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A History of the Real Museo Borbonico

Andrea Milanese

Introduction

The Real Museo Borbonico (today the Museo Archeologico Nazionale) in Naples (fig. 2.1) is one of the oldest museums in Europe.¹ It was created in 1777 through the unification of two preexisting museums—thus its roots go back even further, to the middle of the eighteenth century. By the beginning of the nineteenth century its rich collections had made it one of the most visited, talked about, and illustrated museums in Europe, and there is no doubt that its fame was decisive in making Naples one of the most important ports of call on the Grand Tour.

The history of the Real Museo Borbonico, even more than that of contemporary institutions elsewhere in Europe, can be read as the story of a great laboratory. Within this structure, with greater or lesser awareness and employing solutions that did not always prove to be satisfactory, experts sought ways of overcoming problems and fulfilling requirements that in some cases had arisen for the first time in the history of museums and archaeology in the West. These efforts must be seen in the light not only of the museum's groundbreaking nature and the uniqueness of its collections but also of the broad scope of the functions that, right from its creation, it was called upon to fulfill. I shall therefore single out the elements that show how the museum acted as a laboratory where experiments were undertaken, particularly with regard to layout and restoration.

The Real Museo Borbonico can be understood only if we bear in mind that the institution that came into existence in Naples in the second half of the eighteenth century was not simply a great royal museum. It was a structure embracing various different organisms, with the purpose not only of exhibiting (and conserving) the royal collections but also of managing the entire artistic and archaeological heritage of the Kingdom of Naples. To adopt modern terminology, we can speak of a “system of safeguarding,”² a system in which different institutions were set up to work alongside one another. It was no coincidence that they were located in the same building, and at times even placed under the direction of the same person. These institutions carried out (or at least tried to) a coordinated activity, within a specific legislative framework. In this sense, too, we can say that the Kingdom of Naples represented one of the most important and venerable laboratories in modern Europe for developing a concerted approach to safeguarding artistic heritage.



FIGURE 2.1. Drawing by Achille Vianelli (Italian, 1803–1894), lithograph by Francesco Wenzel (Italian, act. early nineteenth century), *Edifizio de’ Reali Musei di Antichità e belle arti*. From *Napoli e i luoghi celebri delle sue vicinanze* (Naples, 1845), vol. 2, opposite p. 111.



The Origins of the Real Museo Borbonico

So back to the year 1777. For a little over forty years Naples had been the capital of a kingdom that had regained its independence after two centuries of rule by viceroys (mainly Spanish but also Austrian). The kingdom was governed by the Neapolitan Bourbon family, closely related to the Bourbons who were ruling in Spain. In these years the monarchy could count on the support of the majority of the intellectual class. Culturally, Naples was a lively city, participating in the spirit of the Enlightenment that reigned in many other European capitals. In 1780 one of the leading Neapolitan exponents of the Enlightenment, Gaetano Filangieri, published the first two volumes of his *Scienza della legislazione*, which immediately became widely known, were extensively translated, and served as a point of reference for Benjamin Franklin, among others. The city was home to a number of prestigious cultural institutions, such as the university (one of the oldest in Europe), various academies (including the Accademia di Disegno, which trained future artists), and the Teatro San Carlo opera house (Naples was one of the capitals of music making in Europe). In addition, the city had two famous royal museums that brought the ruling family great prestige in the eyes of other European courts: the Museo Farnesiano di Capodimonte and the Herculaneum Museum at Portici. In 1777 the young king Ferdinand IV (fig. 2.2) decided to bring them together, creating a single centralized museum for the capital. This represented a major advance in terms of museum organization and brought into existence the Real Museo Borbonico.

What were the characteristics of the two preexisting museums, and what was at stake in their unification? Both had been inaugurated during the 1750s by Ferdinand's father, Charles VII, who had been the first monarch of the Neapolitan Bourbon dynasty. Although the collections differed in nature and origins, the museums had an important feature in common: both were located inside royal residences. This made them direct expressions of the king's will, as well as his private property (though the latter description is ambiguous, since in an absolute regime the concepts of king and state come close to coinciding). Of course, anyone wishing to visit either of these museums needed to obtain a permit from the king, but this was rarely denied, and the museums were seen by many intellectuals, artists, aristocrats, and illustrious Grand Tourists.

The Museo Farnesiano di Capodimonte had been created to house the collections that Charles VII inherited from his mother, Elizabeth Farnese, now queen of Spain. It was also a political project—one Elizabeth shared—to ensure that the new Kingdom of Naples should have a capital worthy of its standing. The rich collections of the Farnese family, of which Elizabeth was the last descendant, had until then been divided up among the family palaces and gardens in Rome and Parma; they constituted one of the largest private museums in Europe during the Renaissance and Baroque ages. Particularly famous were the Greek and Roman marble



FIGURE 2.2. Installation view of the marble sculpture of Ferdinand IV as Minerva (inv. 10833), by Antonio Canova (Italian, 1757–1822), in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. The statue was commissioned in 1800 and completed in 1816. It was set up in the alcove on the main staircase of the Real Museo Borbonico. On the unification of Italy it was removed from view, but was returned to the spot in 1997.

sculptures and the gems and coins, as well as the highly prized picture collection. All these collections, as well as the fine Farnese library, were brought to Naples soon after Charles ascended the throne, in 1734, with the exception of the sculptures, which were transported from Rome only fifty years later. From the end of the 1750s the collections were laid out in a specially designated wing of the Royal Palace of Capodimonte, which Charles had begun to build in 1738.

The Herculaneum Museum, inaugurated in 1758, owed its existence to the excavations of Herculaneum (begun in 1738) and Pompeii (begun in 1748). It occupied a specially converted wing of another of Charles's palaces, in Portici, about twenty miles from the capital, on the lower slopes of Mount Vesuvius looking out over the Bay of Naples—a spot where Charles went hunting. Over the next thirty years this museum became famous throughout Europe. Johann Joachim Winckelmann visited it on two occasions, in 1758 and 1762. Writing in 1765, Jérôme Lalande described it as the richest and most interesting museum to be seen in Italy, adding that nothing in Europe came near it,³ and in 1787 Goethe called it “the alpha and omega of all collections of antiquities.”⁴ Here it was strictly prohibited to make drawings of the objects on display, which was a constant source of irritation to visitors, who were obliged to commit everything to memory. The museum illustrated everyday life in ancient times through a vast and unprecedented range of art objects (such as wall paintings, which had never previously been found in such quantities, and bronzes, including those from the Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum, which achieved immediate fame) as well as items of daily use (such as the remains of textiles and foodstuffs). This wealth of objects was laid out in the museum's fifteen rooms, organized primarily by typology and class, in a display that was constantly changing as newly unearthed objects were brought in. The museum truly provided visitors with the physical reality of antiquity: one need think only of the imprint of a woman's breast, found in the Villa of Diomedes at Pompeii, that aroused an outcry at the time of its discovery.⁵

The museum was the venue for some of the most significant advances in museographical practice in Europe. Take, for example, the pedagogically modern idea of reconstructing a kitchen from Pompeii, presented in room 7 of the museum. The very link between archaeological dig and museum exemplified how excavation, documentation, drawing, restoring, and display of the objects were closely related. The museum had its own foundry, where the bronzes were restored, and workshops for restoring the marble sculptures and the mosaic flooring that was removed from the ancient houses and re-created inside the museum.

