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Marco Giorgio BEVILACQUA, Denise ULIVIERI (Eds.)



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Marco Giorgio Bevilacqua, Denise Olivieri
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On the Fort of Granatello, to keep its memory alive

Raffaele Amore

Department of Architecture of Naples, UniNA, Naples, Italy, raffaele.amore@unina.it

Abstract

The Fort of Granatello in Portici was built on an ancient coastal watchtower between 1703 and 1706, at the behest of the last Viceroy of Naples Juan Manuel Fernández Pacheco, Duke of Escalona and Marquess of Villena. The following paper is aimed to retrace its history based on the collected archival-bibliographic and iconographic documentation, in the framework of the wider context of coastal defensive buildings and of the story of the construction of the Royal Site of Portici and the Granatello harbor, highlighting their connections and historical ties. This is aimed to preserve its memory, as the Fort was destroyed by cannon fire by the Military Navy of the newborn Kingdom of Italy in 1873.

Keywords: coastal defenses, naumachia, Bourbon Sites.

1. Introduction

As it is well-known, Don Pedro de Toledo's arrival in Naples in 1532 in Charles V's stay in the winter of 1535 marked the start of a long process of reorganization of the defensive system in the Viceroyalty (Brunetti, 2016; Coletta, 1981). Along the coasts, the existing Norman and Anjou forts resulted to be inadequate against firearm attacks; hence, new defense watchtowers had to be built to respond to the repeated attack of Turkish-Saracen ships against coastal villages and trade ships. The attack of the fleet led by Paly Mustafa on the cities of Massa Lubrense and Sorrento on the night of June 13th, 1558, proves that Campanian coasts were still very vulnerable in the mid-16th century (Santoro, 1982; Santoro, 1967). In fact, only in 1563, when don Parafan de Ribera, the Duke of Alcalá, was the Viceroy, military technicians and advisors devised a plan for the realization of a single and continuous network of fortifications along all the coasts of the Viceroyalty. This complex defensive program required huge expenses, which were allowed by taxing 'Università' (universitates, past Italian administration units) proportionally to the respective number of 'fuochi' (families). This choice proved to be hardly applicable, as

it immediately faced strong refusal from local populations. However, the work started with the construction of several towers in the provinces of Terra di Lavoro, on the coastline between Gaeta and Capo Miseno, as a completion of the existing defense line. Likewise, the system of towers on the coastline between Salerno and Agropoli and the one along the Tirrenian coast toward Calabria were integrated. It was a slow process with several difficulties, which was carried over throughout the whole Viceregal period with variable success, despite the conspicuous expenses (Strazzullo, 1992; Mauro, 2003). Despite these actions, in the early 18th century the coastline South of Naples from Marinella to Castellammare di Stabia completely lacked a defensive system. The just-settled Marquis of Vigliena had to devise a plan for the construction of modern military strongholds, to counter attacks from the sea. In particular, he decided to build five new forts: "The first of them will be built in San Giovanni a Teduccio, the second one in Granatello, the third on the tower of Resina (Torre del Greco, Calastro), the other one on the rock of Rovigliano and the last one in Castellammare" (Abatino, 1899; Russo, 1989).

From a military standpoint, the Fort of Vigliena on the beach of San Giovanni a Teduccio was the most strategically relevant among the five requested by the Viceroy, as it was the closest to the city and it was placed on a coastal area whose beaches have shallow waters and could be used by enemy land troops as a landing place. Instead, the other four forts were on rock coastlines with limited possibilities for landing; two of them, in Granatello and on the rock di Rovigliano, were built by incorporating pre-existing Viceregal towers; the remaining two, in Torre del Greco and Castellammare, were new constructions. Nowadays, there are still some remains of the fort in Vigliena and on the rock of Rovigliano, albeit in a strongly decayed state.

1.1. Portici, from a hamlet to a Royal Site

The coastline of the small city of Portici has been shaped over centuries by the lava from the eruptions of Vesuvius. In the early 17th century, the coastline appeared quite high, around 10 m on sea level, and rocky (Formicola, 1984). The eruption in December 1631 produced a wide sciarra, which stretched out to the sea, to the beach Le Mortelle, near the area where the Viceregal Tower of Granatello had been realized. That watchtower had a squared roof plan with four embrasures, with a side parallel to the coastline and a truncated pyramid shape. Its form and characteristics correspond to the most frequent typology of towers built in the Viceregal Age (fig. 1).



