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CARLO BONAVIA & SOME PAINTERS
OF VEDUTE IN NAPLES.

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Carlo Bonavia and Some Painters of *Vedute* in Naples

BY W. G. CONSTABLE

DURING the eighteenth century, Naples never achieved the reputation among visitors to Italy held by Venice, Rome and Florence. Visitors there were in plenty; but they were apt to regard Naples, not as an indispensable element in the Grand Tour, but as an appendage to Rome, to be seen or not as convenience dictated. The city lacked the social attractions and architectural charms of Venice and Florence, and the artistic prestige, political importance, and classical grandeurs of Rome. Vesuvius was a great attraction, and the country to the west round the Bay of Baiae was full of classical traditions and memories; but Herculaneum and Pompei were not excavated until the second part of the century, were not easily accessible owing to government restrictions, and did not achieve fame and drawing power until the eighties. Moreover, the beauties of the bay of Naples, the picturesque life of the district, and the delicious thrills associated with brigands and the Camorra, were not greatly to eighteenth-century taste, and had to wait for the nineteenth century to exercise their full attraction. It is not surprising, therefore, that no considerable group of topographers and *vedute* painters developed in Naples, comparable to those exemplified by Canaletto and Guardi in Venice, by Pannini and Vernet in Rome, and by Patch in Florence. Indeed, if Thieme-Becker can be taken as a test of knowledge, no eighteenth-century painters of views of Naples or of its vicinity are known; that type of work being in the hands of foreigners, eminent among them the Englishmen Richard Wilson, Wright of Derby, and John Robert Cozens, and the Swiss Louis Ducros. In recent years, however, it has been possible to attribute a number of views of Naples and its environs to two obscure Italian painters of landscape, and so bring them within the circle of the eighteenth-century painters of *vedute*. One of these is Gabriele Ricciardelli. According to De Dominici¹ he was born in Naples and was a pupil there of Nicola Bonito, the landscape painter. Later he went to Rome and worked under J. E. van Bloemen (l'Orizante), and studied the work of Gaspar Poussin and of Claude Lorrain. His landscapes, modeled on those of these three masters, won him a reputation in Rome, and in Naples brought him commissions to decorate rooms, including some in the royal palace, and in the royal villa at Portici. He also attracted the attention of foreign visitors; and as a result, from 1753 to 1759 he was in Dublin, where he was concerned with a project for decorative paintings in the Rotunda Chapel. But he was evidently also occupied with landscape, since he advertised two engravings of Dublin seen from the sea and from Phoenix Park (neither of which, however, seem to have been published); while two views of Stillorgan Park and of Stillorgan

1. *Vite dei Pittori, Scultori, ed Architetti Napolitani*, Naples, 1846, IV, pp. 387-389.



Fig. 1. Carlo Bonavia, *River Scene with a Waterfall*.

House which belonged to the Rt. Hon. Philip Tisdall, owner of the house, and were sold in his sale in July 1783, are now in an Irish private collection. Also, a few landscapes by him have appeared in Irish sales and exhibitions². In 1777 he also had two landscapes in an exhibition at the Royal Exchange in the Strand, London, though whether he went to London is unknown.

That he might have practised *vedute* painting in Italy is suggested by his being known as an etcher of picturesque topographical subjects³. The discovery in a private collection in Derbyshire, England, of four views of the Bay of Naples, each measuring c. 24×42 in., one of which is signed in capitals, confirms this. These views are elaborately detailed, thinly painted with a somewhat scratchy linear touch, grays and greens predominating in the color. Almost certainly by the same hand are another group of seven landscapes in the collection of the Duke of Buccleuch of which three are views of the Bay of Naples, two represent Neapolitan festivals, and the others the temples at Paestum and at Girgenti.

2. For these, and for further details of the stay in Ireland, see Strickland, *Dictionary of Irish Artists*, II, p. 277.

3. An example, *Il muro torto*, is reproduced in *Emporium*, vol. 75, 1932, p. 108.



Fig. 2. Carlo Bonavia, *Coast Scene with a Villa and a Pleasure Barge*.

From time to time other examples have turned up in sales, such as no. 109 in the Lane Sale at Christie's, Dec. 8, 1926, a *View of Naples with Vesuvius in the distance*, $22 \times 41\frac{1}{2}$ in., on canvas, catalogued as Italian School, 18th century. The fact that all the known examples of Italian views are in English hands, suggests that these were primarily painted for the tourist trade, like most other topographical views of the period.

