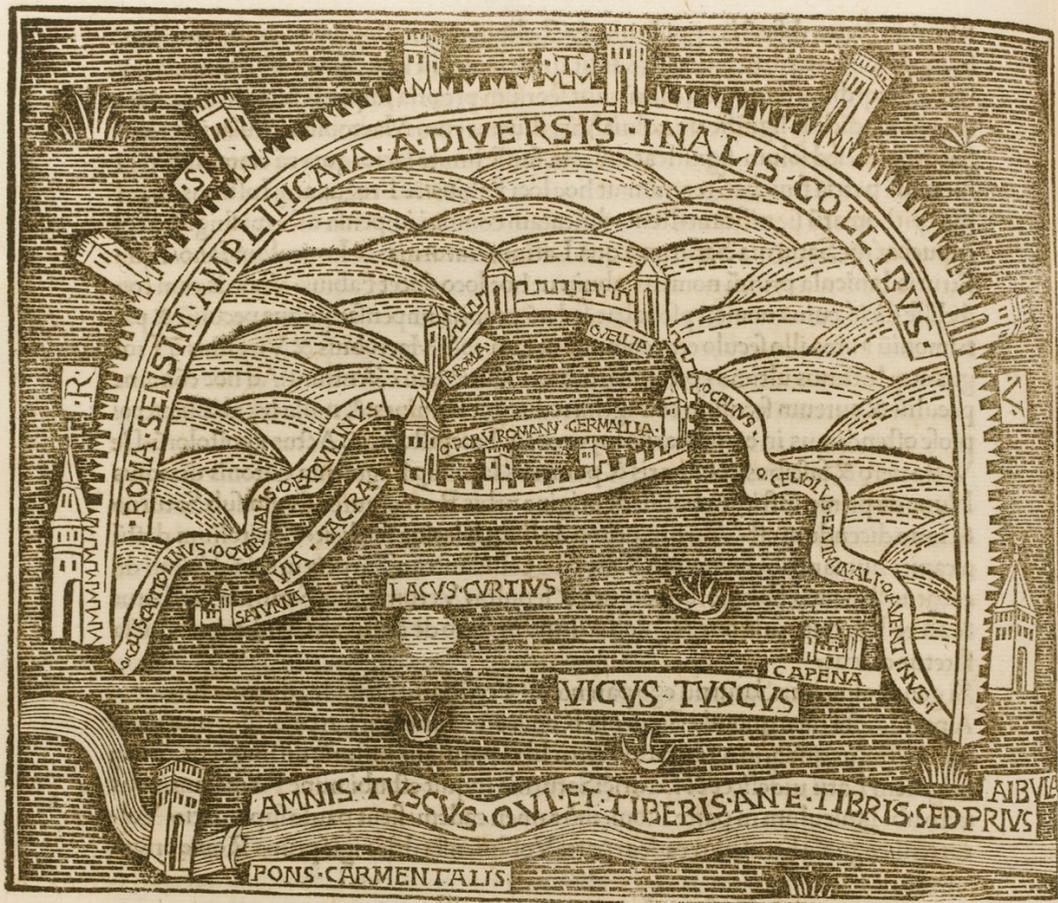
These features of the prehistoric landscape were far more visible in the late fifteenth century, when the largest Italian cities held tens of thousands of people rather than millions, and the entire peninsula housed 7.5 million people rather than today's 60.6 million. Furthermore, the terrain itself played a far greater role in the physical formation of cities than it does in our own mechanized times.¹ The years after 1450 saw a rapid increase in Italy's population, leading fifteenth-century Italians to take an intense interest in city planning that included curiosity about cities of the past.²

One of the first people to make a serious historical study of the decisive links between landscape and patterns of urban development is far better known today for his work as a forger: the notorious Dominican friar Annius of Viterbo (1437–1502).³ In the early 1490s, his investigations into the historical topography of his native Viterbo combined novel methods of archival research with careful examination of the physical evidence provided by the city itself. Unfortunately for his posthumous reputation, Annius interpreted his discoveries of genuine value with the help of

1. The population of Italy in 1450 has been estimated at 7.5 million (compared with 12 million before the plague of 1348); del Pantà 1996, 7. Current population statistics are available from ISTAT, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (*Istituto Nazionale della Statistica*): <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/180494> (accessed 5 December 2017).

