Southern Italy through Capodimonte collections: *The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database*

Michela Perrotta
Università degli Studi della Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli"

The *Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database*[1] project was created to gather and present images made by artists, travelers, mapmakers, historians, and architects of the medieval and early modern monuments and cities of southern Italy. The website includes historical paintings, drawings, prints, ground plans, and photographs of the monuments created between c. 1100 to 1450 from American, Italian and European collections[2]. The main goal is not to create exhaustive entries for monuments or sites, but rather to provide a digital archive of visual documentation of the cultural heritage of the Kingdom of Naples and a research tool.

Each entry in the database is structured in two fields, *Images* and *Works*.

The *Images* section includes an overview of each historical image, notes on its provenance, patron(s), and the collection to which it now belongs. In addition, each entry includes information on the creation date, materials, technique, a transcription of any inscriptions on the image, selected bibliography, and a low-resolution reproduction of the image.

The *Works* section includes an overview of the monument or site, notes on its construction history and current conditions, its geo-location, selected bibliography, and a low-resolution image.

The development of the database began in 2008, when Caroline Bruzelius, along with William Tronzo, conceived the idea of creating a tool for retracing the history of southern Italy through representations of its medieval cities and monuments. The staff of Duke University's instructional technology team helped design the database in 2011, and Paola Vitolo was appointed Project Manager. After a decade of development and growth, a process that included fruitful collaborations with researchers and scholars throughout Europe and the United States, the Duke team invited the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History to join the enterprise. The O'Donnell Institute is located at the University of Texas at Dallas as well as at the Center for the Art and Architectural History of Port Cities "La Capraia", both founded in 2018 as a partnership between the Institute and the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte in Naples. It is currently directed by Sarah K. Kozlowski.

In 2023, the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History took over the administration of the database (Fig. 1). The Institute is currently redesigning the website, as well as adding

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[1] https://koseodiah.org/.

[2] For a more detailed overview of the database and a partial list of the already explored collections, see Caroline Bruzelius — Paola Vitolo, *The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database,* in: *The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database. A Tribute to Caroline Bruzelius,* edited by P. Vitolo, Roma: Viella, 2022, p. 186-206.
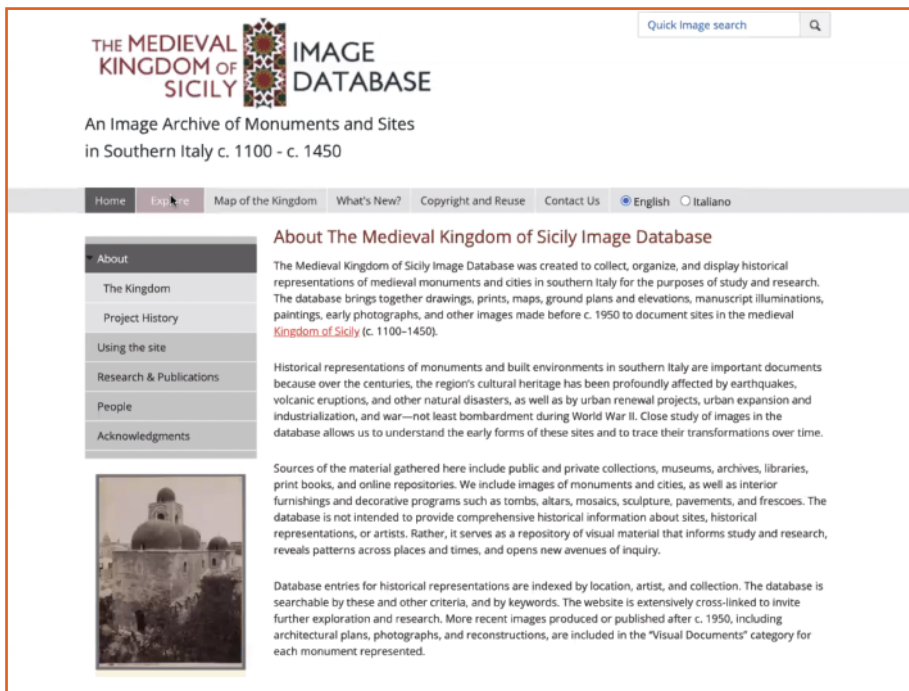
Figura 1. *Homepage of The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database, The Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History*

new images to the database and managing the *Medieval Kingdom of Sicily* Instagram page[3].

The activities and vitality that characterized *The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database* project in the past have led to the creation of a Spring 2023 Research Residency at the Center for the Art and Architectural History of Port Cities "La Capraia", in collaboration with the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte and the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History. I have had the good fortune to have been selected as the first occupant of this Research Residency.

This new research initiative has focused on two collections at the Museo di Capodimonte: the Astarita collection in the Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, which mainly features the drawings of Giacinto Gigante, and a 19th-century ceramic service produced by the Ginori manufactory. Painted ceramics represent a new addition to the over 9,000 historical images featured in the database. The cataloguing project allowed the team to cultivate deeper collaborations with key institutions in Naples, such as the Museo di Capodimonte.

