

lak'schen Arms zur vatikanischen Gruppe erst nach einem halben Jahrhundert allgemein anerkannt.

Der Band kulminiert in zunehmend freien Rekonstruktionsvorschlägen. Große Farbtafeln zeigen das digitale Laokoon-Modell in einem fiktiven Innenraum bei Fackelschein, wie ihn schon Goethe in seinem Aufsatz von 1798 zur Beleuchtung empfohlen hat, sowie in zwei kolorierten Fassungen, bei denen die Schlangen zur besseren Unterscheidung verschiedenfarbig sind. Obwohl naturwissenschaftliche Befunde zur Polychromie fehlen, macht die Darstellung der Laokoon-Gruppe auf Sandboden unter freiem Himmel großen Eindruck (Abb. 4). Das Motiv fügt sich gut in den Trend zur rechnergestützten Visualisierung komplexer Befunde mit Popularisierungspotential ein. Das Pergamon-Panorama von Yadegar Asisi hat hier 2011 Maßstäbe gesetzt.

Zurückzuweisen ist die Annahme, erst die ‚verfälschende‘ Rekonstruktion der Frühen Neuzeit habe dem Laokoon seine Drastik genommen und ihn unter den Vorzeichen des Christentums rezipierbar gemacht (vgl. 37f.). Denn wie kaum ein anderes ‚Meisterwerk‘ verweigert sich die Gruppe einer eindeutigen Semantisierung – nicht zuletzt, weil sie ambivalente Formprinzipien in sich vereint. Vielmehr belegt die Existenz divergierender Deutungen ihren Klassiker-Status. Dabei ist die Laokoon-Forschung – wie das Beispiel Winkelmanns und Lessings zeigt – immer wieder auch ein Lehrstück selektiver Wahrnehmung.

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## The Genius loci of Naples reconsidered

Frank Fehrenbach and  
 Joris van Gastel (ed.)

**Nature and the Arts in Early  
 Modern Naples.** (Naturbilder/  
 Images of Nature, vol. 7).

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**T**he connections between nature and the arts in early modern Europe are the object of a multifaceted field of research; they have been explored by scholars in many ways and within different disciplines of the humanities. Sometimes, art is directly described in terms related to nature – one speaks of naturalistic painting, or praises a sculptor as practicing a

particularly natural way of artmaking; more interestingly, perhaps, the discussion is often “triangulated” through the addition of science to the equation. Scholars have frequently sought to compare scientific and artistic approaches to nature, initially mostly in rather abstract ways assuming some *Zeitgeist* common, say, to seventeenth-century artists and their contemporaries who launched what came to be known, somewhat reductively, as the Scientific Revolution. In recent times, though, the link is made more and more through concrete social networks and discursive structures; this research angle does not necessarily mean the absolute need to establish strict biographical links between artists and practitioners of science, but it does work via the implementation of complex and innovative sociological and epistemological models that seek to explain how different milieus of knowledge and of representation were enmeshed together in the fabric of early modern societies.

## NATURE AND ITS IMPACT ON SCIENCE

Naples has not been absent from these discussions, but it has always played second fiddle to Rome and Florence (and London and Paris), where such networks included more illustrious actors and are thus better studied. While the natural inquiries of savants active in the Parthenopean city, such as Giovan Battista della Porta, Tommaso Campanella, Ferrante Imperato and Nicola Antonio Stigliola, not to mention the nomadic but quintessentially Neapolitan Giordano Bruno, regain some prominence in recent scholarship, and their connections with the flourishing art scene in Naples begin to interest interdisciplinary studies, the field is still more or less nascent. In this context, any edited volume on the interrelationships between the arts, the sciences and nature in the city and the Viceroyalty would be a welcome addition to the existing scholarly literature. The book reviewed here, part of the excellent *Naturbilder/ Images of Nature* series of De Gruyter, is, however, a particularly rich and useful contribution to the field. This is due not only to the exceptional quality of the contributions, but also the originality of the book's concept.

