THE STORY OF THE CITY: PORTICI IN THE TRAVEL LITERATURE BETWEEN THE 18th AND 19th CENTURIES

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Since the end of the 17th century, and throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, Portici, a pleasant place on the Vesuvian coast, characterized by a beautiful coastline and by the looming and suggestive presence of Vesuvius, became a favourite destination for travellers and artists of various nationalities,who left much iconographic evidence and even more literary evidence, first in manuscript notebooks and then in printed editions. Attracting travellers to Portici were the proximity to Naples and the beautiful panorama, which established the reputation of a place of vacation up to the first half of the 20th century. In particular,the noble villas, the Bourbon royal residence built in the 18th century with the Herculanense Museum, which housed the archaeological finds recovered from the nearby buried cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii recently rediscovered, found more space in the travel literature and gave prestige to the village. The essay therefore illustrates the history of Portici, through analysis and comparison of the most interesting and significant literary evidence, made by local historians, but above all by famous authors and travellers, including for example, the prestigious names of Abbè de Saint-Non, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Stendhal. In addition to numerous literary descriptions, the evidence offered by travel guides written from the second half of the 19th century, are also examined.

Key words: Grand Tour, Herculanense Museum, Portici, Royal Palace, Travellers, Vesuvius

Pour me dépiquer je vais à Portici
et à Capo di-Monte, positions délicieuses,
et telles qu'aucun roi de la terre ne peut
en trouver. Portici est pour Naples ce
que Monte-Cavallo est pour Rome.
(Stendhal 1817, 117)

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in 1738, work began in the village of Portici for the construction of a new royal residence, commissioned by King Charles VII of Naples (Alisio 1979; De Seta, Di Mauro and Perone 1980). At the same time, systematic excavation work began to unearth the ancient Herculaneum, followed, approximately ten years later, by the excavation of Pompeii.

The proximity to Naples and to the cities destroyed by lava during the eruption Vesuvius in AD 79, the wonderful panorama, the presence of the Royal Palace and the court, the establishment of the *Herculanense Museum,* make the site one of the most attractive and visited in the surroundings of Naples.

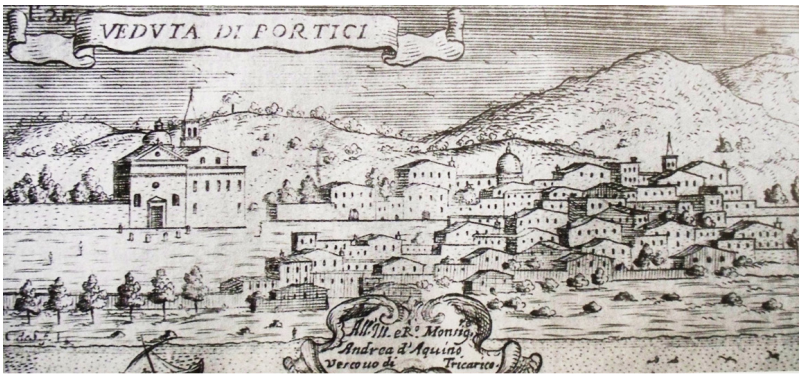
During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Portici represented, infact, one of the main stages of the *Grand Tour* for intellectuals, artists, architects, poets, aristocrats, ambassadors, musicians and travellers of any geographical origin (De Seta 1992; Mozzillo 1992; De Seta 2014; Cioffi 2015).

The attention of travellers, who leave evidence of their passage, focuses on different aspects.

Some of them praise the peculiarities of the landscape, attracted by the proximity to the picturesque Vesuvius; others mention the village only as the place of the royal residence. Some others describe with great interest and an extreme abundance of detail the findings of the *Herculanense Museum*, founded in 1758 in the Royal Palace.

Portici, therefore, is not only the location of the Royal Palace, but also becomes a centre for development in urban planning, encouraging the construction of villas and aristocratic residences built near the palace and in the neighboring villages (De Seta, Di Mauro and Perone 1980; Amodio 2002), but, above all, it becomes the focus of a remarkable cultural development.

Picture 1: Veduta di Portici



Source: Parrino (1700).

One of the first foreign travellers to arrive in Portici was the French writer and magistrate Charles De Brosses (Dijon 1709-Paris 1777) who made the trip to Italy between 1739 and 1740, described in the work *Lettres Familières écrites d'Italie in 1739 et 1740*, published posthumously. The letters, of which only about a dozen were actually written in Italy, represent a very important source on the discovery of Herculaneum and Vesuvius. The French author, while going to Portici during an excursion to Vesuvius, does not pay attention to the village, or to the Royal Palace which at the time was still under construction, however, the presence of the royal residence is attested by the phrase:

> "Quand nous arrivâmes, le roi étoit in Portici, petite maison au pied du Vésuve: c'est son Fontainebleau" (De Brosses 1869, 342).