The Marquis Carlo Ginori founded his porcelain factory in Doccia, near Florence, in 1735. Even though production only started in 1737, the firm soon became one of the most renowned in Europe. Ginori, in fact, gained a monopoly on ceramic manufacturing in the Austrian-ruled Grand Duchy of Tuscany after exporting his products to Vienna. The table service kept at Capodimonte includes 366 pieces made in the first quarter of the 19th century, as a result of a commission by Elisa Bonaparte Baciocchi, Napoleon's sister. Views of Naples, Rome and

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[3] https://instagram.com/medieval.kosid/.

Florence are the main subject of the porcelain service but, for the scope of the database, I focused exclusively on the depictions of Naples and other southern cities. Some views are quite generic and occasionally characterized by imaginary constructions made up by the artist, who frequently placed them among ancient ruins, probably to give a sense of antiquity to the service.

While working on the Ginori service, I came across an interesting group of plates featuring various views of Lake Agnano (Fig. 2)[4]. This lake occupied the crater of an extinct volcano and, since it was a hostile and marshy area and a breeding ground for disease, it was drained in 1870. The draining of a lake constitutes a major alteration of the landscape, even though there are no monuments or noteworthy constructions involved. These images gave rise to the idea of adding a new category to the database that concerns how human interventions have transformed the landscapes of South Italy.

On the other hand, artists of the Neapolitan School of Posillipo provide another important demonstration of how southern *vedute* were conceived in the 19th century. Sketches by Giacinto Gigante and other exponents of

Figura 2. *Ginori manufactory, Lago di Agnano, 1810-1825, painted and gilded porcelain, ⌀ 23,2 cm (inv. no. OA 1099). Courtesy Ministero della Cultura, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte*

[4] The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database, The Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History, <https://koseodiah.org/>, entry #190036.

the School of Posillipo are now part of the Astarita collection, which encompasses more than 400 watercolors and drawings in pencil and pen gathered by the collector Angelo Astarita and donated by his brother Mario to the Museo di Capodimonte in 1970.

The wonderful drawings by Giacinto Gigante show how he experimented with a variety of techniques and materials, ranging from watercolor to pen or pencil drawing with white lead on brown, ivory, or white paper. At the same time, Gigante remained faithful to reality, almost as if he were a historiographer of landmarks and views of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

During my period as a research fellow, cataloguing Gigante's sketches almost felt like navigating through a memoir of his career and achievements. Some drawings are signed and dated by the artist himself, while others give an insight into his relationships with the Russian aristocracy, from whom Gigante received commissions. The Astarita collection also includes watercolors intended for important figures, such as one with a view of the Gulf of Naples from the Certosa di San Martino[5]. This sketch was made for the Empress of Russia, Charlotte of Prussia, as written by the artist at the bottom of the paper: *dipinto all'acquarello per S.M. l'Imperatrice di Russia*.

The inscription[6] of another watercolor, depicting Gaeta and its bay, further demonstrates Giacinto's connections with noble patrons[7]. He stated that he painted the view after the death of Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies, and sent the drawing to the Archduchess Maria Theresa in Vienna. Gigante also specified the date, July 1850, a year before he became the drawing teacher of Ferdinand's daughters (Fig. 3).

Figura 3. *Giacinto Gigante, Paesaggio Napoletano, 1850, brown paper and watercolor, 28,6 × 50,2 cm (inv. no. GDS 1948). Courtesy Ministero della Cultura, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte*

[5] The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database, The Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History, <https://koseodiah.org/>, entry #190069.

[6] *Questo dipinto io feci quando fui condotto dal defunto Ferdinando secondo, per fare dei disegni che furono poi mandati a Vienna – All'Arciduchessa Maria Teresa e ciò fu un anno prima che fossi stato chiamato per le lezzioni delle Reali Principesse e ciò fu in Luglio 1850.*

[7] The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database, The Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History, <https://koseodiah.org/>, entry #190077.

The ongoing cataloguing process leads us to wonder what is the best approach to enriching a database of images from several collections. The Research Residency at La Capraia was based on systematically searching specific areas of Museo di Capodimonte collections, comprising works on paper, paintings, and decorative arts. Mining a collection allows us to thoroughly analyze the collection itself, in such a way that relevant images can be taken into account and added to the database. At the same time, this method enables us to identify views of little-known or underrepresented sites or monuments, and unpublished images that might be useful in reconstructing the history of southern Italy.

At the same time, working on specific monuments or sites makes it possible to give an overview of the evolution of those sites along the centuries. This approach to cataloguing is useful for focusing not only on the famous monuments of South Italy, but also on major events that deeply affected the area. It allows us to shed light on a single region or city, as well as to offer a visual story of a territory in a defined period.

Both methods are valid for expanding the database, especially in relation to the purpose of the website. *The Medieval Kingdom of Sicily Image Database* presents itself as a comprehensive collection of images, with the intention of constituting a starting point for new research in the field of the history of art and, more widely, the history of southern Italy from the 12th to the mid-15th century.

L'ultima consultazione dei siti web è avvenuta nel mese di dicembre 2023