2. Del Pantà 1996, 7, 8, 277.

3. On Annius and his method, see Stephens 1979, 1984; Grafton 1980, 54–68, 104–123; Ligota 1987; Danielsson 1932; Fumagalli 1984; Baffioni 1981; Weiss 1962.



Facies tūc agri hui⁹ istar arcus erat: cui⁹ corda esset alne⁹ Thyberis. Cornua ad solis quidē ortū rupes Anētina ⁊ ad occasus capitolina: media palatina. Eadē palatina rupes thyberim a fronte prospicit: a sinistris Lelio: a dextris Erquolino iungitur. Auentinus item a fronte Thyberim ⁊ Capenā tenet: ad dextraz Leliolo ac Diminali beret.

Vides itaq; thyberī ueluti cordā arcus. Cernis septē rupes: q̄s anti quoz alii mōtes/ alii colles uocauerūt. Aspicias eos istar arcus tēli sibi mutuo succedere. Cornua uides duo: ab occasu qdē rupē Tarpeiā siue Capitolinā/ ubi p̄cipio fuit Saturnia/ ⁊ a q̄ late Saturnia dicta ē terra/ ut ait Varro in p̄rio de līgua latina ab ortu uero solis Auentinā rupē: ubi Ital⁹ Capenā cōdidit a q̄ primū porta Capena/ quē postea Hostiēsis/ q̄ ad urbē ducit Hostiam: nūc sancti Pauli dicit/ quia ducit ad ei⁹ sacrū locū

Fig. 1. Ancient Rome and the Forum, from Giovanni Nanni, *Commentaria fr. Ioannis Annii Viterbiensis theologiae professoris super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatibus loquentium*, Rome: Eucharius Silber, 1498.

pseudo-Etruscan artifacts, spurious ancient chronicles, and some cleverly altered genuine ancient texts, all of them probably his own work. During his own lifetime, however, his forgeries provided the key to his success, with his heroic tales of ancient Viterbo earning him immense popularity among his fellow citizens.

The author who published as Johannes Annius of Viterbo began life as Giovanni Nanni, “in the year of our salvation 1437 on Epiphany eve [January 5]”, in the center of Viterbo, where his grandfather was a local butcher.⁴ Around 1448, he and his cousin Tommaso (only ten months older than Giovanni) entered the local Dominican convent of Santa Maria in Gradi. Tommaso would pursue his university degree at the Dominican college in Padua, while Giovanni studied with the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. In 1466, both cousins petitioned Pope Paul II for permission to pursue a master’s degree in theology at the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome. Here Giovanni met the humanist Gaspare da Verona, who described the young Dominican as “a philosopher, and an elegant physicist at that, sharp, bold, and quick”.⁵ He also composed his first known treatise, an alchemical study in vernacular called *On Alchemy, or the Art of the Stone*.⁶

After receiving their master’s degrees, Giovanni and Tommaso Nanni returned together to Viterbo, where they taught theology at their old convent of Santa Maria in Gradi and preached public sermons as the Dominicans, the Order of Preachers, were trained to do as an essential part of their mission. In 1471, Giovanni moved to Genoa, where he taught grammar as a city employee from 1471 to 1476, and preached from the pulpit of the local Dominican convent, San Domenico, where he was appointed prior in 1474.⁷

During these years, Nanni drew up two horoscopes and a magical work, *On the Sculpture of Gems and Rings* (now lost) for the Milanese warlord Galeazzo Maria Sforza, the *de facto* ruler of Genoa, but when the city rebelled against Milan in 1478, both Prior Giovanni and his patron Archbishop Paolo Fregoso took the side of the locals against the Milanese outsider.

In this tense political situation, Nanni reworked his astrological tract, *On the Turkish Empire according to the Astronomers*, as a new visionary treatise called *On the Future Triumphs of the Christians*, predicting the Sultan’s imminent defeat. First printed in 1480, the book enjoyed international success and went into multiple editions, despite the failure of his predictions to come true.

