

Wall map on 35 double-page engraved sheets.

NAPLES BECOMES A METROPOLIS

Mappa Topografica della Città di Napoli e de’ suoi Contorni.

Author
CARLETTI, Niccolò; and Giuseppe ALOJA

Publication date
1775.

Publisher

Publication place
Naples,

Physical description
Wall map on 35 double-page engraved sheets.

Dimensions
540 by 705mm (21.25 by 27.75 inches). If joined 2.70 by 5.30 meters.

Notes
In his ‘Lettera ad un amico’ (Letter to a friend) of 1750, Giovanni Carafa, Duca di Noja, had implored the municipal government of Naples to create a new map of the city “as the only way to render illustrious the sumptuous public works of our glorious monarch, which are the first fruits of the return of Naples to its ancient state of a metropolis”, Charles the Bourbon, otherwise known as the King of Naples and Sicily, Charles VII and V (1734-1759). Charles had instigated a landmark cadastral survey of the Kingdom, in 1740.

The municipality agreed with Carafa, and he and land-surveyor Antonio Francesco “Vanti” created a manuscript plan. However, the magnitude of the project and Carafa’s numerous other interests meant that when he died, in 1768, nothing very definitive had been achieved. Giovanni Pignatelli, Principe di Monteroduni, took on the commission. He employed local professor of architecture Niccolò Carletti to make revisions to Carafa and Vanti’s plan, and to compile the extensive annotated list of ancient and modern sites in and around Naples, which accompany it, the ‘Spiegazione storiografa…’.

Giuseppe Aloja was employed as sole engraver. In addition to the ‘Mappa topografica…’ itself, and the neo-classical decorations, a panoramic view of the coast from the Ponte della Maddalena in the east to the island of Ischia in the west, the ‘Veduta scenografica a ponente della Citta di Napoli in Campagna Felice’ appears. In it, a number of Naples’s most prominent landmarks are featured: the Albergo dei Poveri, Europe’s largest poorhouse; the Royal Residence at Capodimonte; the steeple of the Church of the Carmine; the cuppola of the cathedral; and its many castles and villas. The result conveys “a sense of extraordinary urban density, depicting extra-monumental Naples as a streetless mass of impenetrable structures,… an urban breadth” (Naddeo), synonymous with the idea of Naples as “metropolis”.

By the time the map was eventually published, twenty years after Carafa’s proposal, Charles the Bourbon had become King of Spain, as Charles III (1759-1788), bequeathing the duel crowns of Naples and Sicily to his son, Ferdinand IV and III. Nevertheless, and ignoring the son, the municipal government went ahead and dedicated the plan to Charles III: Fame, Mercury and Parthenope (the mythical founder of Naples) swoop down from heaven, bursting through the fabric of the map itself, bearing an ox hide with an encomium to Charles on it. The municipal government congratulate their own civic achievements in as high a fashion. In the upper right-hand corner putti also tear their way through the map, pulling it back to show an heraldic tree symbolizing the genealogy of both the civic parliament of the city of Naples and of the map itself.

Bibliography

Naddeo, ‘Topographies of Difference: Cartography of the City of Naples, 1627-1775’, 2004; Pane and Valerio (editors), ‘La citta di Napoli… piante e vedute dal XV al XIX secolo’, 1987, pp. 269-306.

Provenance

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