About the residence, De Brosses does not have a positive opinion and affirms that many of the noble villas are superior compared to that of the king:

> "Le village de Portici est joli; a des jardins agréables et plusieurs maisons de campagne, dont quelques-unes valent mieux que cella du roi" (De Brosses 1869, 360).

Attracted by the discoveries of Herculaneum, the German art historian and archaeologist Johann Joachim Winckelmann (Stendal 1717-Trieste 1768), visited Portici several times, leaving a trace of his travel in Italy, beginning in 1755, in letters published in a German edition in 1778 and in a French edition between 1781 and 1784. During his first sojourn, in the letter of April 1758 addressed to M. Wille, he says:

> "J'ai passé plus d'un mois à Portici, où l'on a déposé les antiquités trouvées à Herculanum" (Winckelmann 1784, 238).

According to Winckelmann, the site is remarkable only because of the *Museum*. Although he visited Portici and Museum many times, Winckelmann never showed interest in telling the story of Portici or in tracing its characteristics. He always paid attention to the importance of the archaeological findings, to the history of ancient Herculaneum and to the eruptions of Vesuvius, and illustrated more widely visits to Pozzuoli, Baia, Pompeii.

The same can be said for the other German traveller, the poet and writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (Frankfurt 1749-Weimar 1832). In 1786 he begins his journey in Italy, where he stayed for about two years, visiting Naples and its surroundings in 1787. Evidence of the Italian stay is the work *Italienische Reise,* which was published in two volumes, between 1816 and 1817.

Goethe, as well as Winckelmann, visited Herculaneum, Pompeii, Paestum, but also Portici on several occasions, attracted by the opportunity to admire the recently discovered finds of classical art. As he writes in the letter of 18 March 1787, he visited Herculaneum and Portici:

> "Nun duften wir nicht länger säumen, Herkulanum und die ausgegrabene Sammlung in Portici zu schen. Jene alte Stadt, am Fuße des Vesuvs liegend, war vollkommen mit lava bedeckt, die sich durch nachfolgende Ausbrüche erhöhte, so daß die Gebäude jetzt sechzig Fuß unter der Erde liegen. Man entdeckte sie, indem man einen Brunnen grub und auf getäfelte Marmorfußböden traf. Jammerschade, daß die Ausgrabung nicht durch deutsche

> Bergleute recht planmäßig geschehen; denn gewiß ist bei einem zufällig räuberischen Nachmühlen manches edle Altertum vergcudet worden. Man steigt sechzig Stufen hinunter in eine Gruft, wo man das ehmals unter freiem Himmel stehende Theater bei Fackelschein anstaunt und sich erzählen läßt, was alles da gefunden und hinaufgeschafft worden. In das Museum traten wir wohl empfohlen und wohl empfangen. Doch war auch uns irgend etwas aufzuzeichnen nicht erlaubt. Vielleicht gaben wir nur desto besser acht und versetzten uns desto lebhafter in die verschwundene Zeit, wo alle diese Dinge zu lebendigem Gebrauch und Genuß um die Eigentümer umherstanden.
> Jene kleinen Häuser und Zimmer in Pompeji erschienen mir nun zugleich enger und weiter; enger, weil ich sic mir von so viel würdigen Gegenständen vollgedrängt dachte, weiter, weil gerade diese Gegenstände nicht bloß als notdürftig vorhanden, sondern durch bildende Kunst aufs geistreichste und anmutigste verziert und belebt den Sinn erfreuen und erweitern, wie es die größte Hausgeräumigkeit nicht tun könnte. Man sieht z.B. einen herrlich geformten Eimer, oben mit dem zierlichsten Rande, näher beschaut schlägt sich dieser Rand von zwei Seiten in die Höhe, man faßt die verbundenen Halbkreise als Handhabe und trägt das Gefäß auf das bequemste. Die Lampen sind nach Anzahl ihrer Dochte mit Masken und Rankenwerk verziert, so daß jede Flamme cin wirkliches Kunstgebilde erleuchtet. Hohe, schlanke, eherne Gestelle sind bestimmt, die Lampen zu tragen, aufzuhängende Lampen hingegen mit allerlei geistreich gedachten Figuren behängt, welche die Absicht, zu gefallen und zu ergötzen, sobald sie schaukeln und baumeln, sogar übertreffen. In Hoffnung, wiederzukehren, folgten wir den Vorzeigenden von Zimmer zu Zimmer und haschten, wie es der Moment erlaubte, Ergötzung und Belehrung weg, so gut es sich schicken wollte" (Goethe 1992, 262–263).