The Herculaneum Museum was linked primarily, but not exclusively, to the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii. The people employed in the museum and on-site were also required to take charge of finds from other parts of the Kingdom of Naples: from Pozzuoli, Baiae, Paestum, and Capua, and also from as far afield as Abruzzo and Calabria. The Kingdom of Naples

was particularly rich in evidence of previous civilizations, whether Greek or Roman, and the king was aware of this extraordinary treasure trove and the risks of allowing it to be casually dispersed abroad. From as early as 1755, Charles introduced a law intended to monitor and regulate all exports of art objects and antiquities. This law did not prohibit engaging in commerce with foreign buyers, but it imposed the obligation of applying for permission to export and having the artworks inspected by a commission of experts (a painter, a sculptor, and an antiquarian).

In 1785 a first set of regulations concerning excavations in the kingdom was introduced, prescribing that private individuals needed to apply for permission to dig. Also in this year the post of superintendent of excavations in the kingdom was created. From 1807 this position was combined with that of director of the Real Museo in Naples—tangible proof of the close relationship between museum and excavations that had been inherited from the Herculaneum Museum, and that had now been officially extended to all the archaeological sites in the kingdom. This precocious link between museum and excavations was not exclusive to Naples. It was to be a key, and perhaps defining, element in the tradition of cultural safeguarding in Italy, where museums have always had a more or less symbiotic relationship with their surroundings, whether these are archaeological digs or churches and palaces.

The First Phase of Organizing the Museum, 1777–1806

When Ferdinand IV decided, in 1777, to bring together on a single site all his collections of art and antiquities, the choice of venue was the Palazzo degli Studi, a seventeenth-century building situated in the heart of the city that had housed the Naples university and that needed to be restored and considerably enlarged (fig. 2.3).⁶ For Ferdinand's idea was not limited to creating a new royal museum from the collections of the two museums discussed above, as well as the more than one thousand Farnese marbles then still scattered about Rome. His project was more ambitious. Room also had to be found for the Real Biblioteca Borbonica, the Accademia di Disegno, the Real Società Borbonica (comprising three academic bodies, one of them the Real Accademia Ercolanese di Archeologia), the Laboratorio delle Pietre Dure (a royal manufactory that Charles VII had copied from its famous counterpart in Florence), and the various restoration laboratories that had formed part of the museum in Portici. As we learn from a blueprint drawn up by the court painter Jacob Philipp Hackert, all the collections were to be open to the public—an important innovation, matched by the fact that the venue was not a royal residence.

Work on refurbishing the Palazzo degli Studi began in 1778, overseen by the Roman architect Ferdinando Fuga, soon to be replaced by Pompeo Schiantarelli. All the numerous plans that were submitted envisaged doubling the volume of the building. Unfortunately, the following two decades were a time of political upheaval in Europe, with events that affected the court in Naples



FIGURE 2.3. Louis Jean Desprez (French, 1743–1804), *Antiquities Found at Herculaneum Being Transported to the Naples Museum*, ca. 1782. Pen and black ink and watercolor, 22 × 35.8 cm (8⁵/₈ × 14 in.). London, British Museum (inv. 1864,1210.502). The work is a print study for Jean Claude Richard de Saint-Non, *Voyage pittoresque; ou, Description des royaumes de Naples et de Sicile*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1782), pl. 2, no. 95.

(the queen, Maria Carolina, was the sister of Marie-Antoinette), and the building project had to be drastically reduced. A second floor was added (though not finished), but the total space was never in fact doubled. When Ferdinand fled from Naples to Palermo in 1799, the year of the Parthenopean Republic, the only institutions to have been moved into the Palazzo degli Studi were the Real Biblioteca Borbonica and the Accademia di Disegno (under its director, Wilhelm Tischbein, traveling companion to Goethe, who was enthusiastic at the prospect of teaching his students in front of the celebrated monumental Farnese Hercules). Building work was still going on while material coming from both Portici and Capodimonte was beginning to accumulate in a disorderly fashion within. In fact, it was not the Bourbon court but the French rulers, Napoléon's close relatives, who began to organize the museum layout over the next few years.

In this early phase of the history of the Naples museum, the nature and scope of the project bear emphasizing. What was being created was a genuine palace of culture, not in a royal residence but in a specially designated venue. With the incorporation of the Accademia di Disegno, the museum was designed to be part of the system of artistic education: a school-cum-museum, in a juxtaposition typical of Enlightenment thinking. Bringing the collections together made it possible to exhibit the entire range of artistic culture, from Greek and Roman antiquity to the painting and applied arts of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. The aim that was at the origin of all Europe's major royal museums—a royal or aristocratic household's achieving prestige by accumulating and displaying objects of rare antiquity and high artistic merit—was now increasingly yielding to a cultural policy clearly linked to the Enlightenment principle whereby the duties of a monarch—still absolute, certainly, but also “enlightened”—included contributing to civilization and progress in society. As the abbé de Saint-Non remarked, the new institution in Naples represented “a proper homage rendered by one Nation and in an enlightened century to the fine arts that have been passed down to us, their splendor giving new luster to Italy and to modern Europe.”⁷

The well-intentioned king conceded his private collections of art and antiquities for the use and instruction of his subjects (who were still not “citizens”), but the concession was *not* a gift to the nation. Even at his most enlightened, Ferdinand remained an absolute monarch, and as such he kept not only the museum but also the archaeological sites of Pompeii and Herculaneum as his private property. They did not count even as property of the Crown—and here we have one of the most startling contradictions of the Museo Borbonico, which persisted until 1860.

A further contradiction can be seen in the disparity between the scope of the project and the limitations of the venue, whose size, as mentioned above, was never doubled as intended. The lack of space—one has only to think of the constant influx of finds, particularly from Pompeii—tended to suffocate the museum right from its opening and remained a constant problem.

It hampered the realization of some interesting projects for exhibiting objects, and a century later was to lead to the splitting up of what had been intended as a cohesive whole.

