

Viewpoints on Nisida. Iconographic comparisons of views of the island

Vincenzo Cirillo^a, Riccardo Miele^b

University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli - Department of Architecture and Industrial Design, Aversa, Italy,

^a vincenzo.cirillo@unicampania.it, ^b riccardo.miele@unicampania.it

Abstract

Due to the visual control of the Gulf of Pozzuoli and the presence of rugged and sheer slopes above the sea, the island of Nisida has always presented itself as a site naturally suited to defense but also to an area of confinement and/or segregation while for the panoramic and salubriousness of the places, to idleness.

Inserted in a panorama of research oriented to a knowledge of what remains today of the defense architectures of Nisida, this contribution focuses attention on the investigation and reading of the iconographic sources of the island. Through the discipline of drawing (as a means of knowledge as well as of narrative representation) the rich visual heritage of view type will be analysed here, which, with multiple points of view and graphic techniques of representation, describe the small island on whose summit the Penal Institute is today implanted, once a coastal defense tower, a medieval monastery, and a Roman villa, as reported in literature and sources.

Keywords: Nisida, Knowledge, visual heritage, viewpoints.

1. Introduction

Nisida, the small island located at the Posillipo promontory in Naples, has fascinated artists, architects, writers, and travelers for centuries (Croce, 1984). Its eventful history and natural beauty have over time inspired the production of numerous visual representations, oils on canvas, topographical maps, and design drawings of its architecture and fortifications.

Today, these all offer a unique opportunity to explore the relationship between culture and coeval scientific representation, as well as to analyze their evolution over the centuries.

The basis of reading such iconographic sources lies in the fact that a visual representation is a powerful means of expression through concepts and ideas are communicated to audiences (specialized or not, depending on the information reproduced) by employing graphic, visual, and textual elements, such as pictures, drawings, graphs, photographs, or other forms of visual expression (Ippoliti, 2023). Specifically, within

the discipline of drawing, they are, on the one hand, an explanatory vehicle of complex notions, such as the representation of syntheses following the surveying of peculiar aspects of landscapes, environments, places and/or architectures, and, on the other hand, a medium for imagining and planning the 'future' through project drawing, or for 'visualizing' the past through ad hoc reconstructions (Docci et al, 2017).

Also, they can have a significant impact on perceptions and emotions, figuring as a powerful tool to stimulate political-cultural debates and substantiate programmatic choices.

To this end, in collecting and documenting the great visual heritage of Nisida, a critical analysis and combined description of visual representations by views type is below, which intend to highlight the different viewpoints from which the island (or its portions) has been depicted to explore both its compositional reasons and the changes that have occurred over time (VC).

2. The role of Vedutistic and Topographic cartography

Cartographic, vedutistic, and topographic representation, based on the geometric construction of anthropic-natural spaces, has always use theoretical and instrumental filters useful for the transcription of the real on the two-dimensional medium, mediated by the culture of the time and the tools through which it is made possible (di Luggo et al., 2018).

In this scientific context, view-type cartography stands as a representation of an evocative record that, beyond measurement, focuses on the 'creation' of panoramic views of places, with the aim of communicating, through applications of geometric or allusive depths, their distinctive and morphological features. This type of cartography has ancient origins and has played an important role in the documentation and promotion of historic places, cities, monuments, and landscapes. Often made through different visual expressions (painting, drawing, engravings, lithographs, and nowadays through digital representations), they have been employed for educational, decorative, and 'touristic' purposes (De Seta, 2004).

In opposition, topographic cartography focuses on the accurate and measurable representation of the physical-geographical features of an area and relies on geodetic surveying and measurement methods to accurately record its location, elevation, and details of land features.

It is important to note that although view-type cartography may share some elements with topographic cartography, its main emphasis is on the evocative representation of a place, rather than on cartographic accuracy (Pane & Valerio, 1987). The readings that view-type and topographical cartography prepares realize from reality a more or less wide, but always present, distance in technique for focusing and understanding the foundational characters of what is represented. In fact, there is always a 'gap' between reality and its representation, a lack that can be found in every imitative mode, which is a necessary condition for representation to take place, a distancing that is indispensable for the process of figuration to take place, the latter being all the more effective, the more capable it is of discriminating characters and specificities of the real, re-presenting them in expressive form. This theoretical and dimensional range can be

measured in terms of figural distance, where each representation connotes itself as an analogue of the real, never fully exhaustive with respect to the multiple connotations of the real, but much richer, because it is the result of a work of selection and interpretation.

