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Neapolitan urban landscapes in two albums of views by the Pagliara Foundation

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Abstract

The Pagliara Foundation of the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples holds a large collection of artworks of different kind that belonged to the polyhedric Neapolitan intellectual Rocco Pagliara. A significant part of this artistic heritage is constituted by prints, engravings and drawings that, given the subjects depicted, very often constitute an interesting tool for analyzing the Neapolitan urban landscape and a useful reference to study its evolution over time.

Ambienti urbani napoletani in due album di vedute della Fondazione Pagliara

La Fondazione Pagliara dell'Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa di Napoli custodisce una vasta collezione di opere d'arte di vario tipo appartenute al poliedrico intellettuale napoletano Rocco Pagliara. Cospicua parte di questo patrimonio artistico è rappresentata da stampe, incisioni e disegni che molto spesso, dati i soggetti raffigurati, costituiscono un interessante strumento di analisi del paesaggio urbano napoletano e un utile riferimento per studiarne l'evoluzione nel corso del tempo.

Keywords: Urban iconography, historical landscape, Pagliara Foundation.

Iconografia urbana, paesaggio storico, Fondazione Pagliara.

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1 | Introduction

Pagliara Foundation of Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples was founded in 1947, when Maria Antonietta and Adelaide Pagliara donated to the University – still a Magisterium at that time – the conspicuous and heterogeneous art collection that had belonged to their brother Rocco, a polyhedric Neapolitan intellectual. Given the variety of the elements it is composed of, this priceless artistic heritage fully reflects the multiple interests and the many facets of its famous owner. Journalist, poet, musicologist, art critic and literary, Rocco Pagliara was undoubtedly one of the most important figures in the artistic and cultural panorama of Naples between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and, during his lifetime, he picked up and collected an extensive number of various art objects from every age. Constituting a precious and enviable museum collection, furniture, books, porcelains, fine fabrics, sculptures, musical instruments and manuscripts, paintings, drawings, lithographs and engravings, among other things, are preserved in some rooms of the historical building of Suor Orsola Benincasa University, jealously guarded by the University.

For their undoubted value of relevant iconographic evidence useful for the analysis of urbanism and the Neapolitan – or more generally Campanian – natural and archaeological landscape, many of these works, in particular prints, engravings, paintings and drawings, were in the past objects of specific exhibitions (with related catalogues) or specific thematic publications edited by Suor Orsola Benincasa University. It is the case – to mention just a few among the most important – of the exhibition entitled *Itinerari archeologici a Napoli e dintorni* (set up at the University in 1983); of the one entitled *Napoli in prospettiva. Vedute della città dal XV al XIX secolo nelle stampe*

della *Raccolta d'Arte Pagliara* (also exhibited at the Italian Cultural Institute in Paris in 1996) or finally of the most recent *I luoghi della Sirena. Vedute di Napoli dal XV al XIX secolo* (2019). While the volume *Cultura Innovazione e Ricerca. MITO_UNISOB: Un progetto per la fruizione del patrimonio librario e iconografico di Ateneo* (2016) records the results of the MITO project (Multimedia Information for Territorial Object; scientific director: Pasquale Rossi) which led to the digitization of part of the book heritage and the collection of the Pagliara Foundation, with some of the most significant historical views and maps of the city of Naples, and the creation of an open access database.

2 | Contorni di Napoli Album

Among the works preserved in the Pagliara Foundation's collection there are, in an album with an hardcover with the words *Contorni di Napoli* on the back, twenty unbound etchings depicting various urban spaces and places of the late eighteenth century Naples. The prints in question, all about the size of mm 160x260, actually constitute part of the work *Raccolta delle più interessanti vedute della città di Napoli e luoghi circonvicini*, published in several editions between 1764 and 1766 in Naples from the «Calcografia di Nicola Gervasi al Gigante di Palazzo n. 23» [Negro Spina 1989, 31-33]. The original Collection, composed of a total of thirty etchings, is provided with a frontispiece – also missing in the album preserved at the Pagliara Foundation – showing the names of the designer and engraver of the prints, Giuseppe Bracci and Antonio Cardoni (or the Italianized name of the Belgian Antoine Alexandre Joseph Cardon) respectively [Di Mauro 1980, II, 428; de Seta 1981, 141-142; Albano 2005, 151-167].

Each engraving of the Collection presents, at the lower margin, descriptions of the captions relating to the place the image refers to and the name of a character from the aristocratic world or the diplomatic corps credited to the Bourbon court to which the work is dedicated; just a few show both the names of the authors or exclusively that of the Cardon, in some cases reported in monogram. The subjects depicted aim to offer a broad overview of the city of Naples and its surroundings, ideally embracing the area that goes from Baia to Vesuvius; a revival of traces of the Neapolitan landscapes and of various and extraordinary places of the “antique” that date back to the original Neapolitan foundation and over time have inspired artists and travellers between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the prints included in the Pagliara Foundation album there are, among others, the views depicting the amphitheater of Pozzuoli (entitled *Vue de l'intérieur du corridor de l'amphithéâtre de Pouzzuol*), the crater of Vesuvius (*Veduta interiore del Vesuvio*), several buildings or locations near Posillipo or Chiaia, as well as some famous buildings in the centre of Naples, such as the Royal Palace or Castel Capuano (identified with the old name of Vicaria in the view entitled *La Vicaria. Porta Capuana. S. Caterina a formello*).