The Second Phase: Innovations in the “French Decade,” 1806–1815

With the French conquest in 1806, when first Joseph Bonaparte (fig. 2.4), brother of Napoléon, and then Napoléon’s brother-in-law Joachim Murat ascended the throne of Naples, a new phase began for the royal museum. At the beginning of this “French decade,” which lasted until 1815, the building still looked like a disorderly warehouse for art objects, no more or less than a museum in the process of being laid out. Worse still, it was lacking much of its contents, since whatever was precious and small enough to transport had been shipped off to Palermo, where Ferdinand had taken refuge.



The Layout of the Museum

In this period there were at least three significant innovations concerning the museum and the system of safeguarding. First, the layout of the museum was completed. A number of rooms were opened to the public, with specific visiting times. As we have seen, public access had been the intention of the Bourbon dynasty, and it is a strange twist of history that it should have been accomplished, in about 1808, by the French rulers. After all, some sixteen years earlier it had been the French who, in nationalizing the royal collections and opening them to all citizens, created the first great public museum in the modern sense of the term, one belonging to the nation, when the *Muséum français* (as the *Musée du Louvre* was then known) opened its doors in 1793.⁸

Great prominence was given in Naples to the *Museo delle Statue* (the marble statues had remained in Naples on account of their size). This collection occupied three porticoes, a large open-air courtyard, and a long succession of rooms on the ground floor. Not only could the Naples museum boast of numerous and representative examples of this category of objects; it was also the museum that best lent itself to the drawing of parallels between ancient and modern art, an exercise typical of the Neoclassical spirit then in vogue in French-ruled Naples. Every effort was made to put the sculptures on display to greatest advantage as soon as possible. No fewer than three projects for their exhibition were commissioned (from two of the museum architects and jointly from the set designer at the *Teatro San Carlo* and the sculpture professor at the *Accademia di Disegno*), and on certain points the authorities sought the opinion of the greatest living sculptor, Antonio Canova. None of the projects presented was based on a chronological arrangement, and this was in line with contemporary practice. No major collection of marble statues that had been formed over the previous decades was ordered in such a way. The knowledge scholars then possessed was based almost exclusively on Winckelmann’s historical

FIGURE 2.4. Jean Baptiste Joseph Wicar (French, 1762–1834), *Joseph Bonaparte*, 1808. Oil on canvas, 230 × 176 cm (90½ × 69¼ in.). Musée national du château de Versailles (inv. MV5136). Joseph, king of Naples from 1806 to 1808, holds a plan of the *Palazzo degli Studi*, whose facade can be seen in the background.

approach, which, though it had laid the foundations for a history of ancient art, lacked the data and expertise to be truly systematic. Moreover, it was one thing to classify works in art-historical terms, another to arrange museum collections. Museums are bound to be short of some types of objects and to have too many of others. The sculptures that were then to be found in European museums, and those in Naples especially—almost all of them Roman copies and reelaborations of Greek models—are still difficult to date with any precision today, and doing so would have been even more problematic before the great excavation campaigns in Greece and the Near East. Thus the criterion for display that was proposed and subsequently adopted was primarily iconographic (works were grouped according to subject), frequently mixed with merely decorative considerations, abiding by the rules of symmetry and a well-proportioned distribution.

Indeed, iconography and decorative considerations were the two most common criteria adopted in the leading museums of the age: in the Townley Gallery at the British Museum, also in 1808, where the decorative approach prevailed; in the Museo Pio-Clementino, in Rome, which had just been laid out by the archaeologists Giovanni Battista Visconti and his son Ennio Quirino; and in the Musée Napoléon (as the Louvre was called from 1803 to 1815), in Paris. In the Naples museum the iconographic criterion prevailed, in galleries “degli Imperatori,” “delle Divinità,” “delle Veneri,” and “delle Muse.” In other galleries, however, it proved impossible to find a single coherent theme (for example, the Portico de’ Miscellanei). Here the only criterion of installation was often to place the most important object in a central position, so that the room took its name from the object in question (the Vestibolo di Ercole, the Sala dell’Ermafrodito).

In at least two of the projects for the layout of the marble statues, pride of place was given to the Cortile delle Statue, a genuine portal to the collection that had a venerable pedigree stretching back, as we know from the Villa dei Papiri, to Roman times. In the project drawn up by the architect Francesco Maresca, there was a courtyard-cum-garden with many Romantic touches: with studied disorder, sculptural and architectural fragments, basins, and sarcophagi were placed around the flowerbeds. More Romantic still (in fact, almost Gothic in style), and clearly inspired by a garden featuring ruins, was the courtyard envisaged by the set designer Domenico Chelli and the sculptor Heinrich Schweickle. For one corner of their courtyard-cum-garden they proposed a sort of reconstructed graveyard, with “plants of lugubrious foliage” and four reassembled ancient tombs, surrounded by gravestones and stelae and a scattering of sarcophagi. Such a scene inevitably invites comparison with some of the sepulchral paintings then being produced by that most Romantic of German artists, Caspar David Friedrich, but even more patently we can recognize elements that must have come from the Musée des monuments français, in Paris, designed by Alexandre Lenoir and opened to the public in 1793. Its garden, called the *Élysée*, had been laid out with the same Romantic taste for the poetry of churchyards (fig. 2.5).⁹ However, at



FIGURE 2.5. Hubert Robert (French, 1733–1808), *The Élysée of the Musée des monuments français*, 1803. Oil on canvas, 37 × 45.8 cm (14⁹/₁₆ × 18¹/₁₆ in.). Paris, Musée Carnavalet (inv. P1750)

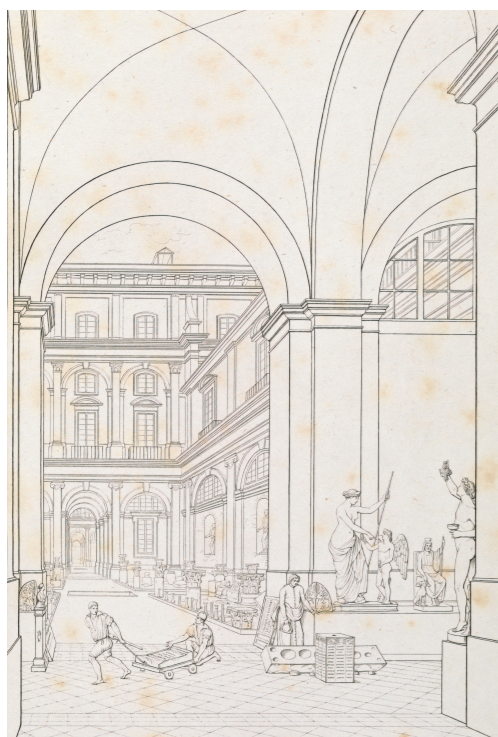


FIGURE 2.6. View of the western courtyard of the Real Museo Borbonico. From *Real Museo Borbonico*, vol. 2 (Naples, 1824), frontis.

the Naples museum neither of these projects was adopted, and eventually the courtyard was laid out according to a more rational approach, with the museum's numerous architectural fragments displayed in an orderly arrangement (fig. 2.6). Some engravings dating from a few years later give us an idea of the exhibition of the marble sculptures in the Naples museum in the years from 1806 to 1810 (fig. 2.7). The other collections laid out and on view in these years were the picture gallery (then arranged according to a fundamentally decorative criterion), the Italo-Greek vases (fig. 2.8), the ancient glass objects, and the papyrus scrolls.

