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SIEGE VIEWS AND THE GENIUS MILITANT IN VENICE AND THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES

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INTRODUCTION

Celebrations of military victories were highly popular from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, and were carried out in every conceivable technique and form of representation, including bronze, marble, wooden and silver reliefs, tapestries, ivory and bone engravings, wooden intarsia work, *scagliola* and wax. As Martha Pollak notes:

Siege views were part of the wider interest in the representation of the city in the Renaissance. The monumental city view and siege had been suggested as appropriate for the decoration of princely residences by Alberti and other early Renaissance humanists; the works of art produced to commemorate, for instance, the Battle of Pavia fulfill this recommendation, linking military representation to Renaissance practice of artistic representation and thus also to antiquity. This established fully the military panorama as a bona fide work of art.¹

This tradition continued until the baroque period. Reliefs were particularly common on commemorative monuments of military leaders and noblemen who had participated in the main European wars. Iconographic prototypes and models thus spread widely and reached not only educated and scientific circles of collectors, but also the military.

The main centres of production of such reliefs during the sixteenth century were in France and Spain.² This is evident not only in the great royal pantheons, most notably the abbey of Saint-Denis and the Escorial monastery, but also in the commemorative monuments of aristocratic families associated with the Habsburg dynasty. In the areas under Spanish influence the main uses of siege reliefs were tomb monuments. Their composition varied, but was frequently similar to altarpieces, as the Iberian clientele requested formal and iconographic characteristics reaching back to medieval tradition. In the iconography of such works secular themes often outweigh the sacred ones; what usually stands out is the glorification of the individual. In the seventeenth century relief maps were increasingly being incorporated, though their use remained a military prerogative.

In Italy the best known examples of this type are the monument to Don John of Austria in Messina (1572-73) and the monument to Alexander Farnese in Piacenza (1620-25). The former, a work by Andrea Calamecca, represents Don John, the half-brother of Philip II, trampling on the head of Ali Pasha. The pedestal has four bronze reliefs, depicting the disposition of the two fleets at the battle of Lepanto, the Turkish defeat, and the fleet anchoring in the port of Messina. It is a respectful homage to the victor of Lepanto, but also a self-celebration of the Sicilian city through the bird's-eye view. This view seems to repeat an iconography that was widespread in European atlases at the time, but it really is a unique document for the history of Messina, since it represents the city's morphology in the very year it was ordered.³ In Piacenza, bronze panels decorate the pedestal of the sculpture. One of these represents the attempt to destroy the bridge over the River Scheldt during Farnese's siege of Antwerp. Francesco Mochi was commissioned to represent Antwerp using descriptions and military drawings of the time. We can see rafts, sailing ships and forts. On the right there is the group led by Alexander Farnese, in a space of which one half is taken up by water and countryside with the city in the distance, and the other half by a clear sky.⁴

VENICE

Such personal celebrative reliefs became particularly popular in Venice and in Naples. A comparison of them in these two cities affords an understanding of the spread of these iconographic models and their assimilation in different political and cultural contexts. In Venice the most significant monuments are those that celebrate the *capitani da mar*.⁵ The intense political tensions in Europe encouraged the Republic to adopt a self-celebratory rhetoric, followed by laudatory propaganda of its main military heroes. The large number of literary and iconographic sources about these reliefs is indicative of the search for new means of representation and of the attempt to obtain closer ties between aristocratic and popular culture, while keeping the basic message understandable. The initiative of the monument's commission could either be taken by the protagonist itself, or by the government.

The commissions of these monuments reflect the concerns mentioned above. From the early seventeenth century the Venetian State tried to influence the city's sensibility. Between the 1650s and 1690s, the prototype of Jacopo Foscarini's monument in the Carmini church, in which the military leader's dignity is given special prominence, is taken up by such patrons as Alvise

Mocenigo (in San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti), Antonio Barbaro (in Santa Maria del Giglio) and Francesco Morosini (in San Vidal, only partially carried out). These works make full use of the Venetian baroque architectural vocabulary, which was principally used by families that attempted to climb the social ladder. Paradoxically, experimentation was more frequent in religious than in civic buildings, but visual programmes typically contained more secular than religious themes, and the most prominent one was individual glorification.

The composition of the Foscari monument in Santa Maria dei Carmini follows the style of Jacopo Sansovino, with representations of naval battles on the two sides of the pedestal.⁶ According to recent studies, Foscari himself requested to be named captain at the end of the sixteenth century, but it was his son who later, between 1618 and 1620, ordered the monument from Francesco Contarini.