Fig. 1- Viceregal Tower of Granatello (Scafatti, 1744)

The State Archive of Naples has several payment coupons of the Treasury - which had already been found by the end of the 19th century - reporting that the two forts in Vigliena and Granatello were designed by the engineer D. Filippo Marinello and realized by the contractor Luise Androsiglio, while Gregorio Minichini provided cannons and weapons (Abatino, 1899). A collection of documents on the Kingdom of Naples written by the court diplomat Labiche for the Duke Vittorio Amedeo II of Savoy between 1718 and 1720, which has been recently studied by A. Fiadino, reports the floor plans of these two forts (Fiadino, 2014). These drawings are ink and watercolor, and their author is unknown: they represent a precious reference source to analyze their initial size (fig. 2 -3).

Indeed, comparing the floor plans of the two forts reveals strong similarities in forms and technical-building characteristics. However, it

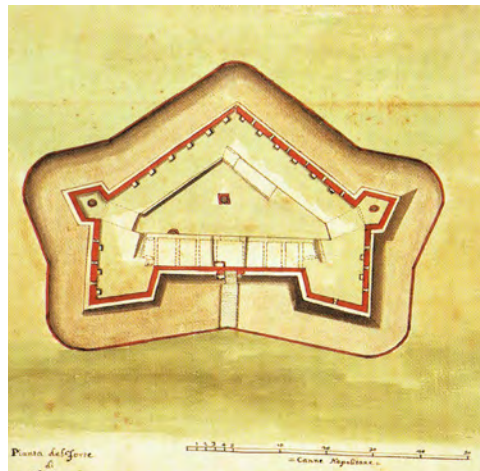


Fig. 2- The Fort of Vigliena (Turin, Biblioteca Reale, ms. Storia Italiana 78)



Fig. 3- The Fort of Granatello (Turin, Biblioteca Reale, ms. Storia Italiana 78)

must be noted that the one in Vigliena had a more regular layout, probably because it was realized in an empty area. In fact, it had a pentagonal plan, which was symmetric with respect to the axis of the bridge that crossed the large moat around the fort. Since it was designed to defend the coast, it had thick and low walls, to avoid being an easy target for possible cannon fire from the sea. The two sides of the fort facing the sea were equipped with *in barbette* batteries and were longer than the side ones, which had two peculiar bastions. The side facing the land was taller than the one facing the sea, and it had a bastion as well.

Conversely, the fort in Granatello had a non-symmetric squared floor plan, both for the need to incorporate the pre-existing tower and for the peculiar geometry of the cliff in front. The side facing Naples was parallel to the coastline, while the South one had an unusual zigzag shape; both sides were concluded by bastions with an irregular shape. On the sides facing the land, the fort had a quadrangular bastion, more or less on axis with the tower, which originated the walls, almost symmetrically joined with the abovementioned bastions at the end of the sides facing the sea. The bridge to cross the moat was placed on the North wall. Compared to the Fort of Vigliena, the one

in Granatello had the advantage of incorporating the Viceregal tower; hence, the fortified area to be destined for the commander's quarters, storage, and systems, was bigger, and it also had a higher observation to monitor naval movement in the gulf. The original configuration of the Fortino del Granatello is also reported in the drawing called [Pianta] del castello, o [forte] del Gran[ate]llo [di Portici] preserved at the State Archives of Naples (fig. 4).

After Charles II of Spain's death and the following Spanish Succession War in 1707, the Viceroyalty of Naples was passed down to Austria. After the first years of Habsburg rule, the attacks on the trade ships by corsairs, the French, and the Spanish dramatically increased, to the point of escorting trade ships with armed vessels. Concerning military defense, since 1712 the Habsburgs aimed at concentrating coastline defense in a few crucial nodes and disregarded the whole network of maritime castles and towers built in the previous epochs: this led to their unavoidable abandonment.