This premise is necessary to understand in the following paragraph how the rich cartographic production of view-type of the island of Nisida represents an iconographic corpus to be critically investigated according to the culture of the time and the purposes of its representation. In addition to critically penetrating the depth of the represented space, the visual and evocative aspects of the landscape will be highlighted, with the aim of investigating (as far as possible) its morphological-constructive modifications over the centuries (RM).

3. Nisida represented in views

Nisida, during the nineteenth century is documented in numerous views published within illustrated periodical such as magazines, newspapers, albums and picturesque Polioramas, made necessary after the consistent growth of mass literacy and the full development of new techniques of image reproduction. In particular, the speed of the latter will lead to the spread of the same illustration in different states within a very few years. An example of this is the illustration *The Island of Nisida*, published within the English weekly magazine, *The Illustrated London News* of 1857, which would then convey, a few years later, within the French weekly *L'Univers illustré* with the name *L'Île de Nizita* (1866). Both (originally in color) evoke the striking central view of Nisida from the Coroglio beach, framed in an ethereal vignette with irregular borders (fig. 1).

In 1856, however, the English weekly periodical *Illustrated Times* portrays Nisida with an off-center viewpoint on Lazzaretto (lazaret), located on the slopes of the Posillipo promontory (fig. 2). Even earlier, the local Neapolitan periodical *Poliorama Pittresco* (1844) adopts a higher vantage point, placed along the 'Discesa alla Gaiola' path and returns a grazing perspective that almost seems to unite Nisida and Lazzaretto into a single territorial portion.

Finally, in an illustrated album, which bears the English title *Naples* on the cover (1835-1900, from which it can be deduced that the sheets with

landscapes of Naples and Pompeii in it were compiled by an English traveler), Nisida appears depicted from Pozzuoli (fig. 3).

On the top of the defensive tower emerges an unpublished element, an optical telegraph, which was certainly present on the island before 1834. This is demonstrated in a chronicle of the rescue of some men lost at sea by Luigi Savarese, telegraph officer of Nisida, on August 3 of that year (*Annali Civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, 1834: 47-48).

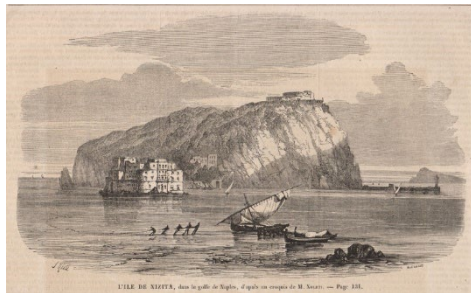
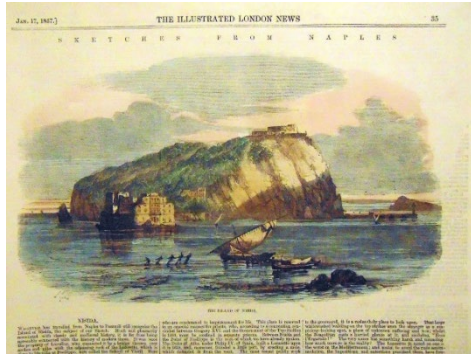


Fig. 1- Xylographic engravings of Nisida: on top, *The Island of Nisida* (*The Illustrated London News*, 1857); on bottom *L'île de Nizita, dans le golfe de Naples* (*L'Univers illustré*, 1860).



Fig. 2- Nisida (*Illustrated Times*, 1856).

Focusing on the vedutistic analysis contained within the pictorial representations of the 19th and

18th centuries (certainly not exhaustive due to the numerous private collections available, especially from the Neapolitan school), Nisida is, for example, depicted in the work of artist H. David Salomon Corrodi (1844-1905), *View of the island of Nisida in the Gulf of Pozzuoli* of 1858, in a panoramic view in the Gulf of Pozzuoli taken from Posillipo Point (fig. 4).