The Creation of the Real Museo e Soprintendenza agli Scavi del Regno

The second important initiative in Naples was the official creation of the administrative structure known as the Real Museo e Soprintendenza agli Scavi del Regno. Once again the groundwork had been laid during the Bourbon reign, but the organizational structure came into being only in 1807, under the direction of Michele Arditi (1746–1838), a member of the Accademia Ercolanese. It is interesting to note that, alongside a small number of curators and architects who worked in close collaboration with the director, there was a significant number of artist-restorers, which remained more or less constant throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Outnumbering any other category of personnel, they made it possible for the various restoration workshops in the Real Museo to function; the workshops dealt with paintings, marble sculptures, bronze sculptures and all metal objects, Greek vases, and mosaic floors. Those employed in the last workshop were responsible for placing and conserving in the various rooms of the museum—numbering, in 1820, no fewer than fifteen—the flooring or fragments of flooring in mosaic or opus sectile that had been removed from houses in Pompeii and Herculaneum (and elsewhere) and that had in some cases already been mounted in the Herculaneum Museum. This was a way not only to exhibit ancient artifacts but to recall, or re-create, the ancient decorative contexts within the museum.

In addition to the restoration workshops there was a singular workshop devoted to producing cork models of buildings and of other architectural features. These models were one of the distinctive achievements of the Real Museo, and within a few years a specific section was created to feature them, testifying to a particular interest in documenting ancient architecture.

Legislation

The third significant innovation in the decade of French domination in the Kingdom of Naples was in the legislative sphere. In 1807 and 1808 new regulations were drawn up concerning excavations and exports of art and antiquities. To oversee the latter the Commissione di Antichità e Belle Arti was set up, working closely with the museum and presided over by its director. The



FIGURE 2.7. Drawing by D. Ferrara, engraving by Giac. Morghen, *Statue in marmo, Portico de' due Balbi*. From Achille Morelli, *Musée royal Bourbon: Vues et descriptions des galeries* (Naples, 1835), pl. 11. The Portico de' due Balbi was also known as Portico delle Divinità.



FIGURE 2.8. New Room at the Royal Museum at Naples. From *The Illustrated London News*, June 10, 1854

legislation thus sanctioned the regular involvement of the Real Museo in controlling the flourishing market in art and antiquities. At the same time, of course, the museum was also an actor in the market, since it, too, made purchases in order to increase its collections (for many years the majority of purchases were of paintings and Greek vases—the two categories of works most commonly exported from the kingdom). Nonetheless, I would suggest that it was a project that was never put into practice that most deserves to be recalled from these years. This was a proposal for a law drawn up by the museum's director, Arditì, that had implications for the history of the modern museum, and is highly indicative of how the Naples museum was conceived at that time.

True to the Enlightenment spirit, Arditì believed that in the long run the best way to check the illicit excavating and commerce that went on throughout the provinces of the kingdom was to rely on education and the formation of a discerning taste. To this end, in 1808 he proposed the creation of a network of provincial museums, one in each of the main cities throughout the kingdom.¹⁰ These museums would serve to instill in the population a love for the local heritage and the wish to conserve and collect antiquities. Moreover, these satellite museums surrounding the museum in Naples would make it possible to strengthen the relationship between the center and the periphery. The museum in Naples would occasionally benefit by acquiring some of the most valuable objects found in the provinces. Arditì's proposal shows clearly that the museum in Naples was now intended to be not simply "universal" (as in the eighteenth-century projects) but also national, representing the history of the Neapolitan nation. As Arditì put it in 1820: "Our Nation, being the heir of Magna Graecia, is the envy of all the great powers; and this is why we should do everything possible to proceed in this direction that can make us great."¹¹

The Third Phase, 1815–1828

With the Bourbon Restoration, in 1815, we come to the last phase in the protracted formation of the museum (from 1816, officially the Real Museo Borbonico). The return to Naples of Ferdinand, and above all the return, in 1817, of the objects that the king had shipped off to Palermo, made it possible to exhibit all the collections that had been intended for the royal museum. This became a reality within a decade. By 1828 the Museo Borbonico had taken on its definitive form and was fully functional. Between 1817 and 1819 four new collections had been laid out: on the ground floor, the Portico delle Statue di Bronzo (next to the Museo delle Statue, described above); and on the first floor, the Gabinetto degli Oggetti Preziosi, the Gabinetto degli Oggetti Osceni, and the Galleria dei Bronzi Minuti. The names indicate that the underlying criteria for classification and exhibition were material, technique of manufacture, typology, and function.

The ancient bronzes in general—both the sculptures and the household implements—were a unique feature of this museum, since no other possessed them in such numbers or variety. The

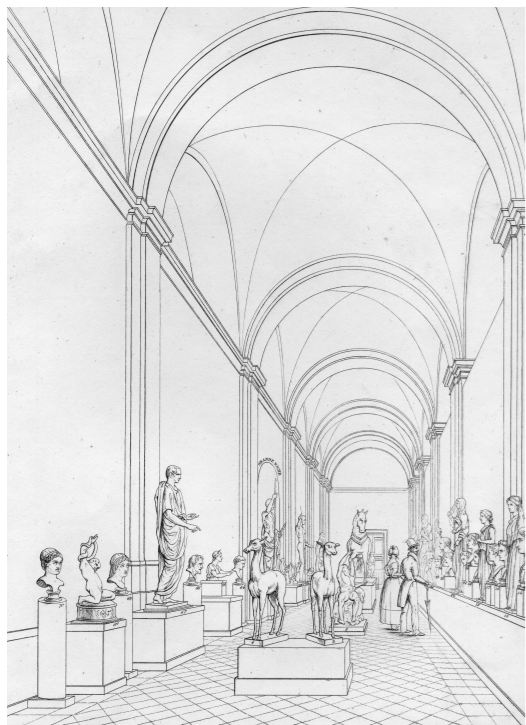


FIGURE 2.9. Drawing by J. Monetti, engraving by Jac. Morghen, *Statue di bronzo*. From Achille Morelli, *Musée royal Bourbon: Vues et descriptions des galeries* (Naples, 1835), pl. 17