In 1734, Charles of Bourbon became the new King of Naples and started several initiatives for the modernization of the kingdom. From the

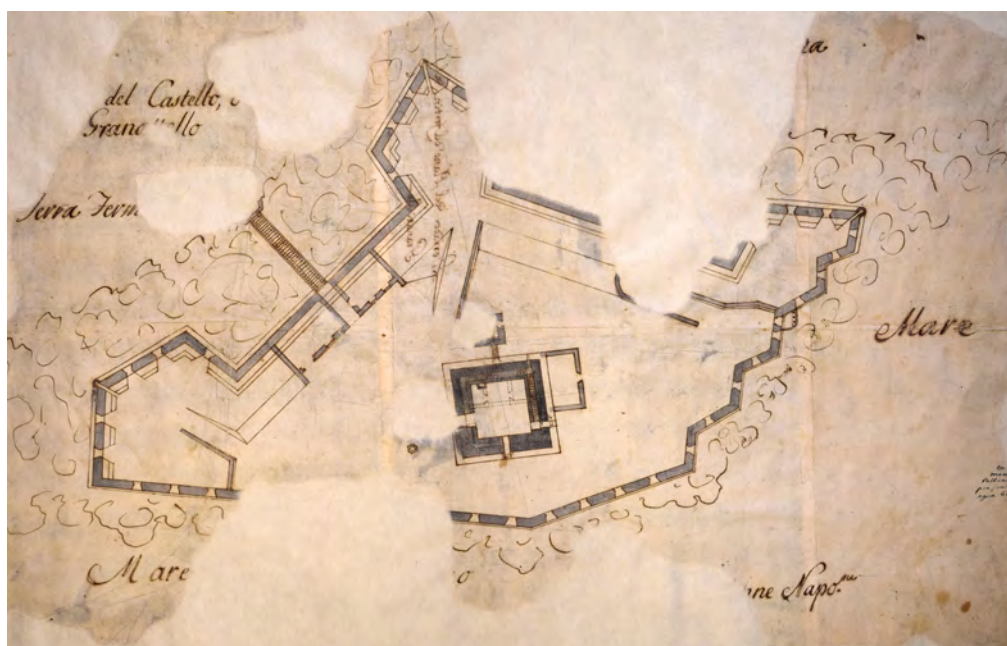


Fig. 4- [Pianta] del castello, o [forte] del Gran[ate]llo [di Portici] (Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Folder XXII - Forti, battaglie, cannoni, navi - n. 5)

military point of view, one of the first goals was the formation of a well-trained autonomous army. For that purpose, Count Balbasor suggested the foundation of a school for officers, sub-officers, and soldiers, which occurred in 1736: it was the *Escuela para el exercito de fuego del canòn y Mortero*. In order to allow soldiers to train with cannons and mortars, a sort of semicircular battery was built near the Ponte della Maddalena, close to the fort of Vigliena. Since the attacks on trade fleets were continuing, Charles tried to solve the situation with international treaties, and by employing naval units for anti-corsair patrol and protection. In the meanwhile, in 1740 another Austrian throne succession war broke out, and the newborn Neapolitan Kingdom allied with France and Spain. In August 1742, the English commodore Martin entered the harbor of Naples with his fleet, threatened to attack the city from the sea, and obliged the Kingdom of Naples to withdraw from the war and declare its neutrality. The lack of adequate coastal defenses to fight the English fleet forced Charles to accept. This made clear that the capital of the Kingdom could not oppose the gunpower of modern warships, due to the lack of opportune defensive works. In the meanwhile, in May 1738 Charles of Bourbon decided to realize a new Royal Site in Naples and bought several villas and gardens overlooking the Royal Road of Calabria to adapt them into a

royal residence (D'Amato, 2008; Amore, 2017). The works started in the October of the same year, under architect Medrano's direction. To expand the Royal Site to the sea, the King bought first the palaces and gardens belonging to the D'Aquino di Caramanico and Mascabruno, and then the villa realized by the Prince of Elbeuf and its attached areas. In 1741, Medrano was joined by the Roman architect Antonio Canevari, tasked with designing a new building to incorporate the acquired properties. The collaboration between the two architects lasted little and ended with Medrano's expulsion. Canevari's palace has an unusual planimetry, over the Royal Road of Calabria. As stated first by G. Alisio, the idea of realizing two overpasses to connect the area on the mountain and the one on the sea originated from the will to keep both the outlook on Vesuvius and on the sea (Alisio, 1974; Alisio, 1988). The planimetric layout called *Barrador del Mappa del Sitio di Portici*, which reports the situation of the site before the realization of the Bourbon complex, also depicts the Fort in its original size.

Of course, after the construction of the new Royal residence, the Fort of Granatello took on a new function, which was more challenging than its destination for coastal control and defense. In this sense, the analysis of the drawing *Plano del Acampamento de artilleria del Real Sito de Portici*,



Fig. 5- Plano del Acampamento de artilleria del Real Sito de Portici (Biblioteca Nacional de Espana)

reposited at the *Biblioteca Nacional de Espana*, is very useful (fig. 5).