The ten etchings missing from the original *Raccolta*, on the other hand, are those bearing the words: *Grotta di Pausilipo, Sepolcro di Virgilio; Sepolcro di Virgilio, Castello S. Elmo; Grotta vicino a li bagni di Tritoli Volgarmente detta di Nerone; Tempio di Diana, Castello di Baia; Tempio di Mercurio, Costa di Baia; Sepolcro di Campana, Strada di Pozzuolo; Marochiano, Scuola di Virgilio; Piazza dello Spirito Santo, Palazzo del Ministro di Spagna, Porta dello Spirito Santo, Castel S. Elmo; Li Studii, Largo dell Studii, S. Teresa de Scalzi, Chiesa della Stella; Aquedotti antichi presso capo di china*.

Among the most beautiful and interesting engravings of the album preserved at the Pagliara Foundation, the one called *Castel Nuovo, Torre della lanterna, Monte Vesuvio, Largo del Castello* stands out. In this image the imposing silhouette of the Castel Nuovo, whose external curtain of the



Fig. 1: The original title page of the work *Raccolta delle più interessanti vedute della città di Napoli e luoghi circonvicini*, which is missing in the Pagliara Foundation album (Negro Spina 1989, 59).

viceregal epoch is well highlighted, dominates; in the foreground the Largo of the Castle surrounds the manor, dynamically animated by several characters; in the background, the Lantern Tower, to recall the port of Naples; finally, even beyond, Mount Vesuvius. This particular print, while portraying an urban environment already plentifully represented in the past, proposes a new point of view of the depicted subject, which will also be resumed a few years later in a similar way by the architect Etienne Giraud (*Vue de la place du Large du Chateau*) in a collection of his Neapolitan views very similar to that of Cardon and probably published between 1767 and 1771 [*Napoli nel Settecento* 1977, 25]. In both cases, therefore, the Largo of the Castle with the dominant structure of Castel Nuovo are iconographically documented, still surrounded by the external curtain wall, before that the interventions of the late nineteenth century brought the street level almost at the level of the drawbridge and to the isolation of the city fortress.

Another particularly suggestive table of this album is that of the *Salita di Capo di Monte*, which instead depicts the ancient road that led to Capodimonte. The image refers to the then only impervious connection existing between the city and the Palace, as an alternative to which, already in 1780, the royal engineer Ignazio di Nardo suggested creating a more comfortable route. His project (not known in content) was judged too expensive and was not realized, but the pressing need for a new road led ten years later the ordinary engineer Gaetano Barba to formulate another project that involved reaching the site from the church of *S. Vincenzo in sopra*, foreseeing an expense of forty thousand ducats [*Il borgo dei Vergini* 1991, 73]. The situation was definitively resolved, however, only in 1807 when, by the will of Gioacchino Bonaparte and on the basis of a project by the engineer Gioacchino Avellino and the architect Nicola Leandro, it was in fact finally realized the new and more comfortable road axis which, bypassing the valley of Sanità, would have put the whole hilly area more quickly and easily in connection with the lower part of the city [de Seta 1969, 168-169; Buccaro 1985, *passim*; Fino 1990, 177; Capano 2017, 98].



1. Castel Nuovo.

2. Torre della lanterna.

D.D. a M^e LIQUIER.

*Vitis ut arboribus decori est, ut vitibus uvae,
Ut gregibus tauri, segetes ut pinguibus arvis,
Tu decus omne tuis.*

3. Monte Vesuvio.

4. Largo del Castello.

Fig. 2: Castel Nuovo, Torre della lanterna, Monte Vesuvio, Largo del Castello, Giuseppe Bracci, Antoine Alexandre Joseph Cardon, 1764-1766, etching, 153 x 264 mm, Pagliara Foundation, inv. 3025.



Fig. 3: *Vue de la place du Large du Château*, Etienne Giraud, 1767-1771, (de Seta 1977, tav. IX).



Fig. 4: *Salita di Capo di Monte*, Giuseppe Bracci, Antoine Alexandre Joseph Cardon, 1764-1766, etching, 158 x 266 mm, Pagliara Foundation, inv. 3038.