Much more slender is our knowledge of the second artist, Pietro Antoniani. Thieme-Becker, quoting from Meyer's *Künstler-Lexikon*, says he was a marine painter from Milan, who died in 1805, and by whom no works are known. However, at Hornby Castle, Yorkshire, in the collection of the Duke of Leeds, there was until fairly recently a group of eight paintings, all attributed to "Pietro Antoniani (Il Milanese)." Under this name the paintings have gone, apparently, ever since they entered the collection in the eighteenth century. No one is likely to have invented such an attribution, and it may be taken as authoritative. The paintings, all in oil on canvas, include (1) *Naples Bay*, $19\frac{1}{2}$ by 51 in. (2) *Naples, looking West*, $25\frac{1}{2}$ by $51\frac{1}{2}$ in. (3) *Naples, looking East*, $25\frac{1}{2}$ by $51\frac{1}{2}$ in. (4) *Naples and the Bay, from Posilipo*, 30 by 82 in. (5) *Naples and the waterfront, looking East*, $25\frac{1}{2}$ by 52 in. (6) *Naples and the waterfront, looking West*, $25\frac{1}{2}$ by 51 in. (7) *Capri from the sea*, 18 by $40\frac{1}{2}$ in. (8) *Paestum and the temples*, 18 by $40\frac{1}{2}$ in. These are all painted in a high key in a cool tone, with elaborate detail put in with a somewhat messy touch. Paintings by the same hand have occasionally

appeared at sales. One example was in the Stourhead Heirlooms sale (Sir Henry Hoare), Christies, June 2, 1883, no. 47, *Naples*, as by Antoniani, bt. Davis; two others were in the W.D. Clark sale, Sotheby, March 7, 1923, no. 59, both views of Naples, 26 by 53 in., ascribed to Pietro Antonini, and for some undisclosed reason dated 1771; a fourth was no. 41 in a sale of Christies, December 9, 1927, *The Bay of Naples with a royal procession and numerous figures*, 25½ by 59½ in., attributed to Van Vitelli.

After consideration of these mediocrities, it is a relief to turn to a third and more accomplished painter, Carlo Bonavia or Bonaria. Thieme-Becker gives both forms of the name; and on the authority of Zani's *Encyclopedia* says that he was a marine and landscape painter of Naples, active from 1740-1756. A brief biography of Bonavia in the 1928 catalogue of the paintings in the National Museum of Naples, by Aldo de Rinaldis, challenges Zani's description of Bonavia as a "painter of Naples," on the ground that, in the absence of mention by any Neapolitan writer, it is not certain whether he was born in Naples or only worked there.

One painting by him is owned by the Naples Museum, a *River Scene with a Waterfall* (fig. 1), canvas, 37⅞ by 52 in., signed lower right C. Bonavia / P. in Napoli / A. 1755, which was bought from Enrico de Lieure on May 18, 1913.



Fig. 3. Carlo Bonavia, *Inlet on a Coast with Fishing Boats*.



Fig. 4. Carlo Bonavia, *Temple of Venus, Bay of Baiae*.

In the Harrach Collection, Vienna, are three paintings⁴:

1. Bay of Naples, with Vesuvius in the distance, right. Canvas, 26 by 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Signed on the rocks: C. Bonaria / P. 1756. A version of the painting formerly with H. Bier (see below).
2. Coast Scene with a Villa and a Pleasure Barge. Canvas, 22 by 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Signed C. B. (fig. 2).
3. Inlet on a Coast with Fishing Boats. Canvas, 22 by 40 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Signed: C. B. (fig. 3). The damages to the picture occurred during the war, and circumstances have so far prevented their repair.

Two other examples appeared at Christies, in an anonymous sale on June 23, 1922, no. 58; *The Bay of Naples* and *A Bay Scene with Fort*, each 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 48 in., and signed (according to a note made at the time) C. Bonaria / P. A. 1758.