The island, placed in the center of the composition with the surrounding water creating a natural frame, is the main focal point. In this work, the author's style is reflected in the precision of architectural details and the natural rendering of colors and lights. What is more, the painting shows an interest in visually documenting and exploring the architectural and landscape features of Nisida.

On the other hand, the beautiful gouache by Alessandro D'Anna (1746-1810), entitled *Isola di Nisida e Lazzaretto del Chiuppino*, proves crucial for a more precise location of the telegraph mentioned earlier (fig. 5). Looking carefully, it appears placed on the roof of the block of buildings behind the tower. The reason may lie in the fact that it had to be accessible both for operation and for possible maintenance without interfering with the tower's reclusive rooms. The work is dated between 1746 and 1810: the presence of the optical telegraph, however, allows it to be placed from 1794, the date when, in France, the optical telegraph system conceived by the Frenchman Claude Chappe began to spread (Marotta & Netti, 2019).

Panoramic views, most interesting to the foreground depiction of the Posillipo promontory, with the presence of a picturesque tree twisted in on itself, are those by Saverio Della Gatta (about 1758-1828), *Blick auf den Golf von Pozzuoli*, and by Pietro Fabris (1740-1792), *View of the Gulf of Pozzuoli with the islands of Lazzaretto and Nisida, Ischia, Procida, Cape Miseno, Monte Nuovo, Pozzuoli, the Stone and part of the original beach of Bagnoli*. The latter, enriched with genre scenes typical of Fabris, has a viewpoint advanced enough to exist. Probably, by placing himself on the slopes of Posillipo toward the Gateway, the optical chamber may have helped him create the illusion.

In the same year, Pietro Fabris depicted a new and unprecedented viewpoint showing the curved inner walls of one of the ancient craters of the Phlegrean area, Porto Paone (or Peacock).



Fig. 3- Album Naples, 1835-1900.



Fig. 4- H. D. Salomon Corrodi, *View of the island of Nisida in the Gulf of Pozzuoli*, 1858.

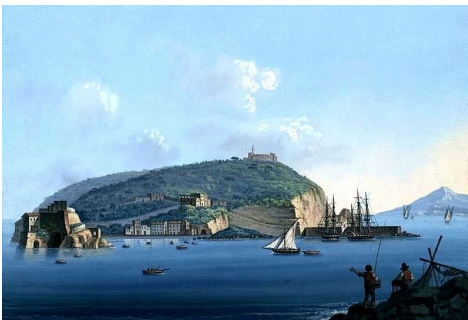


Fig. 5- Alessandro D'Anna, *Isola di Nisida e Lazzaretto del Chiuppino*, gouache, 1746-1810.



Fig. 6- Pietro Fabris, *Veduta di Porto Paone nell'isola di Nisida*, 1776.

This inlet, so-called for its shape resembling the open tail of a peacock, is now a natural harbor, formed by marine erosion of the original volcanic cone. In the background, on the other hand, we can see Palazzotto, a Bourbon-era building used for laundries and logistical activities, which in 1815 was to take the name Bourbon Laundry for the purpose of meeting the needs of the punishment house (fig. 6). All these mentioned works were born thanks to the pictorial current of Vedutism, an artistic phenomenon in which, for the first time, the landscape was represented objectively and scientifically and no longer the mere background of human actions (De Seta, 1998). Within this cultural landscape, emerges the *View of the Gulf of Baja* [...] by the painter and engraver Aloja Giuseppe, active in Naples from 1750 onward and made in 1760 (fig. 7). This is a panoramic view that captures the beauty and topography of the Gulf of Baia and Pozzuoli, with the three islands of Nisida, Procida and Ischia visible at the opening of the gulf. The perspective is rendered with a higher point of view than the flat reality of Bagnoli. This geometric peculiarity brings out more of the topographical details, especially the views, of the places depicted. The focus on Nisida boasts the presence of the circular tower (fortified element) with a raised access from its base. At its side, there is for the first time a hint of the depth of the quadrangular enclosure, referred to as the *Castle* in the *Mappa topografica della città di Napoli* (Topographic Map of the City of Naples) by the Duke of Noja (1750-75). This is probably the former residence of the Piccolomini family. Below, on the left, are visible entrance buildings to the island from which the stepped access path starts. This view finds precedents in the paintings of Caspar Van Wittel (1653-1736), active in Naples from 1699 to 1702, Gaspar Butler (1672-?), Tommaso Ruiz (in Naples from 1710 to 1760), Antonio Joli (1700-1777) and other works of the Neapolitan school. Probably, the first to realize this peculiar (high) viewpoint was Caspar Van Wittel. The work, titled *Gezicht op de Golf van Napels waar verschillende grote en kleine schepen varen* (View of the Bay of Naples with several large and small ships sailing), is a 17th-century painting kept at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (fig. 8). The perspective is set from an elevated position allowing the viewer to see the big gulf and the ships passing through it. Significant typicality of its depiction concern: the representation of the tower of Nisida, which, unlike replicated models in the future, has a