Particularly enthusiastic about the *Herculanense Museum*, in his letter dated 1 June 1787, Goethe defines it as the alpha and omega of all collections of antiquities:

> "Seit meiner Rükkunft von Päestum abe ich außer den Sthätzen von Portici wenig gesehen, und es bleibt mir manches zurück, um dessentwillen ich nicht den Fuß aufheben mag. Aber jenes Museum ist auch das α und ω aller Antiquitäten-sammlungen; da sieht man recht, was die alte Welt an freudigem Kunstsinn voraus war, wenn sic gleich in strenger Handwerksfertigkeit weit hinter uns zurückblieb" (Goethe 1992, 415).

The English poet Lady Anna Miller (London 1741-Bristol 1781) visited Italy between 1770 and 1771. She sent letters about this visit to friends, published first in 1776 and again the following year. In *Letters from Italy, describing the Manners, Customs, Antiquities, Paintings, & c., Of the Country, in 1770,* the letter XXXVI, dated 9 February 1771, is dedicated to visiting the sites of Portici, Herculaneum and Pompeii. Lady Miller gives a short but positive description of the village and the Royal Palace, offering instead a very detailed description of the *Cabinet*, that is, the *Museum:*

> "Since I wrote last, we have seen the cabinet of Portici, or Museum, Pompei and what remains open of Herculaneum. [...] We passed through two villages, one is called *San Giovanni Teduccio*, the other *Pietra Bianca.* The distance from Naples to Portici is six miles, which is a large village, and well built. The palace was erected by Don Carlos. Was there nothing beside the Cabinet of Portici and Pompeia worth feeing in Italy, I think they would greatly overpay the traveller for all the inconveniencies he must have suffered from bad roads, inns, &c. if still more miserable than what we have experienced, and that that supposition was within the limits of possibility. Besides the theatre, little remains open of Herculaneum at present. To save the expense of moving the earth or lava to a distance, when they had made an excavation, and collected whatever they could find that was curious, they opened another quarter, filling up the first with its rubbish, and so on: all these curiosities were deposited as soon as found in the Cabinet of Portici. The Cabinet of Portici, as it is here called, joins on to the palace, and is properly speaking, part of that building. It contains several rooms filled with antiquities. There is a work published by order of government, which is already increased to seven or eight large folio volumes, embellished with engravings representing the various articles in this collection; but it is not yet near completed, on which account no person who visits this cabinet is permitted to take any sketch, note, or memorandum upon the spot; some few things, however, from memory I shall mention in this letter. As to the above voluminous work, I have not time to examine it minutely; but hope when we shall be returned home, and that it is completed, for an opportunity of looking into it at leisure. To give you some idea of this valuable collection, I shall mention what appeared to me most interesting, as they occur to my memory. The palace of Portici cannot boast of beautiful architecture. On

entering the vestibule, the antique equestrian statue of Marcus Nonius Balbus the son is placed on the right, within a great glazed case. Balbus appears by this statue to have been about ten years old; his head is uncovered, and his hair quite short; he is habited in a cuirass, under which appears a thin garment reaching half way down the thighs; his arms are almost naked, though a short kind of mantle fastened to his left shoulder flows downwards, but in such a manner as not to cover them. On his legs are a sort of sandals reaching to the ancles his right arm is raised to his head, and in the left he holds the bridle, which is remarkably short. The horse is without saddle or stirrup; he stands upon three legs, the fourth being raised very high; and though he does not seem sufficiently in movement, yet altogether it is a very fine equestrian statue. The inscription is M. Nonio. M. F. Balbo. P. R. Pro. Cos. Herculanenses. Opposite to this is placed another equestrian statue of Marcus Nonius Balbus the father; esteemed as fine an antique as the other, but is not in such high preservation; the head and one of the hands are supplied, the originals not having been recovered from amongst the rubbish. The inscription is as follows: M. Nonio. M. F. Balbo. Patri D. D. These statues were found in the forum at Herculaneum. The cupola of the staircase of this palace is so well painted by one Vincenzo Re, that it deceives the eye; but I shall defer the description of the habitable part of it for the present, and mention only that wing which is the reservoir of the remains of Herculaneum and Pompeia" (Miller 1777, 63–65).