In 1488, Prior Giovanni contracted an earache that turned into a dangerous abscess of the brain. As he prayed for healing, still a natural philosopher to the core, he turned his prayer into a theological experiment. The Dominican order, following Thomas Aquinas, rejected the doctrine

4. Fumagalli 1980, 195; Fubini 2012.

5. Fumagalli 1982, 198.

6. Fubini 2012; Nanni *Opera* (undated).

7. Fubini 2012.

of Immaculate Conception, the idea that the Virgin Mary had been born without sin, although most Christians accepted it. Prior Giovanni decided to test the Dominican position by praying for a cure to the Virgin Immaculate. He found his answer when the abscess burst through his eardrum and he began to recover. On Christmas Eve of 1488, by a solemn act of devotion in his own convent church of San Domenico, he dedicated himself in eternity to the Virgin Immaculate, a Dominican openly taking the opposing side – with miraculous evidence to support his claim – in one of the era’s most passionate theological debates.⁸ He would pay dearly for his change of heart.

When Nanni’s superiors questioned him about his new views about the Virgin Mary (in other words, subjected him to an inquisition), he stood his ground. By the spring of 1489, he had been deposed as prior and sent home to Viterbo, with his books and papers still confiscated in Genoa. His career, however, was far from ruined. In the Gothic halls of his old convent, Santa Maria in Gradi, he reunited with his cousin Tommaso, who had returned to Viterbo in 1482 as Vicar General of the Observant Dominicans for the Province of Rome. Shortly after his arrival, moreover, Pope Innocent VIII (Giovanni Battista Cybo, 1432–1492), a Genoese who must have been familiar with Nanni’s career, solicited his opinion on the church-sponsored moneylending operations known as Monti di Pietà. In his reply, Friar Giovanni observed that lack of access to his old books and papers meant that he would be giving the matter fresher, more thoughtful consideration.⁹

In this same treatise, Nanni also reveals that the city council of Viterbo had engaged him to teach grammar, but that grammar course swiftly turned into a course on local history. Shortly after returning home, he claimed to have composed a History of Viterbo, of which only the last chapter survives, a summary account of the previous six. It is not entirely clear that those other six chapters ever existed – this final summary may really have been the author’s initial sketch.¹⁰ In this text, still writing as Giovanni Nanni, he begins to outline the ideas that would drive his future researches as a scholar of antiquity.

In 1491, shortly after composing (or at least summarizing) his *History of Viterbo*, laced with compliments to the local baronial family, the Farnese, as well as to Pope Innocent VIII, Fra Giovanni dedicated a brief epigraphic work to Pierluigi Farnese, *On the Famous Men and Deeds of Viterbo* (*De Hominis et Gestis*, explicitly tracing the family’s descent from the Egyptian god Osiris.¹¹ Next, writing as Iohannes Nanis Guerisci (the vernacular version of this name, Giovanni Nanni di Guerisco), suggests that his father may have been named Guerisco), he addressed an archaeological treatise to Viterbo’s governing Council of Eight. He called this study *On the Marble Tablets of Volturrhena* (*De Marmoreis tabulis Volturrhenis*), combining the ancient place-name

8. Fumagalli 1980, 189–191.

9. Nanni 1492, 2 recto.

10. Baffioni 1981.

11. Weiss 1962.

Volturna with *Tyrrhenoi*, the Greek word for the Etruscans. This pamphlet described six purportedly ancient objects, three written in Etruscan, one in Greek, and one in eighth-century Latin. The sixth “tablet” is a sculpted relief, composed of separate fragments, that Friar Giovanni claims was walled into the chancel screen of Viterbo’s cathedral. The three Etruscan tablets had conveniently disintegrated by the time Nanni composed his treatise, but the other three slabs still survive to this day in Viterbo’s Museo Civico.¹²

The two surviving inscriptions of the five “marble Volturrhenian tablets”, carved into soft alabaster rather than hard marble, are clearly forgeries. The Greek text is barely grammatical. The Latin text is written in a script known as Beneventan, a style otherwise only known in ninth-century manuscripts, its flowing, curved forms evidently suited for pen and ink rather than the chisel, or, more likely in this case, an awl.¹³ The “Egyptian” sculpture is made up of ancient and medieval marble reliefs with a backing made from a Hebrew tombstone bearing the date 1409.¹⁴ Nanni could have created the entire “Egyptian” pastiche, but he might also have discovered at least part of it where he said he found it: walled into the chancel screen of the cathedral.¹⁵ Certainly, however, the writer of *On the Marble Tablets of Volturrhena* knows that these tablets are not what they seem.

