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**"Archaeological Espionage and the Urgency to Publish Images of the Early Discoveries of Herculaneum and the Bay of Naples"**

The 1738 discovery of the remains of an ancient theater at the bottom of a well shaft near Portici was the beginning of a nearly century-long effort by the Kings of Naples to treat an archaeological find as a state secret and an exclusive privilege to enhance the prestige of the local academy.

The finds from 1738 to 1750 included fine sculpture, wall paintings, clay and metalwork household objects, glass vessels and the stone foundations of large public buildings. The portable objects were removed from the site to a royal summerhouse at Portici, which became the first impromptu museum of Herculaneum. The excavation site was difficult to work and the cost of the project was high. Neapolitan scholars convinced the King that the finds were of such importance that they deserved an exclusive right to publish these treasures. The logic was that an erudite and lavishly illustrated publication would reflect prestige upon the crown.

The means of guaranteeing this exclusivity was to restrict access to Herculaneum and Portici. Recognizing that some access was necessary to guarantee that knowledge of the find and its importance was spread meant that visitors would be received but restricted, banning the use of pencil and paper during visits. In effect, then, the site was open for one-time appointments. Visitors could carry away their impressions but no notes or drawings. The Neapolitan academy also moved at a ponderous pace to fulfill its obligation to publish. After more than a decade, nothing had appeared in print, and indeed, nothing would for another three decades.

Naturally, curiosity about the finds was intense among the small but growing community of enlightenment intellectuals – virtually a nascent core of art and architectural historians – and art professionals whose appetites were being stirred by the reports of travelers and the early works of the circle around Giovanni Battista Piranesi.

One particularly daring group of travelers from France, in the entourage of the future marquis de Marigny, spent several months in Naples in 1750-51. The party consisted of Abel-François Poisson de Vandières, future marquis de Marigny and director designate of the French royal buildings administration; his artistic mentor, Charles-Nicolas Cochin the Younger, an engraver and member of the Royal Academy of Art; Jérôme-Charles Bellicard, an architecture student at the French Academy in Rome and already one of the band of French engravers working with Piranesi; and the abbé Jean-Bernard Le Blanc, a critic and writer. Because of Marigny's privileged status – as both a royal official and as the younger brother of Madame de Pompadour – the party was headquartered at the residence of the French ambassador in Naples. The ambassador's secretary was Guillaume-Marie d'Arthenay, an associate member of the Neapolitan academy, a vulcanologist and amateur of antiquities.

The companions of Monsieur de Vandières became familiars in the social, court, and intellectual circles in Naples; visited all of the sites both modern and ancient; and formed an extensive network of friendships. Naturally they made their visits to Herculaneum and to Portici. Clandestinely, Bellicard and Cochin wrote a book on the antiquities of Herculaneum and the Bay of Naples. Bellicard's surviving notebook is the best evidence of the premeditation of the project. By means that have never been

discovered, Bellicard drew precise plans of the overall excavation sites as well as detailed depictions of dozens of frescoes, sculptures, and small vessels. Not all of this could have been accomplished from memory, even with repeated visits -- the group likely found someone working on site who would smuggle site plans to them.

The result was an unauthorized but highly successful publication by Cochin and Bellicard, the *Observations on the Recent Discoveries at Herculaneum...*, the first book to publish images of the architectural plans of the theater and forum at Herculaneum and of the Portici collections as well as images of almost all of the major Roman sites on the north side of the Bay of Naples.

The Cochin and Bellicard publication made Naples increasingly a destination for Grand Tourists. The pace of publication increased with Ottavio Antonio Bayardi, *Catalogo degli Antichi Monumenti Dissotterrati dalla Scoperta Città di Ercolano*, (2 parts in 4 vols, Naples 1755-1765) which came to constitute the first two volumes of the official Neapolitan publication under the title *Delle Antichità di Ercolano (Vols 1 & 2)*. The crescendo of publication of the antiquities of the Kingdom of Naples came with the French publication by the abbé de Saint-Non (using a team including Dominique-Vivant Denon, Hubert Robert, Jean-Honoré Fragonard and four architects doing the surveys and measurements); Swinburn's partially plagiarized account of Sicily and ultimately the Neapolitan Academy's belated but monumental illustrated series Pasquale Carcani, ed., *Delle Antichità di Ercolano* (vols. 3-7, Naples, 1757-1792).