Of great interest is certainly the allusion of the author to the monumental work *Le Antichità di Ercolano Esposte,* eight volumes with the engravings of findings from the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii, published between 1757 and 1792.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to include here a complete description of the exhibits in the *Cabinet*; it is, however, essential to consider at least the positive opinion of Miller about one of the most interesting rooms of the entire *Museum*, the library:

"No room in this cabinet is more interesting in its appearance than the library; it contains a vast assemblage of manuscripts; they are pretty thick rolls; most of them quite brown, some black, and had suffered so much by the fire, that it was esteemed impossible to unroll them, had not an ingenious man *Padre Antonio Piaggi,* invented a most curious method of opening them by degrees, so as to be able to arrive at a possibility of reading them. A scholar of

> his, *Vicenzio Merli*, is now at work upon them; but the manner is so laborious and tedious, and the encouragement so small, that it is probable the world may wait long for instruction or entertainment from his labours; he is allowed only six ducats a month. The first roll that was opened proved to be a tract of philosophy by Epicurus; the second treated of morality; the third against musick, for which reason I would have it returned a second time to the flames; the subject of the fourth is rhetoric. It is computed that there may be about eight hundred of these volumes or rolls in this library, all which are arranged with great order in glazed repositories; they were found in book-cases, part of the mouldings remain, and are shewn, not unlike many now in use amongst us" (Miller 1777, 77).

Very fascinating for the peculiarity of the contents, is the report of the organist, composer and historian of English music Charles Burney (Shrewsbury 1726-London 1814), author of the work *The Present State of Music in France and Italy,* published in London for the first time in 1771. The volume is a report of the journey between France and Italy, undertaken in 1770, to collect useful material in order to create a general history of music.

Burney visits the Neapolitan surroundings and Vesuvius in the company of Mr. Hamilton, but the visit to the *Museum* of Portici, represents for Burney the most charming experience, being a wonderful opportunity to admire and study the ancient Roman musical instruments, recovered during the excavations:

> "*Friday, Nov. 3*. This day I visited his Neapolitan majesty's museum, at Portici, where I had enquiries to make concerning ancient instruments and MSS. which were of real importance to my History. In the third apartment of this curious repository, where the ancient instruments of surgery are placed, I met with the following musical instruments; three *Systrums,* two with four brass bars, and one with three; several *Crotoli* or cymbals; *Tambours de basque;* a *Syringa*, with seven pipes; and a great number of broken bone or ivory *tibiae*. But the most extraordinary of all these instruments is a species of trumpet, found in Pompeii not a year ago; it is injured by time and broken, but not so much so as to render it difficult to conceive the entire form. There are still the remains of seven small bone or ivory pipes, which are inserted in as many of brass, all of the same length and diameter, which surround the great tube, and seem to terminate in one mouth-piece. Several of the small

brazen pipes are broken, by which the ivory ones are laid bare; but it is natural to suppose that they were all blown at once, and that the small pipes were unisons to each other, and octaves to the great one. It used to be flung on the shoulder by a chain, which chain is preserved, and the place where it used to be fastened to the trumpet, is still visible. No such instrument as this has been found before, either in ancient painting or sculpture, which makes me the more minute in speaking of it. This singular species of trumpet was found in the *Corps de Garde*, and seems to be the true military *Clangor Tubarum*. As no person is suffered to use a pencil in the museum, when the company with which I had seen it was arrived at the inn where we dined, Mr. Robertson, an ingenious young artist of the party, was so obliging as to make a drawing of it, from memory, in my tablets; which all the company, consisting of seven, agreed was very exact. In the ninth or tenth room are all the volumes as yet found in Herculaneum, of which only four have been rendered intelligible, these are Greek. One upon the Epicurean philosophy, one upon rhetoric, one upon morality, and one upon music; each volume appears to be only a black cinder. I saw two pages, opened and framed, of the MS. upon music, written by Philodemus; but it is not a poem on music, as Mr. de la Lande says, nor a satire against it, as others say; but a confutation of the system of Aristoxenus, who, being a practical musician, preferred the judgment of the ear to the Pythagorean numbers, or the arithmetical proportions of mere theorists, Ptolemy did the same afterwards. I conversed with Padre Antonio Pioggi about this MS. It was he who opened and explained it; and he is now superintending, at a foundery, the casting of a new set of Greek characters, exactly resembling those in which it was written, and in which it is to be published. Every lover of learning laments the slow manner in which they proceed in opening these volumes. All that have been found hitherto were in Herculaneum. Those of Pompeii are supposed to have been wholly destroyed by fire" (Burney 1773, 342–346).

A complete description of the territory of Portici does not really find space even in one of the most emblematic texts of the eighteenth century, the *Voyage pittoresque ou Description des royaumes de Naples et de Sicile* by the French Jean Claude Richard de Saint-Non (Paris 1727–1791), who visits Italy between the 1760s and 1770s. In this work the great interest for Vesuvius and the excavations of Herculaneum is obvious, while Portici is mentioned only for its proximity to the excavations and as the

seat of the *Museum*. Interesting is the engraving with the view of the ancient lavas near the *Granatello* of Portici, in the coastal area, where it is possible to see the Royal Palace, dominated by the scenographic Vesuvius (Saint-Non 1781, 218).