3 | *Ansichten von Neapel und umgegend* Album

The city of Naples and its surroundings are represented also in other forty-five views, completely similar in size and construction technique, which compose another collection conserved at the Pagliara Foundation. This time the album is bound in leather and has the title in German *Ansichten von Neapel und umgegend* engraved on the front. The boards are all trimmed and centered on white supporting sheets with a pencil numbering, from 1 to 45, in the upper right corner, and the title at the bottom right, written with pen. On the back of each sheet is the inventory number (from 148 to 192) and a blue ink stamp with the words «Istituto Suor Orsola Benincasa». All prints were originally part of the multi-volume work entitled *Esquisses pittoresques et descriptives de la Ville de Naples et de ses environs*, published in Naples in 1832 by the Lithograph of Domenico Cuciniello and Lorenzo Bianchi. In the introduction of the first volume of the original work, the two publishers lithographers specified that the publication was supposed to be a sort of tourist guide for foreigners visiting Naples and its surroundings. To the descriptive text of the various places – entrusted to the Neapolitan scholar Elisa Liberatore and written in French because this was considered to be the language of excellence of well-educated people at that time [*Annali civili* 1835, 77] – it was associated the most important part of the work, one hundred lithographs made by Franz Wenzel based on a live drawing of Giacinto Gigante. The same introduction reported that the entire editorial work had been organized in five parts treating respectively: the riviera from Naples to Cuma; the ruins of Herculaneum and Pompeii; Naples and its main buildings; the eastern and southern riviera of the Crater, the islands and the Vesuvius; and finally, in the appendix, the views of Caserta, Cava, Amalfi, the amphitheater of Capua, the ruins of Paestum, and the new bridge over the Garigliano.

Among the afore mentioned forty-five views contained in the Pagliara Foundation album it is certainly noteworthy the one identified with the number 9, titled *Villa reale*. The lithograph in question was originally proposed in the volume dedicated to Naples and its main buildings; to it was associated the relative text on pages 13, 14 and 15 of the same tome. The print depicts the Villa Reale from the east, with the current piazza della Vittoria in the foreground – animated by numerous figures walking, on horseback or in a carriage – and, in the background, the Posillipo hill. The main entrance of the Real Passeggio is clearly visible, marked by two symmetrical neo-classical pavilions joined by the gate to the garden. The perspective of the drawing limits the perception of the extension of the Villa towards the west, but it perfectly highlights the Villa's perimeter limits on the North, on the Riviera di Chiaia, and on the South, directly on the sea. Of the five avenues the Villa was subdivided into, only the central one can be recognized, wider and uncovered by the rich vegetation which hides the other paths from view. The descriptive text that was originally included in the lithograph is definitely more exhaustive. Here a large number of architectural details are reported and it is clarified that «la partie la plus délicieuse du jardin est sans contredit ce qu'on appelle la *Villa nuova*, qui y fut ajoutée depuis 1806, et qui est plantée et disposée à l'instar des jardins chinois ou anglais» [*Esquisses pittoresques* 1832, II, 14]. Finally, with regard to the chronological certification of the work, it is particularly interesting the reference to the moving of the famous ancient sculptural group of the Toro Farnese, which previously adorned the fountain located along the central avenue of the Villa, to the Real Museo Borbonico (1823) [Visone 2003, 119].





Fig. 5: *Seggio nuovo, Chiesa di S. Giuseppe, l'Ospedaletto, Convento di S. Maria la nuova*, Giuseppe Bracci, Antoine Alexandre Joseph Cardon, 1764-1766, etching, Pagliara Foundation, inv. 3013 (pagina precedente).

Fig. 6: *la Vicaria, Porta Capuana, S. Caterina a formello*, Giuseppe Bracci, Antoine Alexandre Joseph Cardon, 1764-1766, etching, Pagliara Foundation, inv. 3034 (pagina precedente).

Fig. 7: *Villa Royale*, Giacinto Gigante, Franz Wenzel, 1832, color lithograph with watercolor touch-ups, 113 x 189 mm, Pagliara Foundation, inv. 156.

4 | Conclusions

The study of views, urban iconography and historical cartography have always been an indispensable tool in order to make a careful analysis of the stratifications of a site. Moreover, drawings, prints and engravings, besides reflecting a more or less objective image of the urban scene depicted, are also able to transmit a tangible perception of the social condition of the time of that specific place, for instance through the visual description of details which are apparently collateral compared to the main subject. This is very true especially for the depictions of Naples in the years around the mid-eighteenth century, when the city has finally become the capital of an independent State and will be more and more frequently visited by travellers of the Grand Tour. In fact, as a consequence of this relaunch worldly of the city there is its most frequent representation – very often standardized, i.e. conditioned by its ideal and unrealistic vision – made up of a multitude of notes or descriptions by writers and artists, or even more by real illustrated guides which aims to introduce foreign tourists to Naples and its surroundings. Furthermore, the already flourishing market of a similar vedutism of the Neapolitan places is nourished also by the great interest shown by the aristocratic class to which, as we have seen, these works very often reported a dedication certifying the commission. The two collections of views discussed here, partially contained in the Pagliara Foundation albums, undoubtedly represent excellent examples of this artistic trend which, although rooted in the Piranesian tradition, offer also depictions of the great architecture of the new course, like the Capodimonte palace or the Albergo dei Poveri.



Fig. 8: *Palazzo reale dal mare*, Giacinto Gigante, Franz Wenzel, 1832, color lithograph with watercolor touch-ups, Pagliara Foundation, inv. 157.



Fig. 9: *Napoli dalla strada del Campo Marte*, Giacinto Gigante, Franz Wenzel, 1832, color lithograph with watercolor touch-ups, Pagliara Foundation, inv. 148.

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