

The book project to which I am devoting my time at the Italian Academy focuses on an historical landscape of the medieval Mediterranean. The twelfth-century Norman kings of Sicily created a circuit of parklands to surround their capital Palermo. Modeled on elite Islamic estates, these Christian rulers carved monumental lakes into the landscape and ordered curated parks where they introduced specific species of fauna and flora. For these sites, they relied on hydraulic engineering for water features and botanical and agricultural knowledge originating in the Islamic world. Their royal parkland palaces formed the nuclei of these green spaces and are some of the best-preserved examples of medieval secular architecture in the Latin West. Even more striking, the Norman kings placed monumental epigraphy in Arabic that exalted them atop their residences, facing onto the city, most likely composed by Muslim poets. Over time, there was a seismic shift in the relations between the Norman rulers and their Muslim subjects. From relative tolerance under the first king Roger II (r. 1104–56), this population faced persecution and systematic forced assimilation under his successors in the second half of the twelfth century. The study of these medieval parklands, delimiting a landscape of power, modifies current understandings that can be extrapolated to an examination of multi-ethnic relations in the wider region. The interpretation of the park architecture encompasses a comparative Mediterranean context, and I incorporate examples primarily from the Iberian Peninsula and Maghreb into my work. The book I am completing as a Weinberg Fellow in Architectural History and Preservation considers the interplay of the three connected elements of landscape, architecture, and interfaith relations in a pre-modern hegemonic society.