Picture 2: Vue des laves du Vésuve, prise sur le bord de la Mer près de Portici

Figure 2: Saint-Non (1781).

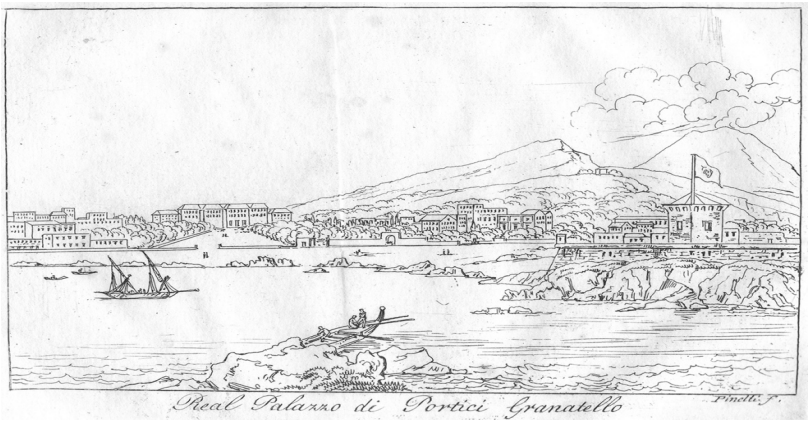
In 1785 the magistrate and erudite Charles Marguerite Jean-Baptiste Mercier Dupaty (La Rochelle 1746-Paris 1788) also visited Italy, leaving his memories the trip in the *Lettres sur l'Italie écrites en 1785*. The letter XCVI is explicitly dedicated to the visit to Portici, that he admires for the privileged position between Herculaneum, the steaming Vesuvius and the sea:

> "Il faut voir Portici, non pour le château du roi, qui n'a rien de important, ni en architecture, ni en ornements extérieurs; mais pour sa situation pittoresque. Portici est assis sur Herculanum, au milieu des gazons et des fleurs, entre le Vésuve, qui, au-dessus de sa tête, fume, et la mer qui à ses pieds, bouillonne. Herculanum, le Vésuve et la mer menacent tous les trois d'engloutir Portici: le Vésuve, dans ses laves; la mer, dans ses flots; Herculanum, au milieu de ses ruines. Portici mérite encore d'être vu, pour quelques statues de marbre qui décorent son péristyle; surtout pour les statues équestres des deux Balbus, monuments de la reconnaissance ou de la flatterie, car on a prostitué les statues dans tous les

temps. Ce n'est pas que je sois aussi enthousiaste que beaucoup d'amateurs, de celle du fils; il est placé naturellement à cheval; mais il a une figure ignoble; mais il se tient en paysan; mais le cheval, qui est de marbre, paraît de marbre. Les objets les plus dignes de votre curiosité sont deux cabinets, l'un de peintures antiques, et l'autre de vases, d'instruments et de statues, également antiques. Un volume entier ne décrirait pas tout ce qui intéresse dans le second de ces cabinets. Tout y est, en effet, ou ingénieusement inventé, ou élégamment travaillé, ou formé de matières précieuses et d'ailleurs antique et romain" (Dupaty 1825, 133–135).

THE 19th CENTURY: FROM THE REPORTS AND TRAVEL NOTES TO THE PRINTED TOURIST GUIDES

Picture 3: Real Palazzo di Portici Granatello



Source: Pinelli (1823).

In the early nineteenth century, one of the most interesting descriptions of the Real Villa is offered by the Irish writer Lady Morgan (Dublin 1776-London 1859). Present in Naples in 1820, she visits Herculaneum, Pompeii, Vesuvius and Portici, of which she leaves an enthusiastic and extremely long and accurate description of the Royal Palace, returned to the Bourbons after the French domination:

"From Naples to Pompeii, the route along the bay includes not only one of the loveliest of the many lovely views of this region, but most of the principal objects for which the naturalist and antiquarian visit this extraordinary region Herculaneum, Portici, Vesuvius. A long suburban line of buildings some shattered and miserable (the abodes of the people), others spacious but deserted (the villas of the nobles), leads to the royal palace of Portici, by the village of Resina the first stage in this journey of wonders, at which taste or curiosity is induced to stop; for the streets of Resina cover the buried ruins of Herculaneum. [...] The high road of Portici runs through the old-fashioned paved court of its royal palace—a heavy, cumbrous fabric, commanding the bay. Though one of the most considerable and finely situated of the royal villas, it must have been a most gloomy and incommodious one, before the elegant improvements made in it by its late active but transitory queen. The old *custode* who shewed us the apartments, had some difficulty in naming his late mistress by the title *of Madama Murat*, instead of *"her majesty,"* and had evidently got up a new vocabulary for the new (or old) regime. On entering, he observed to us that the whole of the very elegant vestibule in which we stood, the broad and double staircase, the spacious corridor, and the beautiful little theatre into which it opens, were all *"fatti da Madama Murat."* Again, a gallery ornamented with superb, candelabras, and accommodated with elegant ottomans, extorted the laconic *"fatto da Madama Murat."* In a word, we found that endless suites of apartments, baths, cabinets, book-rooms, green-houses, orangeries, etc. etc. were all either painted, decorated, and furnished, or planned and erected *"da Madama Murat."* Some of the rooms exhibited a very extraordinary degree of taste in "consulting the genius of the place." The walls were covered with paintings copied from Pompeii, and the furniture was imitated from objects discovered there, and still preserved in the *Museo* at Naples. The draperies of the richest silk were all of the Neapolitan loom; for "*Madam Murat*" made a complete clearing out of all the old and tawdry furniture of this palace: so that on the return of the royal family, they knew it as little as many other objects of her reformation and improvement; and expressed their surprise and admiration, with a naiveté that still contributes the current coin of anecdote to the circulating medium of ridicule in Naples. The apartments of the ex-queen are models of elegance and feminine taste. The bed-room, dressing-room, boudoir, and library, are eminently so; and have been left precisely as she last occupied them. Her dressing-boxes are on the toilet; a miniature of her nephew, the little Napoleon (hung by a ribbon), decorates the chimney-piece; her *dejeuné,* on an English

tray, stands in the centre of the room; and some pretty *étrennes* (worked and embroidered for her by her ladies a few days before her reverses) are scattered on a sofa. *"Niente cangiato,"* said the cicerone, "except this;" (and be approached her magnificent bed, and pointed to two large black crucifixes, and a pendent vase of holy water, hung at its head) *"Non è quella una moda Francese."* On the king and his wife sleeping one night at Portici, these sacred images were hung up for the occasion. In the dressing-room, all the necessaries of the toilet, in crystal and silver, still remain; even some silver brushes, lying where the *fèmme-de-chambre* of the late fair inhabitant had left them. It is said, that Madame Murat carried even to affectation her determination of not removing any thing that belonged to her royal state, and took only what she considered personal and private property. Portici was her favourite residence, and the numerous English and Irish nobility whom she received there, can vouch for the courtesy and hospitality with which she did the honours of her palace. Murat's apartments join his wife's: they were equally luxurious, splendid, and commodious, the hangings all silk and satin; the carpets all English and Turkey; the toilet splendid and *recherchée* as that of the vainest petite-maîtresse, or royal beauty. Close to his superb sleeping-room is a simple little cabinet, with a small white dimity camp-bed, where his secretary slept. Here, in this little bed of the ex-secretary, sleeps the Royal Bourbon, the legitimate King of Naples, when he makes his visits to Portici. It is said that he walks about the palace in endless amusement, admiring all the elegant finery of which he is become the master; but still adhering to the little dimity bed, and the secretary's closet, which resembles his own homely bed-room in his palace at Naples, He has added nothing but a large crucifix. In an old lumber-room of this palace, all the portraits of the Murat and Bonaparte family are huddled with broken chairs and mouldering tables; but there is a cicerone to shew them, who expects to be as handsomely remunerated for the exhibition of *the lumber-room*, as for the museum of Portici, which is attached to the palace. This museum, so often described, and so well worth describing, by those who can do justice to its merits, though now despoiled of its ancient bronzes, which are to be seen in the Musée Bourbon at Naples, still contains several hundred paintings, in fresco, taken from the ruins of Herculaneum, Pompeii, and Stabia. Though buried for eighteen hundred years, the colours of these antique paintings are wonderfully fresh. There was one that struck me particularly—it was a *Sappho*, her stilus pressed to her lip, and her tablets lying open before her. It probably decorated the cabinet of some learned lady of Pompeii; for many of the paintings still remaining

on their sites, were evidently appropriate to the rooms they decorated" (Morgan 1821, 96–103).