In 1492, the election of Pope Alexander VI Borgia proved providential for Friar Giovanni. The pope’s latest mistress, “Beautiful Giulia” Farnese, was the daughter of Nanni’s patron Pier Luigi Farnese, Lord of Montalto, to whom he had dedicated his little study *On the Illustrious Men and Deeds of Viterbo* in 1491.¹⁶ The dotting pope made a hunting expedition to the countryside of Viterbo in 1493, accidentally discovering an underground Etruscan tomb filled with carved stone sarcophagi. These were transferred to Viterbo’s new city hall, where Fra Giovanni, the city’s official historian, stood ready to tell the pope all about the significance of the finds.¹⁷ An impressive set of Etruscan sarcophagi still decorates the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Priori, and although their inscriptions have weathered away, they are probably the same sarcophagi.¹⁸ Within a month, Friar Giovanni had drafted a little study of the statues and their historical significance to Viterbo, the *Borgiana lucubratio*, “the Borgian study”.¹⁹

In such glamorous company, Nanni was becoming restless in his convent. For a brief time in 1496, he even left the Dominicans altogether and took up residence with the Augustinian friars at Sant’Agostino in Viterbo. In 1499, however, Pope Alexander appointed him to the third highest

12. Weiss 1962; Fubini 2003a.

13. Weiss 1962.

14. The assemblage was dismantled and examined by the curators of the Museo Civico di Viterbo.

15. Nanni 1512, XXVIr.

16. The documents regarding Giulia Farnese have been collected by Romei and Rosini 2012.

17. Danielsson 1928; Cristofani 1979.

18. Emiliozzi 1986, 19–36; Curran 1999, 171–72.

19. Published by Danielsson 1928.

position in the Dominican order: Master of the Sacred Palace, the Vatican's resident theologian and censor of published books.²⁰

A careful courtier, Friar Giovanni swiftly adapted to his new environment by shifting the focus of his scholarly attention from Viterbo to Rome. He also adjusted his own literary persona, recasting himself, in Latin, as Johannes Annii Viterbiensis. His surname, Nanni, simply meant "Johnson". Now, however, the Master of the Sacred Palace revealed himself as the scion of an illustrious ancient Etrusco-Roman clan, the Annii, which had produced two ancient Roman emperors. "[Viterbo]", he would write in his *Commentaries* of 1498, "was both the native region of the early kingship and of the Annii Veri, an extremely ancient Etruscan family, adorned by the august Emperors Antoninus [Pius] and Commodus."²¹ For the grandson of a butcher, assuming this imperial ancestry implied a considerable change in social status.

Rome itself presented the resourceful friar with a far more challenging intellectual environment than Genoa or Viterbo. The University of Rome had adopted a humanistic curriculum in the late 1460s, with a special interest in investigating the physical remains of Rome's ancient past; this is where his mentor Gaspare da Verona had been employed as a professor of rhetoric.²² But professors and students were not the only active scholars in the city. The Curia, Rome's largest employer, depended on large numbers of highly educated men to carry out the bureaucratic duties of the Church and the Papal State. The position as Master of the Sacred Palace ensured the friar easy contact with both university and Vatican circles as he shifted the focus of his interest from Viterbo to Rome.

Annius never presented his urban studies as an end in themselves; rather, he wove them into the grand fictitious schemes he created for his various patrons: the Farnese family, the city council of Viterbo, the Genoese pope Innocent VIII, the Spanish pope, Alexander VI Borgia, and Their Most Catholic Majesties, Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. In 1498, he published a series of these studies in a quarto book, *Commentaries on various authors who speak about antiquity*, with the papal printer Eucharius Silber.²³