museum's statues and busts in bronze were displayed in a long gallery (fig. 2.9), with no consideration either for chronology or provenience. The bronzes from the Villa dei Papiri would surely have gained from being presented as a separate group, not least since they had constituted a collection in ancient times. But one can hardly expect to find an interest in provenience, or its concrete reflection in museum layout, in museums in the mid-nineteenth century, when the chief emphasis was on the reconstruction of typological or chronological series. A detailed study of the Villa dei Papiri and the original arrangement of the sculptures was attempted only toward the end of the century (by Domenico Comparetti and Giulio De Petra), and this did not have consequences for their display until the early years of the twentieth century, in the case of the bronzes (it was not until 1973 that all the various materials found in the Villa dei Papiri were finally exhibited together). However, this should not be taken to mean that archaeologists in the nineteenth century, or indeed in the eighteenth, paid no attention to context. After all, in about 1750 the Swiss engineer Karl Weber was diligent in noting down on his plan of the Villa dei Papiri the findspots of many sculptures. In the same years the highly regarded Italian antiquarian Scipione Maffei declared that if everything were left exactly where it was, Pompeii would be the most interesting museum in the world.¹² In October 1765 the prime minister, Bernardo Tanucci, advocated leaving all the decorations of the Temple of Isis in situ, but a month later was obliged to change his mind when King Charles decided that all the paintings should be removed from the walls and conserved in the museum (and his prudence was soon vindicated by an unusual phenomenon—a snowstorm).¹³ To give one final illustration, in 1850 Giuseppe Fiorelli published the old excavation journals from Pompeii, knowing that the information they contained was worth conserving, even though he gave little heed to provenience when he came to reorganize the museum in Naples a few years later.¹⁴ The problem is that history, undoubtedly in the fields of taste and museums, has its own laws and its own rhythms. Far from being linear, it proceeds in an ambiguous, contradictory manner, full of shades of meaning, and this is all the more so when problems are being encountered for the first time.

The “*bronzi minuti*” (small bronzes), which occupied several rooms on the second floor, were amply represented in the museum. These were chiefly household items from the Vesuvian cities, but there were also objects from funerary contexts further afield, and they were all organized according to typology and function. The *Gabinetto degli Oggetti Osceni*, another exhibit unique to Naples, owed its existence to the puritanical spirit of the heir to the throne, the Duke of Calabria. The section contained over one hundred objects, in a variety of materials and across a wide chronological range, featuring erotic subject matter. Only adult males were entitled to visit it, armed with a specific permit from the relevant minister (it was nonetheless one of the most sought-after features in the museum, as is demonstrated by the huge number of requests

for permits from Grand Tourists from all over Europe preserved in the Archivio di Stato in Naples).¹⁵ The Gabinetto degli Oggetti Preziosi, a genuine *Wunderkammer*, contained all manner of precious objects: gold, silver, gemstones, crystals, and ivories from different periods, as well as natural rarities and organic remains and foodstuffs found during excavations at Pompeii. A few years later, in a gesture toward a chronological arrangement, all the objects dating from modern times were taken out, to form a Gabinetto degli Oggetti del '500.

The year 1821 saw the inauguration of the Galleria di Oggetti Egiziani, and the next year, the Gabinetto degli Oggetti Etruschi—both were among the first such galleries anywhere in Europe. They were made possible by the recent purchase of the Museo Borgiano, a splendid collection assembled in the eighteenth century in Velletri, south of Rome, by Cardinal Stefano Borgia, which Joachim Murat had been determined to buy in 1814, though the acquisition went through only the following year, when Ferdinand was back on the throne. Thanks to these two collections, Arditì could begin to map out an overall chronology for the museum—from the Egyptian and Etruscan collections through those of Greece and Rome, to medieval and modern times. Within these periods the different groups of objects broadly represented the main stages in the historical development of the various Western artistic civilizations. The Egyptian and Etruscan objects constituted the first links in this “chain of the arts,”¹⁶ as Arditì put it. Contemporary museum practice was indeed to attempt to display the “progress” of the ancient artistic civilizations, just as, within the space of a couple decades, the natural sciences would try to demonstrate the evolutionary chain of living beings.

In 1827 and 1828 the last two major collections opened to visitors: the celebrated Pompeian wall paintings (which had remained in the museum in Portici) and the inscriptions. The wall paintings were displayed on the ground floor, organized according to an iconographic criterion involving a hierarchy that went from paintings of figures to landscapes (fig. 2.10). The inscriptions were arranged according to language and subject matter. One of the many projects that were submitted but not implemented for the display of the inscriptions called for them to be incorporated in a garden on the hill of Santa Teresa, immediately behind the museum, where there was an ancient Greek necropolis that had been only partially excavated in previous years. In 1823 the suggestion was made to complete the excavation and include it in the tour of the museum, which would offer a suitably sepulchral setting for the funerary inscriptions in the Romantic style (reminiscent of the earlier plans for the Cortile delle Statue). Certainly this would have been an artificial construct, but the proposal, presented jointly by the director of the museum and Antonio Niccolini, the director of the Accademia di Belle Arti, did have a genuine and conscious didactic intent, linking the many vases on display in the museum to a typical provenience, namely a necropolis.



FIGURE 2.10. Drawing by Achille Morelli, engraving by F. Morghen, *Pitture antiche*. From Achille Morelli, *Musée royal Bourbon: Vues et descriptions des galeries* (Naples, 1835), pl. 8

We know of various other projects from these and subsequent years, some of which became reality. There were of course a number of installation improvements made (such as the new tables for the gems that could be raised to reveal the stones' transparency, and numerous rotating bases that allowed sculptures to be viewed in the round).¹⁷ In just a few cases the display of an entire collection was reorganized, and there had to be changes to make room for new acquisitions, which continued to pour in from the Vesuvian sites, and through purchases on the local market, and from further afield in the kingdom. There also continued to be proposals for reform: one particularly interesting suggestion was put forward by the constitutional government of 1848, according to which the museum was to host the university chairs in the history of art and in archaeology. But in practice the museum remained as we have seen it in about 1828 until 1860, when with the unification of Italy and the fall of the Bourbons it was to change its name and become the Museo Nazionale.