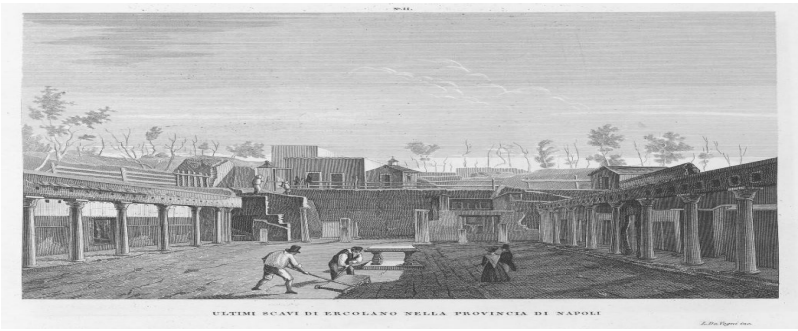
In 1821 was written one of the most interesting and little known descriptions of the Vesuvian town in the work *A tour through the southern provinces of the kingdom of Naples to which is subjoined a sketch of the immediate circumstances attending the late revolution,* by the British intellectual and traveller Richard Keppel Craven (Coombe Abbey 1779-Naples 1851). Following his mother, he moved to Naples and began travelling in the Italian Mezzogiorno, obviously visiting Portici among other Vesuvian places.

Although it's not very positive, the opinion expressed about Portici interrupts the tradition of the travel reports centred mainly on the story of the *Museum* and the Royal Palace. Craven's report, instead, focuses on the picturesque aspects of the place, whose main vocation to the beginning of the 19th century is the *villeggiatura*:

"A mile further is the town of Portici, containing another royal residence, through which the road passes; it was once celebrated for the museum originally established for the reception of all the objects found at Herculaneum and Pompeii: the greatest part of these are now removed to the magnificent national collection in Naples, known under the name of the Studii, or Museo Borbonico. Portici, and several adjoining villages, become, during the autumn, the resort of the rich and fashionable, and at that time present a scene of bustle and gaiety fully equal to those offered by the metropolis, especially on Thursday and Sunday, when the high road is thronged with carriages belonging to the families then resident at Portici, as well as those who come from Naples, distant only three miles. The way there is in fact one continued street, bordered with large well-built houses, misnamed, according to our ideas of country residences, casinos and villas; for they differ in nothing from those of the city, except in the view and the more or less extensive gardens attached to each. Several rich lawyers and merchants also take up their abode here during the *villeggiatura*; and the rigid observance of those ceremonious forms, which still keeps up a distinctive line of separation between these classes and the nobility, is here relaxed, and no doubt this circumstance contributes greatly to add variety and enjoyment to the social parties which seem to

constitute the principal charms of this country residence. Portici can scarcely boast any other; the situation is flat and dusty, the danger from the volcano almost imminent, and the air even painfully sultry during the summer months, owing to its vicinity to Vesuvius, but perhaps more attributable to the black sand upon which the town stands" (Craven 1821, 419–420).

Picture 4: Ultimi scavi di Ercolano nella provincia di Napoli



Source: Zuccagni Orlandini (1845).

Very significant also is the description, between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of Arthur Hamilton Norway (Bodmin 1859-Southsea 1938). In the work related to his journey, *Naples past and present,* published for the first time in 1901, the author leaves a surprisingly negative impression of Portici and the deserted Royal Palace, expressing instead more interest in the excavations of Herculaneum:

"The visitor who strolls to-day through the main street of Portici sees nothing but a continuation of the squalid life and poverty of building which have followed him continuously from the eastern quarters of the city. The mean aspect of the town is unexpected. One had not looked for any striving after the dream of classical beauty, once so frequent and so great upon the Campanian shore. But this was the chosen pleasure resort of the Bourbon kings; and some greater dignity might have been expected in the close neighborhood of a palace. The palace is there still. The noisy street runs through its courtyard. Poor deserted palace! It has lost its royalty of aspect, and for all one sees in passing by the discoloured walls and shuttered windows it might be any poverty-stricken crowded palazzo in Naples. But turn in beneath the archway on the right,