Other paintings which have come to light more recently are:

1. The Bay of Naples, with Vesuvius in the distance, right. Canvas, 26 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 50 in. Signed and dated 1760 (the form of the signature is not known). Formerly with Herbert Bier, London. A version of no. 1 above, in the Harrach Collection.
2. Temple of Venus, Bay of Baiae (fig. 4). Messrs. Colnaghi, London. Canvas, 16 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 42 in. From the Earl of Chichester Collection. Signed with initials C. B. P. Pendant to no. 3 below. A drawing by Richard Wilson of the same subject from almost the same point of view is in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Dyce, 647).
3. View from Miseno, looking across the Mare Morto, to Monte Procida (?). Canvas, 16 $\frac{1}{4}$ by 41 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. Master of Kinnaird. From the Earl of Chichester Collection; with Roderic Thesiger, London. Pendant to no. 2 above.
4. River Scene with a Waterfall (fig. 5). Messrs. Duveen, New York. Canvas, 37 $\frac{3}{4}$ by 47 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. Signed and dated lower right: C. Bonavia P / A. 1787. Pendant

4. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Ernst Buschbeck for obtaining photographs of these, and for supplying full information concerning them.

to no. 5 below. From a New York private collection, acquired c. 1850. Similar in theme and design to the Naples Museum picture.

5. Castello d'Ovo, Naples (fig. 6). Canvas, $37\frac{3}{4}$ by $47\frac{1}{2}$ in. Messrs. Duveen, New York. Signed and dated, lower left: *C. Bonavia P./A. 1788*. From a New York private collection, acquired c. 1850. There is a little doubt whether the third figure is an 8 or a 5. Both upper and lower loops are slightly open, which has led to a 5 being suggested. But for a 5 the form would be unusual. Also in the pendant (no. 4 above) the third figure is clearly an 8.

If all the signatures and dates have been correctly read, the painter signed himself both *Bonaria* and *Bonavia*, but somewhat preferred the latter; and his known period of activity extended from 1755 to 1788. Comparison of the Naples Museum picture which carries the earliest date, with the two belonging to Messrs. Duveen (4 and 5 above) indicate an interesting change in outlook and method. From a reminiscence of the carefully balanced design of a Gaspar Poussin with its boldly massed light and shade, and the dramatic emphasis of a Salvator Rosa, he passes to a more freely handled type of composition, the lights and shadows more irregularly distributed, with a greater variety of incident and a greater feeling for

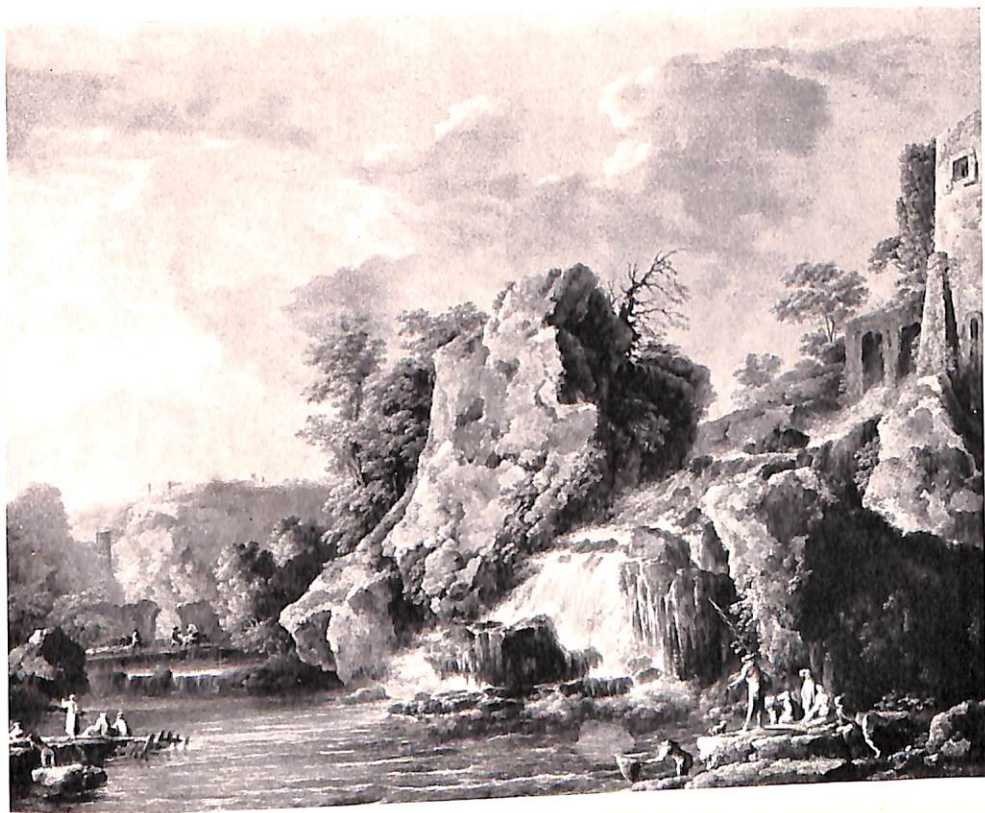


Fig. 5. Carlo Bonavia, River Scene with a Waterfall.