Restorations at the Real Museo Borbonico

I have referred to the Real Museo Borbonico as a “laboratory,” and highlighted some experimental features in its history. We also find experimentation in the story of the restorations carried out in the museum. It is a subject that requires more work before any definitive conclusions can be drawn, but I end by offering a few insights into this practice. We have seen that from 1807 the Naples museum had a well-developed sector dealing with restoration, comprising five laboratories and numerous employees. These were all artists, mostly painters and sculptors, true to the contemporary idea of restoration. But from the outset one can detect divergent approaches within the museum, with some progressive standpoints existing alongside others that were more traditional or simply in step with the times. This is the case with the Pompeian wall paintings.¹⁸ Whereas the restoration of all the other classes of objects adhered to a criterion that was traditionally integrative and mimetic, for the paintings we find an advanced attitude right from the start (that is, from the second half of the eighteenth century). The criterion here was not to introduce even the slightest integration, and this orientation is borne out in the engravings of the paintings that were published as they came to light. These reproductions faithfully indicated all the parts of the painting that were missing. There are factors that account for this special treatment, since the paintings were unique and particularly famous, having never been found elsewhere in such quantity. Nonetheless, this approach was remarkably bold and modern.

For all the other classes of objects, the practice was the contrary, at least until 1818. In the case of the vases, for example, the school of restoration in Naples was considered unmatched anywhere else in Europe for its mimetic and integrative skill (above all in painting). In February 1817, Arditì spoke with similar pride about the expertise of his restorers of bronzes—Giacomo



FIGURE 2.11. Attic terracotta black-figure amphora with Peleus and Thetis, attributed to the Red-Line Painter, 530–510 B.C. H. 47.5 cm (18⁵/₈ in.), Diam. (body) 30.5 cm (12 in.). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (inv. 81178). This example of *mezzo restauro* was almost certainly carried out by Raffaele Gargiulo.

Ceci, Raffaele Gargiulo, and Raffaele Trapani—in imitating the ancient patina on the bronze sculptures to perfection.¹⁹ The following year the situation changed radically. A royal decree dated January 15, 1818, prohibited any integrative restoration for all classes of ancient objects.²⁰ The premise of this decree, formulated by the Accademia Ercolanese, was advanced for the times. The new law stated that restorations were an obstacle to the correct interpretation of the objects (in making it impossible to distinguish what was original from modern integrations). One cannot help wondering whether the reason for this about-face may not have been that the “perfection” attained by the Neapolitan restorations had come to be seen as excessive. Already in 1813 the antiquarian James Millingen had spoken of “dangerous perfection,”²¹ at least in the restoration of vases; the danger was for science first and foremost, but there was also probably some anxiety about the number of fakes that must have been circulating on the market.

The 1818 decree led to an immediate and total suspension of restorations, leaving the various laboratories, for vases and bronzes but also for marble sculptures, standing idle. This hiatus continued for three and a half years. Restoration work began again at the end of 1821, but now it had to abide by strict new rules. In practice, however, during at least the next twenty years we see that different methods coexisted, and at times the choices made seem to have fluctuated enormously. After all, in the fields of method and taste, innovations cannot be introduced by decree.

We know of several cases in which Greek vases restored without pictorial integrations in 1822 were reconsidered ten years later and subjected to the so-called complete restoration—that is, with the painting completely integrated. Gradually, a third solution began to gain currency. This was known as *mezzo restauro* (half restoration) and consisted of a pictorial recomposition of the missing parts of the vase, leaving the integrations visible on close inspection (fig. 2.11). This was a happy compromise between the satisfaction of the eye, or taste, and the more recent demand for safeguarding scientific data. This new solution is documented in Naples in the late 1820s and early 1830s, both in the museum and in private collections. In the meantime, Raffaele Gargiulo, undoubtedly the most important figure in the history of restoration at the Real Museo, had invented a glue for use on vases that was officially adopted by the museum.²²

Bronze Restorations

In the restoration of bronzes, too, opinions and practice fluctuated, and the situation was, if anything, even more complex. The 1818 decree prohibited restoration of bronze sculptures because this almost inevitably led to the loss of the ancient patina, which the decree cited as the sole guarantee of authenticity. Thus it would seem that in the case of bronzes even the mere recomposition of a broken object was “dangerous.” Following the suspension of all restoration, what had been turned out of the door found its way back in through the window. The museum employees

managed to obtain a modification to the decree, applicable to bronzes. A new regulation, of September 3, 1821, laid down that bronzes that were found whole in the excavations were merely to have the soil cleaned off.²³ Those whose handles had come off were to be treated, but without in any way affecting the ancient patina; and bronzes that were badly ruined could be restored and repatinated, but only with the supervision of a special commission for the restoration of bronzes, made up of the museum director, two members of the Accademia Ercolanese, an artist from the Accademia di Belle Arti, and two restorers: Raffaele Trapani (ca. 1700–after 1854), responsible for bronzes, and Raffaele Gargiulo (1785–after 1870), responsible for vases. And this was the procedure adopted over the next few years.

This was not, however, the end of the experiments or of the quest for new methods. In 1838, Gargiulo developed a new method for restoring bronzes that were particularly damaged and oxidized. From archival documents we know that this method was applied to some pieces from Ruvo, in Puglia. These were two pectorals and two headguards for horses, from the Ficco and Cervone collection, recently purchased in Ruvo (figs. 2.12–2.14), and two cuirasses and a helmet, from the recent royal excavations (figs. 2.15–2.17).²⁴ They were in such a fragmentary state and so badly deteriorated that restoration seemed impossible, but this master restorer had both the means and the ability to tackle such a project. Gargiulo had a profound knowledge of ancient materials and techniques. He had started out as a restorer of vases—and earned an excellent international reputation—but he had also worked with bronzes (in 1845 he restored the



FIGURE 2.12. Detail of a case in the Stanza delle armi in bronzo, with bronze horse pectorals and headguards from Ruvo, 1890–1900. Alinari 19070. Naples, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Archivio Fotografico



FIGURE 2.13. Bronze horse pectoral from Ruvo, 6th century B.C. 130 × 20 cm (51³/₁₆ × 7¹⁴/₁₆ in.). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (inv. 5715). The photograph was taken just before restoration in 1996.



FIGURE 2.14. Bronze horse pectoral from Ruvo (fig. 2.13), after restoration in 1996, during which all the nineteenth-century integrations were removed.