The monument to Alvise Mocenigo in San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti is based on the idea of a triumphal arch.⁷ Giuseppe Sardi, a Venetian architect of Swiss origin, was responsible for the iconographic programme. Even if Mocenigo was aware of the importance of his deeds to the Republic, there is no mention of the Republic on his monument. In accordance with local custom there are four high-reliefs, which here represent the fortifications of Candia. These were known from descriptions and illustrations by Marco Boschini in *Regno tutto di Candia delineato*, published in Venice in 1651.⁸ In the middle is Mocenigo's portrait as he is watching the procession of the army, wearing ceremonial clothes. On the side there are two reliefs representing views of the battles of Candia and Paros. On Mocenigo's is the flagship *Galeazza*, the only overt reference to the Serenissima.

Antonio Barbaro required a more complex architectural celebration. He is one of the most popular characters of the Candia wars: the siege lasted twenty-two years, and ended in 1669 when Turkey conquered the island. Barbaro took advantage of the war to raise his own social and economical status. This culminated in the spectacular façade of Santa Maria del Giglio, the last and most emblematic example of baroque self-celebration in Venice.⁹ The façade, designed by Giuseppe Sardi, with input from Barbaro himself, was built between 1678 and 1681. In the lower order there are four niches with statues of the brothers of the captain, his own portrait being in the central compartment of the upper order. Pictures of naval battles and ships are above; below, in the mirrors of the bases of the half-columns, there are low-reliefs portraying scenes of the life of Antonio Barbaro, as well as planimetric views of the cities where he had political offices, namely Rome and five cities ruled by the Serenissima: Zara, Candia, Padua, Corfu, and Split.

NAPLES

In Naples, the tradition of sculpted representations of sieges is much older. It is connected to the Spanish world, and more specifically to the humanistic culture of the Aragonese court. The oldest recorded example is the double bronze door of Castel Nuovo, with its six relief panels, a work realized after 1465 by the French bronze caster Guglielmo Monaco together with Pietro di Martino.¹⁰ The war is described in three episodes, in the chronological order of the events. In the two upper panels there is the ambush laid to king Ferrante by his disloyal barons with the fortified cities of Teano and Calvi and the *extra moenia* church of Torricella. The lower part shows the capture of Accadia by the Aragonese army in 1462 (Fig. 1); the scene depicts with great realism how a bombard is piercing the towers and walls of the city. In the middle there is the conclusive battle of Troia, with the river Sannoro on one side and the walls, the embattled towers and the gate of the Apulian city on the other.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Naples was part of the Spanish realm, yet at the same it was far enough removed from the Habsburg court in Madrid to allow its local aristocracy to freely display its own magnificence.¹¹ Sculpted siege views are mainly found in the sepulchral monuments of Spanish viceroys of the Kingdom of Naples. To begin with, there are the works of Giovanni da Nola, who collaborated with Iberian artists.¹² The first one is the monument to Viceroy Ramón de Cardona at Bellpuig in Catalonia (c.1522),¹³ which has a war scene taking place in a marshland area, to commemorate his participation in the battle of



Figure 1. Guglielmo Monaco and Pietro di Martino, The capture of Accadia by Aragonese army in 1462, after 1465. Naples, detail of the bronze doors of Castel Nuovo.

Ravenna (1512) as the commander of the army of the League of Cambrai. There is also the monument to Viceroy Pedro de Toledo and his wife Maria Ossorio Pimentel, ordered from Giovanni da Nola and placed in the Church of San Giacomo in Naples by his son in 1570.¹⁴ On three sides of the pedestal there are low-reliefs representing the Viceroy going to Baia to fight against the corsair Barbarossa and setting him to flee, the Viceroy heading the delegation to welcome Charles V outside Porta Capuana, and the victory over Turkey at Otranto. In the first low-relief there is a view of Pozzuoli, which has recently been recognized as an important iconographic source on the fortifications in the Gulf of Pozzuoli.¹⁵

There is another interesting bronze panel preserved on a tomb monument in the Kingdom of Naples. In 1535, when the Emperor Charles V visited Seminara, he was received by Count Carlo Spinelli, who later distinguished himself as military leader in the Spanish army and was raised to the title of duke by Philip II.¹⁶ Spinelli's claim to fame is the foundation of the citadel of Palmi in 1564.¹⁷ It is noteworthy that two episodes, though distant in time by thirty years, are represented together in one of the four low-reliefs on the pedestal of Carlo Spinelli's monument prior to the Calabrian earthquake of 1783. The panel underlines the continuity in sculptural representations of fortified cities.