The volume, essentially the proceedings of a 2015 conference, goes beyond the now-common interest in social networks, adding a further layer to the study of art's (and science's) interest in nature: the specific, local natural environment of Naples itself is at the centre of almost all the essays. Not only were the early modern artists and scientists studied here living in Naples or visiting it when they participated in a lively textual and pictorial discussion of nature, but the nature that they were observing was by no means abstract or universal: it was the concrete phenomena visible to, or otherwise experienced by, anyone physically present in Naples or nearby. Thus, the volume is principally about a specific sense of place, a *Genius loci*; about how where you are, and not only whom you know, influences your way of considering nature. The concrete natural environment, we are told, is a necessary trigger and complement to thinking about nature, experimentally and aesthetically. This focus has the supplementary

advantage of making the book a perfect companion to the armchair travellers we have all recently become: again and again, while reading the evocative descriptions of Naples and examining the sometimes spectacular images included in the volume, one's mind is pleasantly wandering to the magical, unforgettable city where little-changed nature and precariously preserved artefacts of early modern culture vie for our attention.

While the structure of the volume might seem at first somewhat random – there are no thematic sections nor an obvious chronological progression – one does end up discerning (or perhaps imagining) a logical order. Some of the chapters (those by Harald Hendrix and Maria Toscano most explicitly) develop a narrative – in itself rather conventional in the history of ideas of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries – according to which (proto-)scientific observation has gradually replaced, in the period's inquisitive minds studying Naples, the literary traditions hitherto serving as a stable basis on which to explore nature. In an interesting *mise-en-abyme*, the book itself seems to follow the same evolution, beginning with two articles centred on literary figures, Iacopo Sannazaro and Virgil, then exploring ways of seeing gradually more and more “emancipated” from the powerful heritage of Antiquity and humanism, and approaching modern ideas of “science”. This is not to say, however, that the authors, as a collective, uncritically follow the heroic narrative where the sciences become ever more powerful and the arts have no choice but to follow the new observational and experimental ways of studying nature: while this metanarrative is indeed present here, it is also repeatedly and usefully questioned, sometimes with the help of relevant twentieth-century critical theory (Walter Benjamin is an important reference in some of the essays) not that common in studies on early modern Naples.

## THE LITERARY HERITAGE

The first two essays, then, are not interested in nature *per se*, if such a thing even exists, but in nature always-already mediated by poetic texts and by the mythology surrounding these texts'

authors. Carlo Vecce, in a brief chapter, reads Sannazaro's *Arcadia* and is interested in particular in how the nature represented in the pastoral work both is and is not the real-life surroundings of Naples. Sannazaro and his Golden Age imagery are present in the next essay, too, but Joana Barreto goes further back in time to the formidable figure of Virgil, supposedly buried in Naples, and to the multiple layers of mediation making the great poet of Roman Antiquity a useful currency in the development of Neapolitan identity. While Barreto declares from the outset her interest in the "scientific, astrological, mythological and *in fine* political exploitation" (7) of the Virgilian legend in the city, it is indeed the latter aspect that always has the last word; all the other fields are no more than roundabout ways aiming to recruit Virgil for the political ends of the Aragon sovereigns. It is a fascinating study in the usefulness, or exploitable potential, of Antique heritage, and more generally of texts from a distant past, in attempts to gain control over an unstable political environment.

Barreto's is also, incidentally, the sole chapter in French in this quadrilingual book (six essays, as well as the introduction, are in English; four are in Italian and two in German). Such linguistic diversity is presently a relatively common choice in edited volumes on early modern art, particularly those published in the German *Sprachraum* or in Italy, and it has obvious advantages (idiomatic writing by authors, many of whom express their thoughts in their first language or in their best foreign language; resistance to the pervasive dominance of English in academia and beyond; flexibility in quoting source materials in their original languages) as well as drawbacks. The major downside is, of course, that such linguistic *varietas* limits the number of readers who can peruse the volume as a whole rather than just this or that article. The language(s) we use in art history, or in the humanities in general, are an important issue to which we should perhaps pay more attention; a good starting point for this much-needed debate is the recently published (and trilingual) *Art History before English: Negotiating a European Lingua Franca from Vasari to the Present*

(ed. by Robert Brennan, C. Oliver O'Donnell, Marco M. Mascolo and Alessandro Nova, Rome 2021), but one could say that any book opting for linguistic multiplicity, like the one under review here, is implicitly an important statement on the question.