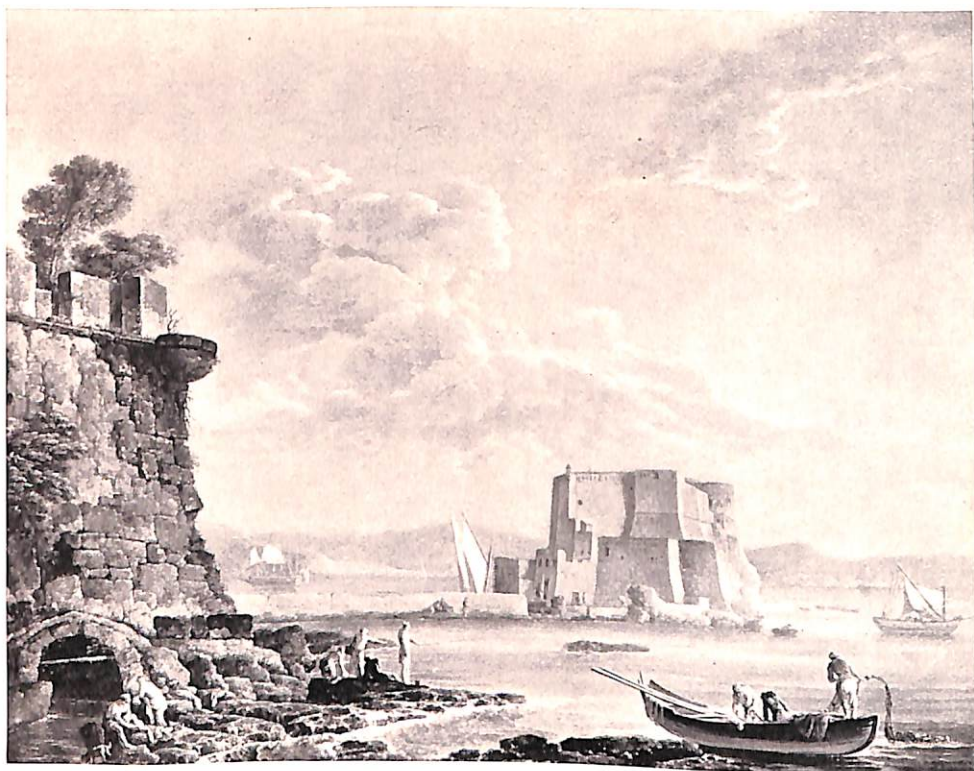


Fig. 6. Carlo Bonavia, Castello d'Ovo, Naples.

luminosity and atmosphere. "The sublime" has been succeeded by "the picturesque." This liveliness of design, feeling for light, and bravura of handling makes his work much more attractive and interesting than that of Ricciardelli and Antoniani. He, more than they, is among the painters who turned the tradition of imaginative landscape painting to the uses of topography, rather than becoming simple recorders of fact. In this and in his technique he is related to two English painters of his own time, Richard Wilson and Joseph Wright of Derby, both of whom visited Naples and found material there. Wilson, with his headquarters at Rome from 1752 to 1756 or 1757, was in Naples twice and possibly three times. He worked principally in the country to the west of the Bay of Baiae, at Pozzuoli and at Ischia, finding at Lake Avernus one of his most popular and often repeated subjects. Wright was in Naples in 1774, and was much impressed with Vesuvius, which was in eruption at the time, making it the theme of a considerable group of paintings. He also painted views of the Bay of Naples, and in the neighborhood of Salerno and Amalfi and at Capri. Whether Wilson and Wright ever met Bonavia, or saw anything of his work, is unknown, though dates make it possible. Both were more imaginative painters than he, less conventional in method and handling; but both might have learned something from him. Alternatively, contact with greater men might have encouraged and helped Bonavia. All this, however, is pure speculation at present.

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add to Bonavia:

- (1) Christie's May, 15 1953 (Tollmach Estate) { 101. Rocky Coast Scene. S. P. D. 1756 (Acquis 300 gns)
all large 50 x 80 { 102 Storm off a Rocky Coast - S. P. D. 1757 (Acquis 800 gns)
103. A Grotto - S. P. D. 1757 (Acquis 240 gns)
- (2) A pair, Sunrise & Sunset - C. B. T.



all. 818734