The wide circulation and popularity of cartographic views of major military events can be illustrated by two tomb monuments to Neapolitan military captains, Vincenzo Carafa and Carlo Spinelli, from the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁸ The 1603-11 monument to Vincenzo Carafa in the church of Santi Severino e Sossio in Naples can be attributed, for the sculptural part, to Geronimo d'Auria, one of the best pupils of Giovanni da Nola.¹⁹ It takes up almost completely the wall of the left transept. The structure is still based on sixteenth-century formulas: halfway between an altar and a stylised urn, in a temple-like shape with two pairs of columns that support the pediment.²⁰ Besides the columns six low-reliefs, by an anonymous artist close to d'Auria, represent the military campaigns in which Carafa took part: the siege of Malta (1565), the battle of Lepanto (1571), the conquest of Tunis (1573), the battle of Alcântara (1580), the siege of Antwerp (1584-85), and the battle of Fontaine Française (1595). The latter seems to be an ideal reconstruction based on written descriptions of the battle, since it is different from the print by Braun and Hogenberg which sets the event in open countryside.

As Carafa took part in the siege of Tunis, together with Don John of Austria, and in the siege of Antwerp, together with Alexander Farnese, it is interesting to compare their respective monuments. While the scenes on Don John's monument in Messina and on Farnese's equestrian monument in Piacenza aim to be celebrative, the battle scenes on Carafa's monument in Naples apparently have a different function: they seem to be in chronological order, like small votive panels, as if this were a token of gratitude for having had the opportunity to commemorate those moments, after an active and glorious life serving the Empire and the Catholic Church.

Such low-reliefs, with a Latin inscription commemorating the event, give representations an iconic meaning, while from the diversity of typologies it is clear that the sculptor used a large number of sources. The representation of the battle of Lepanto shows the well-known formation of the fleets of the Holy Alliance and the Ottoman Empire before the final engagement, as if it were a simple reproduction of an existing print.²¹ The perspective view of Tunis is clearly taken from the 1576 edition of Braun and Hogenberg's *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, but the representation was corrected in order to have a better contextualization of the event that occurred two years earlier. For this reason the view does not include the new fort erected by Don John of Austria after the conquest of the city.²² In the battle of Alcântara the troops are shown following the river and Lisbon facing the ocean with the naval fleets ready to attack. Behind the town walls, the part of the city that was later destroyed by the 1755 earthquake is recognizable.²³ The representation of Malta (Fig. 2) is derived from a fresco by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio of 1576 representing *Il soccorso piccolo al borgo di notte tempo a dì 5 luglio 1565*. This painting was engraved by the same artist in 1582, and again by Anton Francesco Lucini in 1631.²⁴



Figure 2. Anonymous artist from the circle of Geronimo d'Auria, *Laboranti Melitæ auxilium fert* (Siege of Malta, 1565), early seventeenth century. Naples, Santi Severino e Sossio.

The tomb monument to Carlo Spinelli dates from 1634. The sculpture by Giovan Marco Vitale was placed in the second chapel of the left transept of San Domenico Maggiore in Naples.²⁵ During the Thirty Years' War, Spinelli distinguished himself on many battlefields, from the Low Countries to Bohemia and Moravia, until his death in 1634.²⁶ He already commissioned his own tomb monument during his lifetime; it was erected after his death by his brother. Spinelli's tomb, in contrast to Carafa's, has a much more traditional plan, with two views on the front of the side pedestals, under statues of Hercules and Minerva, without any historical framework or representations of battles. The two city views, Breda and Prague, take inspiration from sixteenth-century

affairs, with details taken from Joris Hoefnagel's views from the 1572 edition of the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*. It is possible that the author of the reliefs was not the sculptor, and that the two artists were commissioned on different occasions. In these practices, the deceased individual is rescued from oblivion by immortalising the attributes that marked the triumphs of his life. Like Venice's *capitani da mar*, Vincenzo Carafa and Carlo Spinelli are typical representatives of the ancient Neapolitan aristocracy that found luck and glory on Europe's battlefields, at the service of Spain. Their portraits, associated with views of their heroic military feats, helped create the myth of the genius militant of Naples. This was eventually turned into a hagiographic celebration by Bishop Raffaele Maria Filamondo's *Genio bellicoso di Napoli*, published in 1694, at the end of the series of siege views discussed here.

Endnotes

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