To go back to Naples and to the rich (and indeed multilingual!) literary heritage at the basis of the consideration of its natural environment, the essay by Harald Hendrix is perfectly placed after Vecce's and Barreto's as it discusses most explicitly "how in the course of the sixteenth century the way people looked at Naples and its surroundings changed fundamentally [...] from a predominantly deductive mentality based on previous notions, mainly bookish ones, towards a much more inductive attitude based on observations and enquiries" (25). As happens often when such shifts are described, the case studies reveal a somewhat messier chronology than the one stated at the outset, though the complexity, while nuancing the validity of the essay's main thrust, does not in any way make the chapter less illuminating – especially given the veritably curious episode at its centre, the volcanically-induced emergence, in 1538, of a *Monte Nuovo* near Pozzuoli. Texts and images, direct testimonies or later reconstructions, are convincingly used by Hendrix to trace the changing views on natural events from the 1540s onwards.

The next two essays analyse two descriptive corpuses representing Naples, but differ both in chronological scope and in the discussed medium. Christof Thoenes examines cartographic documents and *vedute* from three centuries, and pays special attention to the all-important question of the point of view – towards the sea, from the sea, bird's eye – and to the iconographic elements adding cultural information, as well as ornamentation, to the more and more detailed maps. Sabina de Cavi's object is textual and more narrowly circumscribed: she proposes a detailed account of the *Diario di un viaggio a Napoli* written by Monsignor Giovan Battista Confalonieri in

1616. It is a rich document, and although the essay does not venture much beyond a descriptive summary, it is highly instructive. Its last part, on the notion of *thesaurus* and its usage both for ecclesiastic objects and for the marvels of nature collected by *studiosi*, is particularly thought-provoking.

### WATER AND VOLCANIC FIRE

Of the four traditional elements of nature, water and (volcanic) fire are especially prominent in the Neapolitan environment and consequently in the city's image, both in the minds of its inhabitants and as considered by foreign visitors. It comes as no surprise, then, that the pair of antagonistic elements is well represented in *Nature and the Arts in Early Modern Naples*. The omnipresence of water in this emblematic seaport is discussed in the essays by the volume's two editors, most explicitly in Frank Fehrenbach's detailed study of a few Neapolitan seventeenth-century fountains, where refreshing water almost literally gushes forth in the middle of the book. Fehrenbach, who previously published a book-length account of the famous Roman *Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi* and *Fontana di Trevi* (*Compendia Mundi: Gianlorenzo Berninis Fontana Dei Quattro Fiumi, 1648–51, und Nicola Salvis Fontana Di Trevi, 1732–62*, Munich/Berlin 2008), examines here fountains that are much less well-known and more rarely studied, not least because many of them have disappeared, have been vastly modified or else moved to new sites where their original meaning has been inevitably obscured. Indeed, using archival materials, Fehrenbach goes here well beyond the iconography of the solid components of the fountains and considers the complex relation between stone and water, frame and viewpoint, text and image, city and sea, as expressed in these often-misunderstood monuments. Water infiltrates the volume more subtly in Joris van Gastel's "Porous Baroque", where the spongy porosity of Naples, and thus the inherent "Baroqueness" of the city (even before the Baroque period properly speaking) is demonstrated through the case of the *Palazzo Donn'Anna*, again an edifice significantly

transformed since its seventeenth-century construction. Taking his cue from Walter Benjamin's and Asja Lâcis' fabulous descriptions, van Gastel understands the palace, situated right on the seashore where water and land constantly interpenetrate each other, not only as a compelling metaphor for the amphibian city of Naples, but also as a highlight of the latter's (quintessentially Baroque) theatrical nature.