It does not show physical transformations from the previous planimetric layouts; conversely, it is interesting to analyze the number and the characteristics of its resident troops and the artillery size. It portrays a *Batteria de seis Canones da 24* (C), a *Batteria de quatro morte* (E), an *Acampam.to de cinco companias de Artilleria* (H), and an *Acampa.to de 13 piquettes de Infanteria* (I); moreover, *Pavellones de Oficiales* (L) and *Almacenes de diferentes Particollares* (P). Considering that in the 18th century an artillery company consisted of no less than 50 units, it corresponds to a contingent of about 300 troops, including artillerymen, infantrymen, and officers, with a battery of six 24-pound cannons and 5 mortars.

To further improve military structures along the Eastern coastline in case of invasion and landing attempts, in addition to the protection of trade ships, the Fort of Calastro and the so-called *Baracone* - barracks destined for chivalry - were built between the '40s and the '50s of the 18th century in Torre del Greco. In the framework

of these initiatives for defense improvement, in 1743 Pietro Bardet realized a “rivellino e la controguardia” (ravelin and pastedown) for the Fort of Granatello. This addition is clearly visible in the drawings by Michele d’Aprèa in M. Scalfatti’s volume, which proposes a detailed report of the military drill requested by the king in the fall of 1773, employing around 2,000 soldiers, sub-officers, and officers (fig. 6). These practices involved the simulation of a sea invasion in the territories between Portici and Torre del Greco (Scalfatti, 1774).

In the same years, Ferdinand had also chosen to establish the headquarters of the cadets of the Marine Corps in Portici, and to build a small harbor at the marina of Granatello, tasking the Director of Marine Hydraulic Works, the engineer Giovanni Bompiede, with designing it. He realized the new harbor between 1774 and 1780 (Formicola, 1984). In particular, two harbors were constructed: one was rooted to the mainland and hosted a lodge for the king, and the second one included a battery for the defense of the harbor, provided with a 12-gauge mortar, and a small lighthouse.

In the meanwhile, when in the early 18th century, the prince of Elbeuf was building his abovementioned villa in Granatello (Visone, 2008), he was informed of the discovery of ancient marble artifacts around Resina. After buying a land plot, the prince continued the underground exploration and was very successful: inscriptions, columns, and several statues were recovered (Zevi, 1994). Despite the news of the findings having a strong echo, the excavations in the ancient city of Herculaneum only began after the start of the construction works for the Royal Site, following an explicit request from the military engineer de Alcubierre, accepted by King Charles after some reluctance. Hence, since 1740, the progress in the works at the Reggia was matched by the intensification of Herculaneum excavations; since 1758, the rooms of the Caramanico Palace, incorporated into the new Royal Palace, were adapted into the Herculaneum Museum to contain the most important artifacts (Allroggen-Bedel & Kammerer-Grothaus, 1983; Cantilena, 2007).

Over a few decades, the construction of the new Royal Site and the archaeological discoveries in Herculaneum produced the conditions for the deep transformation of the coastal area in Portici and of the areas near the Fort. The area along the Royal Road of Calabria, stretching out from



Fig. 6- The Fort of Granatello (Scalfatti, 1744)



Fig. 7- Giovanni Carafa Duca di Noja & Niccolò Carletti, Mappa topografica della città di Napoli e de' suoi contorni [1750-75] (Naples, Museo Nazionale di San Martino)

the Vesuvius to the sea, thanks to its natural and landscape values, became the favorite place for Neapolitan nobility, which started to sojourn there for several months every year, in sumptuous villas and palaces that were then built or readapted by the most important architects in that period (Pane et al. 1958; De Seta et al. 1980). The Herculaneuse Museum became a destination for architects and artists from all over Europe, who were attracted by the possibility to study the archaeological artifacts and ancient architecture, still covered by the original painted plasters that were being brought back to light.

2. From the Neapolitan Republic to the Unification of Italy

From the late 18th to the early 19th century, the Kingdom of Naples was the scene of important political events. The Neapolitan Republic was proclaimed in 1799, but it had a very short life and ended with Ferdinand IV's cruel repression; a few years later, the Bourbons were defeated by the French, so for about 10 years the Kingdom, except Sicily, was ruled by Joseph Bonaparte first, and Gioacchino Murat then. During the republican experience, the Forts of Vigliena and Granatello were the scene of bloody battles between the republicans - who had barricaded there - and the Bourbon troops, led by Cardinal Ruffo. On June 13th, 1799, the occupants of the Fort of Vigliena, after realizing that they could not resist, blew themselves up, leading to partial destruction of the building. Some days before, the Fort of Granatello had suffered strong damage, too.