> and go by the large cool staircase, across the clanking stones, until you emerge into the hot spring sun again. There is a noble semicircular expanse, flanked on either hand by a terrace, adorned with busts and vases, and with stairs descending to the garden, which stretches down to a belt of pine trees, cut away a little in the centre to reveal that band of heavenly blue which is the sea. The young trees standing by the pine are in fresh leaf; the grass is full of poppies; white butterflies are skimming to and fro across it; all is silent and deserted. A bare-armed stable-boy comes out to train a skinny pony round the terrace. The stucco of the walls is peeling off; the long rows of windows are shuttered; the sentry boxes stand empty. It is forty years since any courtier came out to taste the evening freshness on this spot where Sir William Hamilton talked of the wonders of the buried cities so long and eagerly that he forgot to watch the wife and friend whose sins the world forbears to reckon when it remembers the beauty of the one and the valour and wisdom of the other. It is but a little way beyond the palace to the spot where the Prince d'Elboeuf is said, while sinking a well in the year 1709, to have chanced on things of which he did not know the meaning. This is one of the fables which demonstrates the extreme difficulty of speaking the truth, even about important and world-famous matters. Nothing is more certain than that the prince sank his "well" with the hope and intention of drawing up not water, but antiquities. The fact is, that in the year just mentioned he bought a country house, which stood near the site of the present railway station. It was perfectly well known that Herculaneum lay buried underneath Portici or Resina, and the prince began excavating of set purpose. It was mere chance which guided him to the spot where his first shaft came right down on the benches of the theatre, thus letting in to Herculaneum the first gleam of daylight which had entered there for more than sixteen centuries. Not much more than that stray glimmer has enlightened the old academic city even now; for none of the energy and learned patience lavished daily on Pompeii has been expended here" (Norway 1901, 28–31).

In the nineteenth century, to impressions and travel reports are added the convenient and practical information offered to tourists by printed guides, such as the German Baedecker and the English Murray and Cook, which testify to a different way of travelling, which changed also thanks to the birth of the railway, whose first section, Naples-Portici, was opened in 1839 (Gamboni and Neri 1987).

The guide *The handbook for travellers by Karl Baedecker,* so named by the German printers and booksellers who began publishing these guides in 1836, devotes little space in the first edition of 1867 of the volume dedicated to *Southern Italy and Sicily,* to Portici, giving only information about the railway station, the country-residences and the casino of the Prince of Elboeuf of Lorraine, inserting them in the wider and more detailed description of the itinerary of Vesuvius and Herculaneum (Baedecker 1867, 122–127).

At the end of the century, from the 1887 edition of the same handbook, however, Portici is mentioned as:

> "A town of 12,500 inhab., is also the station for Resina. It has a small harbor formed by a molo, from the end of which a fine view is obtained of the bay. The high-road from Naples to Salerno traverses the town, and also leads through the court of the palace built by Charles III in 1738. In the somewhat neglected park of the latter is now a school of agriculture" (Baedecker 1887, 115).

Picture 5: Il Palazzo Reale di Portici

Source: Gigante (1854).

Particularly interesting is the information related to the School of Agriculture, housed in the park of the Royal Palace.

The guide *A Handbook for travellers in Southern Italy*, published in London in 1868 by John Murray, offers, instead, a rather detailed description of Portici, focusing briefly on the Royal Palace, but also highlighting the panoramic peculiarity of the place, as the site of *villeggiatura* for Neapolitan middle class:

> "Portici is supposed to derive its name from the *Porticus Herculis,* mentioned by Petronius as a portico of a temple of Hercules at the W. end of Herculaneum. The road passes through the courtyard of the *Palace,* built by Charles III. Here were deposited the objects discovered at Pompeii and Herculaneum before their removal to Naples. The palace is only now remarkable for its beautiful situation at the head of the bay, all its furniture and objects of art having been lately removed, and the palace made over to the municipality of Naples. Portici as well as S. Iorio and Barra, during the spring and autumn, are a favourite resort of Neapolitans. From the Fort and Mole of *Granatello* on the seashore there is a fine view of the bay" (Murray 1868, 196).

The guide *Cook's tourist's handbook: Southern Italy,* published in 1875, briefly mentions the city in the description of the journey by rail to Pompeii, dwelling on the absence of the art treasures in the Royal Palace:

> "The road from Naples to Pompeii runs very near the railway, passing several places of interest as it rounds the foot of Vesuvius. We first reach Portici, with its palace beautifully situated. Its art treasures, etc., have been removed to Naples" (Cook 1875, 261).

From the analysis of Norway's report, as well as from the guides, it is obvious that, at the end of the nineteenth century, Portici, with the transfer of the *Museum* and with the end of the Bourbon dynasty and the achievement of *Unità d'Italia*, lost those characteristics of originality that attracted travellers, becoming, instead, almost exclusively a place of passage in the route from Naples to Herculaneum and Pompeii.

CONCLUSION

The sources of evidence examined are only a small part of the different and various descriptions concerning the Vesuvian town; however, they are the most important to understand how the place was actually seen and perceived by foreign travellers, giving an image, though in many cases too partial and limited, that is nevertheless fascinating.

Travel reports represent an important instrument of knowledge and contribute, with the works of local historians of the eighteenth century (Parrino 1700; Nocerino 1787; Celano 1792) and nineteenth century (Alvino 1845; Venditti 1880; Jori 1882; Rapolla 1891), to reconstruct a real and complete historical memory of the place.

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