As for fire, the Vesuvius, menacingly looming over Naples and concretely devastating parts of its surroundings a few times during the period studied here, inevitably occupies pride of place in the volume. The three essays constituting this spectacular *Vesuviana* make clear how deep the volcanic phenomenon penetrated Neapolitan spirits and sometimes emerged in unexpected places. Damian Dombrowski's "Bronzegüsse und Lavaströme" ingeniously explores an aspect of material art history – attention to which is a rising trend in a discipline traditionally privileging form over matter. The chapter specifically shows how the volcanic presence and activity around Naples created an accrued sensitivity to "lebendige Materie" (117) in the early seventeenth century, and, moreover, how the role played by Saint Gennaro in saving the city from the wrath of Vesuvius was expressed in the choice of bronze for statues representing the popular patron saint.

Sean Cocco's essay here is one of numerous texts that are a small-scale sequel to a seminal book their author had previously published on a related subject. In Cocco's case, his 2013 *Watching Vesuvius: A History of Science and Culture in Early Modern Italy* is supplemented in this volume by a concise account of various representations of the volcano, dormant or active, as participating in a broader "historical ecology". The tension between formal permanence and unpredictable, destabilizing eruptions is a prominent feature of such a narrative, moreover constantly hovering between art and (geological) science in the four centuries outlined here. Maria Toscano, following Cocco's chapter, analyses, again through the example of the erupting Vesuvius, the interrelations between scientific texts and the illustrations accompanying

them, and more specifically the division of labour between, and the shifting fortunes of, artistic draughtsmen, authors of natural histories and specialized scientific illustrators. Placing Toscano's essay at the end of the volume also appropriately bookends the narrative described above, as it traces, somewhat similarly to Hendrix but in a later period, a process in which "le istanze estetiche [in naturalistic publications] cedevano progressivamente il passo all'esigenza scientifica di adesione alla realtà" (236).

### STILL LIFE PAINTING, MAGNETISM, GEOPOLITICS OF EXPLOITATION

Finally, three essays in this volume are exceptional in that they do not discuss any concrete natural features of the Neapolitan area itself. One of these is Nicholas Napoli's, an excrescence of sorts of his excellent monographic study, *The Ethics of Ornament in Early Modern Naples: Fashioning the Certosa di San Martino* (Farnham 2015). A detail of Cosimo Fanzago's celebrated ensemble, a floral-motive marble revetment, triggers a brief but rich survey of flower arrangements in Neapolitan still lifes, and in particular the dialectic relations, in this genre, between images and their frames. Magnetism, like flowers a natural phenomenon not specifically characteristic of Naples, is at the centre of Sergius Koderà's intriguing discussion of magnetic dynamics in the work of Giovan Battista della Porta. Through a schematic reading of *Sorella*, one of the scholar's rarely studied theatrical plays, Koderà reveals the magnetic tropes (pole reversals, for example) underlying the complicated twists and turns of the amorous relationships between the play's characters. The concept of magnetic power travels freely and imaginatively between science and art – the different, but interconnected fields of Della Porta's activity – and between the inorganic and the all-too-human emotional spheres.

Helen Hills, for her part, presents one of the highlights of the book precisely because instead of taking for granted the concept of "nature", she questions its elusive meanings. Moreover, by linking the ambiguities of both "nature" and "art" to the colonial networks of which Naples was an

important part, Hills ultimately problematizes the idea of "Naples" itself, a highly useful caveat to the whole volume. Instead of looking at the Bay of Naples, the Vesuvius or other local sites, Hills traces the tortuous journey of American silver transformed in the Parthenopean Viceroyalty into excessive, ostentatious objects, particularly reliquaries. She reminds us that in early modern Europe, not least in territories governed by Spain, the local and the global intermingle and that too much emphasis on one of the two poles may result in a skewed portrait, concealing and obfuscating important geopolitical and economic aspects of past realities. While in no way invalidating the rest of the volume's interest in the particularities of the Neapolitan region immediately visible within and from the city, Hills' contribution recognizes that no city is an island, entire of itself (which is true even for cities that are, literally speaking, islands). Naples is a piece not only of the European continent, but of a huge intercontinental network of commerce and exchange, exploitation and violence. The local dramas and idiosyncrasies so competently described in the rest of the volume are put in salutary perspective by Hills' essay, hidden in plain sight in the very middle of the collection.

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