FIGURE 2.15. Detail of a case in the Stanza delle armi in bronzo, with one of the bronze cuirasses (fig. 2.16) from Ruvo, 1890–1900. Alinari 19071. Naples, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Archivio Fotografico



FIGURE 2.16. Bronze cuirass with head of Athena from Ruvo, 5th century B.C. 41 × 27 cm (16¹/₈ × 10¹⁰/₁₆ in.). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (inv. 5735). This cuirass has been cleaned since Gargiulo's restoration.

sculptures presented by Ferdinand II, king of the Two Sicilies, to Nicholas I, czar of Russia) and with Egyptian mummies (we know he worked on some in 1823). Surely it is another indication of his interest in the latest techniques that he was the first Neapolitan to appear in a daguerreotype. He was the maker of highly regarded reproductions of vases and bronzes, and also the author of various publications, including two well-known guides to the museum. Last but not least, he was a celebrated dealer in antiquities—perhaps the most respected figure in the field in the 1820s and 1830s—with a vast international clientele. A dealer who was also a senior employee of the Real Museo Borbonico, which was charged with monitoring and regulating the market—there you have another teasing contradiction of the museum. All things considered, Gargiulo must have been a man of many parts.

The method Gargiulo developed to restore the bronzes from Ruvo, which has yet to be properly analyzed (his restoration of at least one of the objects is still intact, see fig. 2.17), consisted fundamentally in consolidating the metal by causing an adhesive substance of his own invention to “penetrate,” as he put it, into the most badly corroded parts. He never revealed the composition of this substance, referring to it as “mastiche” or “glutine” (fig. 2.18). Presumably he used the same substance for more minor integrations. Then there was his personal patina, which was famous for its resemblance to the original patinas. The bronzes seemed to have been brought back to life. Certainly the result pleased both the king and the interior minister, Nicola Santangelo, who in addition to having a large private museum of his own was Gargiulo's protector. From what we can learn from the archives, this project seems to have been Gargiulo's last invention in the field of restoration, and brings to a fitting end the series of experiments we have tried to illustrate.



FIGURE 2.17. Bronze cuirass from Ruvo, 4th century B.C. 36.5 × 28.5 cm (14⁹/₁₆ × 11¹/₄ in.). Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale (inv. 5696). This cuirass appears to not have undergone any interventions since Gargiulo's.

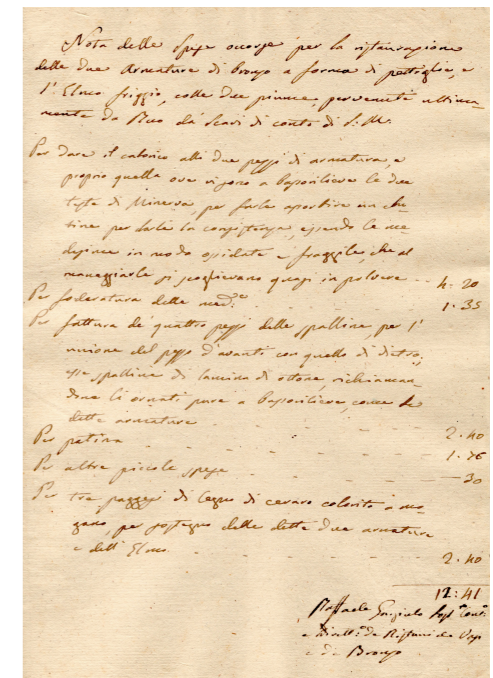


FIGURE 2.18. Nota delle spese (account of expenses) referring to restoration of the two bronze cuirasses from Ruvo (figs. 2.16, 2.17) by Raffaele Gargiulo in 1838. Naples, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Archivio Storico, XXI C8, 16