In the excitement of committing his written work to the new medium of print, Annii, like many early modern authors, aimed for completeness rather than consistency, and thus he included texts that had been composed for several patrons, responding to several different kinds of concerns. Some of the "various authors who speak about antiquity" extol Viterbo and his first patrons, the Farnese family, and some focus on Rome, where he worked in the Curia for most of the Borgia papacy. When the inventive friar finally decided to dedicate his published volume to Ferdinand

20. Fumagalli 1984, 363; Weiss 1962, 435–436.

21. Nanni 1512, CLXXIVr.

22. Viti 1999.

23. Nanni 1512, XXVIr.

and Isabella of Spain, he turned his ingenuity towards inventing a legendary Spanish past, but this was necessarily a past rooted in textual chronicles, ancient and modern, genuine and spurious, rather than the product of his own close, intelligent examination of the ways in which cities interact with their landscape. In his topographical investigations, Viterbo, the city that Annius knew more intimately than any other, would provide the model for his analysis of Rome. It was not a casual parallel. The distance between the two cities is only 80 kilometers, and they both rise on a series of isolated bluffs composed of the same kind of volcanic tufa. The streets of Rome famously fail to follow the grid pattern that authors like Vitruvius and the ancient surveyors of the *Corpus Agrimensorum* prescribe for the plans of cities; instead, like the streets of Viterbo, a main street runs along the crest of each of the Seven Hills, with side streets branching off from this central artery. This is the classic street pattern for Etruscan hilltop settlements, developed for precisely this kind of geological situation.

The similarities between Rome and Viterbo were political and religious as well as physical: Viterbo was the last significant stop before Rome on the Via Francigena, the old pilgrim route to and from France, and in the turbulent years between 1257 and 1281 it substituted for Rome as a home for the Curia.²⁴

The physical parallels between the four hills of Viterbo and the seven hills of Rome were much more striking five hundred years ago than they are today. Viterbo, like Rome, sits on the skirts of a volcano (in Rome's case, a series of volcanoes).²⁵ Like Rome, split by the course of the Tiber, the city was also split down the middle by a river, the Arcione or Urcionio, until the middle of the twentieth century. Since World War II, the Urcionio has run underground. The deep gully that once cut through the center of Viterbo has been leveled to create a modern street, the Corso Matteotti, and the bridge that once connected the city's northern and southern halves, the Ponte Tremolo, has been covered by several meters of fill, rubble created by devastating Allied bombing between 1943 and June 1944.²⁶ But then, as Annius knew well, the people of Viterbo had been filling in the streambeds between their hills for centuries.

Viterbo's Piazza Nuova was created in 1206 on a site that had been called "La Carbonara", outfitted, according to local chronicles, with a fountain that "took up the water that flowed into Piazza Nuova."²⁷ A *carbonara* is charcoal kiln, a kind of structure that was normally sited outside city walls because of the smoke and soot it produced. This brief notice records two signs that

24. Faperdue 2004; Rowland 2016, vol. 2, 661–674.

25. Heiken, Funicello, and de Rita 2007 also discuss Monte Cimino, the volcano looming over Viterbo, and the similar terrain; *ibid.*, 39.

26. Archivio di Stato di Viterbo 1994; Piacentini 1996; Cappelli 2014; Allegrini 2017.

27. Della Tuccia 1872, 12: "1206. Fu fatta Piazza Nova, che prima si chiamava la Carbonara, e li fu fatto una fontana sine pari, per la quale si pigliava dell'acqua che andava in Piazza Nova."

Viterbo was growing rapidly in the early thirteenth century: an industrial operation was replaced by a public square, and the watercourse that fed the area was channeled to feed a monumental fountain. 1206 was also the year in which the people of Viterbo first enclosed their city within a single fortification wall.²⁸

Annius cites his source for this notice as the thirteenth-century chronicler Godfrey of Viterbo (who also supplied the friar with some of his more fanciful theories about Viterbo's connections with the Biblical patriarch Noah and his son Japheth), but he also claims to have discovered reports of similar urban improvements in the archives of his convent, Santa Maria in Gradi.²⁹ His efforts to integrate literary evidence with first-hand observations may well have been inspired by his experiences in Rome; the idea of using legal documents to bolster his arguments may reflect his own experience as an administrator. In any event, Annius gained credibility through the sheer variety and specificity of his evidence.