During the French decade, several interventions were performed for the improvement of the defensive structures along the Vesuvian coastline.

In addition to restoring the Forts of Granatello and Vigliena, the French decided to realize a new defensive structure in Pietrarsa and to adequate the Fort of Calastro with new moats and bastions on the North side. Moreover, a new fort was built in Capo dell' Ancino to further improve the defensive system of the Royal Site of Portici and of the coastline stretching out to Torre Annunziata (Amirante, 2008). When coming back, the Bourbons carried over the plans started by the French. However, other events affected the fate of the Fort of Granatello, and of the whole coastline of Portici

In 1822, the abovementioned collection of the Herculaneuse Museum was moved to the Palace of Studies, the current Archaeological Museum of Naples. The Bourbons started to envisage a different perspective of development for the area between Naples and Portici. In fact, the activity of the harbors of Naples and Granatello was improved, and in 1839 the engineer Armando Bayard de la Vingtrie designed the first Italian railway, which reached Portici - and then, the Southern regions of the Kingdom - from Naples. Pietrarsa, instead of the military stronghold, then housed the well-known Ironworks for the production of locomotives and rails. These events led to a radical transformation of the whole Vesuvian coastal area. Several industrial factories were established between the Royal Road of Calabria and the sea, between Napoli and Portici,



Fig. 8- Carta Topografica del Monte Vesuvio, Detail sheet III [1875-76] (Firenze, Istituto Geografico Militare)



Fig. 9 - Portici. Satellite view of Granatello, from Google Maps©2022 Google

and in around a century they turned the coast into one of the most significant and extended industrial areas of the city of Naples. At the end of the 19th century, the coastline defended by the Forts of Vigliena and Granatello no longer existed, just like the defensive needs that led the Marquis of Vigliena to build them. In 1873, after being considered useless from the standpoint of the defensive military strategy, the Fort of Granatello was bombarded and wiped out by the ships of the Military Navy of the newborn Kingdom of Italy. Instead, the one in Vigliena, thanks to the first studies on the 1799 revolutionary upheavals carried out by several intellectuals such as Benedetto Croce, was proclaimed a national monument in memory of the sacrifice of the republican troops (fig. 8).

3. Conclusions

The demolition of the Fortino del Granatello marked - also symbolically - the end of the important cultural season in which the Royal Site of Portici and the Vesuvian coastline were the focus of attention of all European courts. In little

more than a century and a half, the coastal trait between the Marinella and Portici became one of the most celebrated and desired areas in the capital of the Kingdom, for its landscape beauty and its architecture (Amore, 2018).

Following the Unification of Italy, many events rapidly led to its progressive and relentless decline. In Portici, in particular, the expansion of Corso Umberto I and Via del Granatello reduced the surface of the lower park of the Royal Site, removing its original sea access. Starting from the late 19th century, Villa d'Elboeuf, the Queen's Bath, and the land plot of the Fort were sold to private buyers (Rossi, 2015). In the places loved by the Bourbon kings, which were the scene of the clashes between Republicans and Sanfedisti, many industrial buildings serving the harbor were built between the late 19th and the early 20th century and then abandoned. In recent years, the ENEA Research Center, designed by Vittorio Gregotti, has been realized on the site of the ancient Fort, while the areas of the former slaughterhouse have been recovered and destined for the *Turtle Point* of the Anton Dohrn zoological station in Naples.

However, apart from these, the area of Granatello and the Le Mortelle beach are strongly decayed and marginalized, compared to the rest of the city (Pugliano, 2016). Abandoned buildings, unaccomplished public works, and substantial lack of maintenance are, unfortunately, the distinctive traits of a place with an extraordinary landscape and historical value. Hopefully, these notes can be useful for the formation of conscious

heritage communities among the citizens of Portici, with sensitivity toward the history and the value of these places, as encouraged by the Convention of Faro, and toward the promotion of effective redevelopment actions. These are also partially envisaged in the recently approved PUC (Municipal Urban Plan) of the City of Portici but are far from being put into practice.

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