crenellated summit crown; the presence of vertical elements arranged along the stepped path to the tower that lead one to speculate (but not confirm) that it may have been covered in some parts; and the finding of an elevated building body, separate from the tower, leading one to suppose the presence of a drawbridge for access.

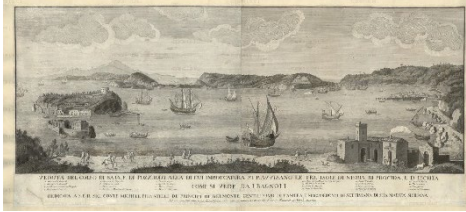


Fig. 7- Aloja Giuseppe, *Veduta del golfo di Baja, e di Pozzuolo* [...], 1760.



Fig. 8- Caspar Van Wittel, *Gezicht op de Golf van Napels* [...], 1699-1702.



Fig. 9- Gaspar Butler, *Porto di Mahon, Minorca*, 1735, Paul Mellon Collection.

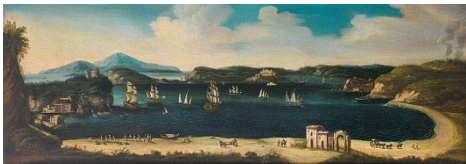


Fig. 10- Tommaso Ruiz, *Il golfo di Pozzuoli*, first half of 18th century.



Fig. 11- Tommaso Ruiz, *Il golfo di Pozzuoli*, prima metà del XVIII secolo.

Next, is the work attributed to English artist Gaspar Butler incorrectly titled *Port Mahon in Menorca*. This 1735 (about) painting, probably edited in several replicated models themselves (with different color and light qualities), does not offer a fine quality of detail of the buildings exhibited earlier, but it confirms the hypothesis of the drawbridge by a clearer presence of a horizontal element (probably a planking) connected to the tower. The author, in fact, unlike Van Wittel, emphasizes this element by detaching it more from the circular tower (fig. 9). Tommaso Ruiz, on the other hand, seems to devote himself more to a bucolic type of depiction, to seduce the viewer with the depiction of thicker and more lush vegetation. The view does not offer any differences in the reproduction of the tower, but it certainly attracts attention by the presence of a covered oblique pathway, a loggia with an entrance door placed next to the buildings downstream of the island (fig. 10). Finally, the view of Baia created by Antonio Joli (between 1759 and 1777) depicts Nisida from an aberrated perspective, with an even wider point of view than its precursors (fig. 11). Joli intends to stage a kind of static visual narrative with the combination of different viewpoints united in a single representation. In fact, the viewpoint on Nisida seems to be at Coroglio beach; the Chiuppino rock and the Posillipo promontory appear to be observed from Pozzuoli; Miseno seems closer to the viewer and its tip does not appear hidden by Nisida.

Attention is now moved to the descriptive cartography of cities, which, over the centuries, has over time favored more ornamental types of representation with the shaping of urban images from multiple viewpoints according to frontal, pseudo-axonometric, and/or pseudo-prospective views (Cirillo, 2016). As stated earlier, this way of representing the city has returned a cultural bearing based on the plastic characteristics of the city as opposed to the plan view, which inevitably reduces these peculiarities. In this sense, the analysis of descriptive cartography here becomes a useful tool for the iconic reading of the island of Nisida, plastically illustrated in the drawing sheet through the allusion to three-dimensionality and such as to determine in the urban views of Naples a particular visual-perceptual impact in the fruition of the same image.

