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*The Neapolitan Collection of Giuseppe Valletta – Art, Artefacts, and their Epistemic Functions at the Crossroads of Knowledge around 1700*

My dissertation centers around the collection of the Neapolitan Giuseppe Valletta (1636–1714) which included paintings, antique vases, and an extensive library that attracted scholars from all over Europe. My specific interest is in the epistemological functions that the art and artifacts in his collection had in a cultural context characterized by the international exchange of ideas and knowledge. My holistic approach entails a close reading of the objects, reflects on the intellectual network they were embedded in, and on Naples as a site of knowledge shaped by both its geographical position and its socio-cultural context. Valletta was also co-founder of the Accademia degli Investiganti which met in his palazzo. This speaks to Valletta's wide-ranging interest in various fields of knowledge and made the collection a point of attraction for scholars in Naples and beyond. Thus, the space of the collection was defined by a specific public with similar interests. Furthermore, being a tailor's son, Valletta's collection displays his social ascension through erudition. My project thus evolves around the following central questions: to what extent do images and artifacts, with their specific medial qualities, contribute to the culture of knowledge in Naples? How is the collection used as a space and as a medium for the production and transmission of knowledge? And in which way is an erudite collector's taste developed here?

Two examples may give a little insight in the collection. Among Valletta's works was the still life *Ipomee e boules de neige* by Andrea Belvedere (now at the Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte). It depicts plants which have sedative and hallucinogenic effects. Valletta was the editor of the works of Francesco Redi, who studied the pharmacological effects of plants and owned a varied botanical garden himself. Given this, it is plausible that he knew the *Tesoro Messicano*, a botanical treatise that was exchanged between Mexico, Naples and Spain. Knowing that one depicted plant was imported from Central America, Valletta would have understood that owning a still life of that plant would make his collection a site of current botanical knowledge. This type of crossover – between remote written knowledge and localized artistic representation – is typical of Naples as a port city and indeed of Valletta's collection itself.

Valletta's collection of antique vases, however, is the first to focus decidedly on that type of object. A scientific interest can be seen in the fact that Valletta catalogued each vase separately, had them drawn, and attempted to identify them. A planned catalogue which would have served as an instrument to disseminate knowledge about Southern Italy's past to a greater, international audience, was never published and is thought to be lost. Although contemporary scholars considered the vases Etruscan, Valletta claimed their Greek-Campanian origins, and in doing so emphasized Campania's affiliation with Magna Graecia. Valletta's systematic approach to the ancient objects attests to a scientific and perceptive attitude to material history. Here, the epistemological function of objects is used to strengthen arguments for a proper Neapolitan identity which is truly Mediterranean and interwoven with its Greek past.