Godfrey of Viterbo's chronicle and the city archives made it perfectly clear that Viterbo was a medieval city, first mentioned in the eleventh century, with a circuit of fortification walls erected for the first time in 1206. But Annius could also see extensive remains of Etruscan construction all around him, especially on the steep, isolated hill that held the cathedral and the bishop's palace, still reached to this day by an Etruscan bridge and ringed by the remnants of Etruscan walls, their huge blocks of volcanic stone easily distinguishable from the smaller blocks favored by medieval builders. A city had existed on the site in ancient times, but ancient authors were frustratingly silent about its name and history.

To fill that gap, Godfrey of Viterbo traced the city's origins back to Japheth, the son of Noah. Annius went one better, identifying the primeval founder as Noah himself, eager to repopulate the world after the Flood. Rather than founding a single city, Annius argued, the patriarch had created four cities in on four separate hills, a tetropolis. The great cities of antiquity all followed this same model, he asserts: Jerusalem, Babylon, Syracuse – and, in its earliest stages, Rome. Piazza Nuova effectively erased the boundary between two of Viterbo's four cities. In the same way, the Roman Forum stood where a stream had once marked the boundary between the Palatine and Capitoline Hills.³⁰ The stream had been channeled into a canal, the eventual *Cloaca Maxima*, and the area around it filled and leveled to create a civic center, operations that ancient authors credited to the Etruscan king Tarquinius Priscus.³¹ Annius simply noted that the Etruscans' expertise in this kind of civic improvement had begun in the tetropolis that would become Viterbo. The settlement's earlier name, he suggested, was Etruria.³²

28. Grassotti 1997, 19.

29. Nanni 1512, XXVIr, CLVIIr.

30. Hopkins 2010, 25–107; Hopkins 2013.

31. Hopkins 2004, Hopkins 2010.

32. Nanni 1512, Xv–XIIr, XIIIv, XVIv, CXXXIXr–v, CXLv–CXLIIr, CLIV, CLIIIr–v, CLVr–CLVIr, CLXr–

In effect, then, Annius analyzed Viterbo's urban history by drawing on what ancient authors had written about the growth of Rome, and what humanists at the University of Rome, like Gaspare da Verona, were beginning to say. But when he moved to Rome nearly twenty years after his previous visit, he needed to create an account of Roman history that would harmonize what he had written in the meantime about Viterbo, or rather Etruria, a city he had revealed to be as old as Noah, and much older than Rome.

Most of his new Roman history appears in a work he attributes to Quintus Fabius Pictor, a historian who wrote at the end of the third-century B.C. and whose work survives only in fragments quoted by other authors.³³ But Annius claimed to have found a text of Fabius Pictor's treatise *On the Golden Age* during his stay in Genoa, which he prints together with his own commentary. *On the Golden Age* is written in Latin, although ancient authors report that Fabius Pictor wrote in Greek. Few readers were likely to complain; aside from a few Greek refugees and Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, the learned son of Pier Luigi and the brother of the Pope's mistress, Giulia the Beautiful, Italian scholars knew very little Greek.³⁴

"Fabius Pictor" reports that Rome, too, was originally a tetrapolis just like Etruria/Viterbo, before it expanded to occupy seven hills. Its fortification wall, as "Fabius" declares and Annius confirms in his comments, was shaped like a bow, with the Tiber as the bow-string. To prove the point, Annius provides a woodcut image of the city, the only visual image in his *Commentaries*. The four original hilltop settlements of the tetrapolis, Roma, Velia, Saturnia, and Capena, are represented by tiny images of cities. The seven hills that would be included within Rome's first city wall, and enshrined in immemorial tradition, are identified in banderoles as the Capitoline, Quirinal, Esquiline, Caelian, Little Caelian (*Caeliolus*), and Aventine. The Palatine, he writes, is obvious because it is the largest hill among those that rise within the arc of fortifications, but the maker of the woodcut, presumably working from a sketch provided by Annius himself, has provided thirty-one nearly indistinguishable hills rather than the proverbial seven with one larger than the rest. The city walls, with their Guelph battlements, and the city gates, with their tall hollows for portcullises, look more like the medieval fortifications of Viterbo than the Aurelian Wall of Rome.