- 1 For the history of the Museo Borbonico and its successive layouts, see Milanese “Il Museo Reale di Napoli al tempo di Giuseppe Bonaparte e di Giocchino Murat: Le prime sistemazioni del Museo delle Statue e delle altre raccolte,” *Rivista dell’Istituto Nazionale di Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte*, 3rd ser., 19–20 (1996–97), pp. 345–405; “Sulla formazione e i primi allestimenti del Museo Reale di Napoli (1777–1830): Proposte per una periodizzazione,” in *Beni culturali a Napoli nell’Ottocento: Atti del Convegno di studi, Napoli, 5–6 novembre 1997*, Pubblicazioni degli Archivi di Stato, Saggi 61 (Rome, 2000), pp. 141–60; “L’attività giovanile di Giuseppe Fiorelli e l’esperienza nella Commissione per le Riforme del Museo Borbonico: Nascita di un protagonista della storia della tutela in Italia,” in *A Giuseppe Fiorelli nel primo centenario della morte: Atti del Convegno, Napoli, 19–20 marzo 1997*, ed. P. G. Guzzo and S. De Caro (Naples, 1999), pp. 69–100; “Michele Arditi, il Museo Borgia e la ‘catena delle arti’: L’acquisizione delle raccolte borgiane e la loro sistemazione nel Real Museo di Napoli,” in *La collezione Borgia: Curiosità e tesori da ogni parte del mondo*, ed. A. Germano and M. Nocca, exh. cat. (Naples: Electa Napoli, 2001), pp. 54–60; “Pietro Bianchi e il Real Museo Borbonico: Interventi architettonici e sistemazioni museografiche tra il 1821 e il 1845,” *Napoli nobilissima* 4, nos. 1–2 (2003), pp. 27–46; “Dal Gabinetto degli oggetti preziosi alla Sezione delle arti industriali: Le gemme Farnese nel Museo di Napoli,” in *Le gemme Farnese*, ed. C. Gasparri, 2nd ed. (Naples, 2006), pp. 107–12; “Iconografia, cronologia, contesti di provenienza: Un secolo di evoluzione negli allestimenti delle sculture del Museo di Napoli (1807–1903),” in *Le sculture Farnese: Storia e documenti*, ed. C. Gasparri (Naples, 2007), pp. 135–56; and *Album Museo: Immagini fotografiche ottocentesche del Museo Nazionale di Napoli* (Naples, 2009).
- 2 For the system of safeguarding the Neapolitan heritage in the eighteenth century, contemporary legislation on works of art, the two museums at Portici and Capodimonte, and the history of excavations in Herculaneum and Pompeii in the eighteenth century, see (with extensive bibliographies) A. Fittipaldi, “Museums, Safeguarding and Artistic Heritage in Naples in the Eighteenth Century,” in “Antiquarianism, Museums and Cultural Heritage: Collecting and Its Contexts in Eighteenth-Century Naples,” ed. G. Ceserani and A. Milanese, special issue, *Journal of the History of Collections* 19, no. 2 (2007), pp. 191–202 (and the essays by A. M. Rao and E. Chiosi, as well as the introduction by A. Schnapp, in the same volume); P. D’Alconzo, *Lanello del re: Tutela del patrimonio storico-artistico nel Regno di Napoli (1734–1824)* (Florence, 1999); R. Cantilena and A. Porzio, eds., *Herculanense Museum: Laboratorio sull’antico nella Reggia di Portici* (Naples, 2008); F. Zevi, “Gli scavi di Ercolano e le antichità,” in R. Ajello et al., *Le antichità di Ercolano* (Naples, 1988), pp. 11–38; C. C. Mattusch, *The Villa dei Papiri at Herculaneum: Life and Afterlife of a Sculpture Collection*, with H. Lie (Los Angeles, 2005); and S. De Caro, *Pompei ed Ercolano* (Rome, 1995).
- 3 J. J. de Lalande, *Voyage d’un François en Italie, fait dans les années 1765 et 1766*, vol. 7 (Paris, 1769), p. 110.
- 4 J. W. Goethe, *Italian Journey, 1786–1788*, trans. W. H. Auden and E. Mayer (1962; repr., London, 1987), p. 326.
- 5 See E. M. Moormann, “Una città mummificata: Qualche aspetto della fortuna di Pompei nella letteratura europea ed Americana,” in *Pompei: Scienza e società; 250° anniversario degli scavi di Pompei. Convegno internazionale, Napoli, 25–27 novembre 1998*, ed. P. G. Guzzo (Milan, 2001), pp. 14–15.
- 6 On the architectural history of the Palazzo degli Studi, one can still consult *Da Palazzo degli Studi a Museo Archeologico: Mostra storico-documentaria del Museo Nazionale di Napoli, giugno–dicembre 1975*, exh. cat. (Naples: Museo Nazionale, 1977), in particular the essays by F. Divenuto and C. Zucco.
- 7 J. C. R. de Saint-Non, *Voyage pittoresque; ou, Description des royaumes de Naples et Sicile*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1782), pp. 54–55.
- 8 On the idea of the museum during the European Enlightenment, I can single out two excellent essays in the extensive literature available: É. Pommier, preface to *Les musées en Europe à la veille de l’ouverture du Louvre*, ed. É. Pommier (Paris, 1995), pp. 14–32, and M. Fumaroli, “Naissance du musée moderne,” in *Lille, chefs-d’œuvre d’un grand musée européen*, exh. cat. (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1995), pp. 13–49.
- 9 For the Romantic garden at the end of the eighteenth century, and the garden in the Musée des monuments français in particular, see C. de Bourgoing, ed., *Jardins romantiques français: Du jardin des Lumières au parc romantique, 1770–1840*, exh. cat. (Paris: Paris Musées, 2011), pp. 160–61.
- 10 For the proposed law on provincial museums, see A. Milanese, “Il piano Arditi del 1808 sui musei provinciali: Centro e periferia nella tutela in ‘Magna Grecia,’” in *I Greci in Occidente: La Magna Grecia nelle collezioni del Museo Archeologico di Napoli* (Naples, 1996), pp. 275–80, and “Real Museo Borbonico e costruzione nazionale: Spunti di riflessione,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée* 113, no. 2 (2001), pp. 585–98.
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- 13 On this episode, see P. D’Alconzo, *Picturæ excisæ: Conservazione e restauro dei dipinti ercolanesi e pompeiani tra XVIII e XIX secolo*, Studi della Soprintendenza Archeologica di Pompei 8 (Rome, 2002), pp. 54–57.
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- 16 Michele Arditi, letter to the interior minister, September 30, 1820. Quoted in Milanese, “Michele Arditi” (note 1), p. 56.
- 17 On rotating bases, see also Peltz in this volume.
- 18 On the restoration of paintings (both ancient and modern) in Neapolitan collections, see M. I. Catalano and G. Prisco, eds., “Storia del restauro dei dipinti a Napoli e nel Regno nel XIX secolo,” special issue, *Bollettino d’arte* (2003); D’Alconzo, *Picturæ excisæ* (note 13); P. D’Alconzo and G. Prisco, “‘Restaurare, risarcire, supplire’: Slittamenti semantici ed evidenze materiali; Alle origini di una ‘vernice’ per i dipinti vesuviani,” *Bollettino dell’Istituto Centrale per il Restauro*, n.s., 10–11 (2005), pp. 72–87; G. Prisco, ed., *Filologia dei materiali e trasmissione al futuro: Indagini e schedatura sui dipinti murali del Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli* (Rome, 2009).
- 19 Naples, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Archivio Storico, File of Raffaele Trapani.
- 20 On this decree, see A. Milanese, “‘Pour ne pas choquer l’œil’: Raffaele Gargiulo e il restauro di vasi antichi nel Real Museo di Napoli; Opzioni di metodo e oscillazioni di gusto tra 1810 e 1840,” in *Gli uomini e le cose*, vol. 1, *Figure di restauratori e casi di restauro in Italia tra il XVIII e il XX secolo*, ed. P. D’Alconzo (Naples, 2008), pp. 89–90; and the article by A. Irollo in the same volume (where the text of the decree is published in its entirety, but with the erroneous date of January 25). This decree is also discussed by Risser and Saunders in the present volume.
- 21 *Peintures antiques et inédites de vases grecs tirés de diverses collections, avec explications par J. V. Millingen* (Rome, 1813), p. xi.
- 22 On Raffaele Gargiulo, see Milanese, “‘Pour ne pas choquer l’œil’” (note 20), pp. 81–101, and “‘De la ‘perfection dangereuse,’ et plus encore: La restauration de vases grecs à Naples au début du XIX^e siècle, entre histoire du goût et marché de l’art,’” in “‘Une perfection dangereuse’: La restauration des vases grecs, de Naples à Paris, XVIII^e–XIX^e siècles,” B. Bourgeois and F. Matz, eds., special issue, *Technè* 32 (2010), pp. 18–30 (and also the essays by L. Chazalon, U. Kästner, and M. Svoboda in the same volume).
- 23 Naples, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Archivio Storico, XXI C8, 6. See also Risser and Saunders in this volume.
- 24 On the restoration of the four bronzes from Ruvo, from the Ficco and Cervone collection (today Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, inv. 5711, 5712, 5714, 5715), see the report by Gargiulo, June

25, 1838, addressed to the museum's supervisor, Giovanni Pagano, and the *nota delle spese* (account of expenses) bearing Gargiulo's signature and dated November 3, 1838 (Naples, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Archivio Storico, XXI D7, 1.18 [d]). On the restoration of the two cuirasses (inv. 5696 and 5735) and the helmet (inv. 5699?) from the royal excavations at Ruvo, see the two reports by Gargiulo addressed to Michele Arditì, February 15, 1838, and April 9, 1838, with the relevant *nota delle spese* (see fig. 2.18) (Naples, Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei, Archivio Storico, IV B11, 47; XXI C8, 16); and the documents dated March 1838 (Naples, Archivio di Stato, Ministero Pubblica Istruzione, 338, 79). The nineteenth-century restorations to all the other bronzes from Ruvo have been removed in recent decades.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

- Fig. 2.1: Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (87-B27149)
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