As Master of the Sacred Palace, Annius evidently had little time to spend scrutinizing his physical surroundings. The Tiber's course through the city of Rome makes a series of sinuous loops, nothing like a taut bowstring – if anything, it is the river itself that makes an arc around the Campus Martius. Images of Rome in the late Middle Ages and the fifteenth century tend to turn the outline of the Aurelian Walls into a schematic design, either a lion or a circle, and Annius seems to be falling into this tradition, a holdover from medieval cartography.³⁵

CLXXv.

33. Cornell 2013, Vol. 1, 160–178.

34. Stephens 2013, 279.

35. Maier 2015, 1–25; Jacks 1993, 11–73.

But “Fabius Pictor” also reserves a special status for the lands on the opposite bank of the Tiber, the site of the Apostolic Palace and the Janiculum Hill.³⁶ This is what “Fabius” calls the “Antipolis,” the Etruscan alternative to Rome, sited on Etruscan soil that belongs, historically, to the ancient kingdom of Etruria. The Anti-city was called, at least according to this account, Etruria Janicula, and it was ruled by Noah/Janus at the time when Saturn ruled Rome itself – or the Capitoline Hill – from the opposite bank. The Tiber, in this new geography, marked the “*finis imperii*,” the boundaries between these two empires.³⁷ In his commentary on this passage of *On the Golden Age*, Annii writes that he has discussed the two cities of Rome and Etruria Janicula in his commentaries on the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of the New Testament, but none of these works seems to have survived.³⁸

The place of Annii of Viterbo in the history of systematic topography is hard to assess, but probably marginal, because his work is such an inextricable mix of truth and fiction. When he told his fellow citizens in Viterbo to look carefully at their cityscape, he saw a real terrain, even if he dotted with invented names, transforming the Piano San Faustino into Stic Kity Arim, and glorifying the “flat valley” of Vallepiatta as Py Atta. But his picture of the city’s physical layout provides an accurate of fifteenth-century Viterbo, and a surprising number of the names are real:

So put yourself in the middle of Faul [the bed of the Urcionio, which is really called Faul], and turn your face toward the Bishop’s Palace, and you’ll see the hollows of the ancient watercourses between the four hills, about which Vergil says *quem undique colles includere cavi* (“surrounded by hollow hills on all sides”).

Sometimes, moreover, Annii got things uncannily right: modern archaeologists agree that the citadel that now holds Viterbo’s cathedral was once the Etruscan settlement of Surrina, just as Annii says it was.³⁹ He tries to root his Roman readers just as firmly in a real place; thus “Fabius Pictor” provides his readers with a list of Roman place names, pointing out along the way that “in part of Rome are the Etrurian places: Antipolis, Janiculum, Vaticanum.”⁴⁰ But his new duties in the Vatican made it more difficult to study Rome in depth, and time was running out for Annii of Viterbo in another way.

At some point after 1498 and before his death in 1502, the Master of the Sacred Palace began to lose his mind. A marginal note in a copy of his *Commentaries* reports that “this man went insane twice and died in chains” – he must have been unruly enough to require a Renaissance straitjacket.⁴¹ Another rumor held that he was poisoned by Cesare Borgia.⁴² Within a generation his studies

36. Nanni 1512, XLVIIv.

37. Nanni 1512, XLIIIv.

38. Nanni 1512, XLIIIv.

39. Honigmann 1932.

40. Nanni 1512, XLVIIv.

41. An early sixteenth-century marginal note in the 1512 copy of the *Antiquitates* held by the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome (Zn 500-1120 raro) declares “hic vir bis insanivit et propter insaniam mortuus est vincus” (11v) and “mortuus est in vinclis” (168v). See Rowland 2004, 192 n. 7.

42. The story that Annii was poisoned by Cesare Borgia is refuted by Tigerstedt 1964, 299 and Stephens

of ancient Italy would be largely discredited. Nonetheless, there are few early modern writers who can conjure up the intense sense of place he provides in his tales of the primeval origins of Viterbo and Rome. As Shakespeare's Polonius would say of Hamlet: "Though this be madness, yet there is method in't."⁴³

1979, 208 n. 74.

43. *Hamlet*, Act 2, Scene 2.

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