The *veduta scenografica a ponente della città di Napoli in campagna felice*, a topographic

perspective of the city of Naples placed in the lower part of Giovanni Carafa Duke of Noja 1775 *Mapa topografica della città di Napoli e de' suoi contorni*, illustrates the city of Naples from an east-west point of view, which allows the entire Gulf of Naples with the islands of Ischia and Procida to Pozzuoli and Miseno to be depicted. In this view, Nisida, referred to in the legend as number XXXVI, is visible with its tower and castle on the left and, further down, another building, probably one of the intermediate constructions that intercepted the ancient stairway (fig. 12).

Pseudo-axonometric views, on the other hand, return a greater topographical impact of the plan layout. In Alessandro Baratta's *Fidelissima urbis neapolitanae* [...] of 1627 (fig. 13), *Nisita*, identifiable in the west area of the view, is outlined in a few graphic strokes that configure a 'cliff' on which there is a large, crenellated tower, the element of greatest distinctive evocation of the island in those years. The same thing happens a few years later in Stopendaal's view (1653). Different from Baratta's, the latter, although in its unreliable depiction of the island, allows the viewer to locate the iconic element of the tower in its correct position.

Descriptive cartography of cities in the form of views (but also topographical) can also be found within travel guides, which, by means of drawn and/or engraved representations of places, from the 16th century onward constituted a way in which people explored the world (even from a distance). The engravings had as their fundamental purpose to support the long narrative descriptions contained in the volumes, allowing readers to visualize concretely the places described in the text. Some of the most recent examples are those attributable to the guides of Pompeo Sarnelli (1784) and Domenico Antonio Parrino (1715). Both, in their guidebooks *de' Forestieri*, portray Nisida with a frontal viewpoint, in the first case, taken from Coroglio and, in the second, from Scola di Virgilio, the present Gaiola (figs. 14-15). Pompeo Sarnelli produced in 1709 a first edition of *Guida de Forestieri* [...]. Here, the island of Nisida, within the *Pianta di Pozzoli e' suo territorio*, appears depicted in plan to highlight its topographical morphology and, in so doing, also reveal to the viewer the configuration of Porto Paone. The depth of the tower is alluded to by means of a frontal drawing placed in elevation.

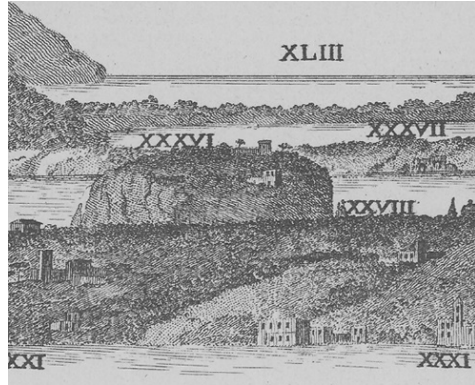


Fig. 12– Nisida in a detail of Map of Giovanni Carafa - Duke of Noja, *Veduta scenografica a ponente della città di Napoli in Campagna Felice*, 1775, sheet n. 25.



Fig. 13- Nisita in a detail of *Fidelissima urbis neapolitanae* [...] by Alessandro Baratta (1627).

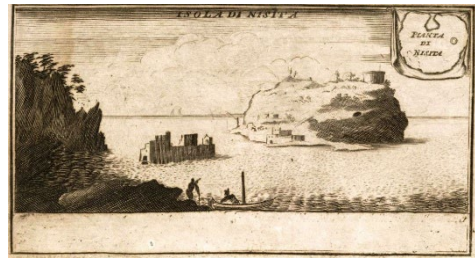


Fig. 14- *Isola di Nisida*. In Pompeo Sarnelli, *La guida de' forestieri* [...], 1784, Napoli, p. 216.

This combination of planimetric and altimetric elements is typical of the pseudo-axonometric representation of cities belonging to the 17th season, with numerous examples on Nisida. One of the most emblematic is certainly that of Francesco Villamena of 1652, whose volume, entitled *Ager Puteolanus* [...], includes exclusively engravings of the surroundings of Pozzuoli without any textual description.



Fig. 15- *Veduta della Gaiola et is. De Nisida*. In Domenico Antonio Parrino, *Nuova guida de forastieri per l'antichità curiosissime Di Pazuoli* [...], 1715, Napoli, p. 126.

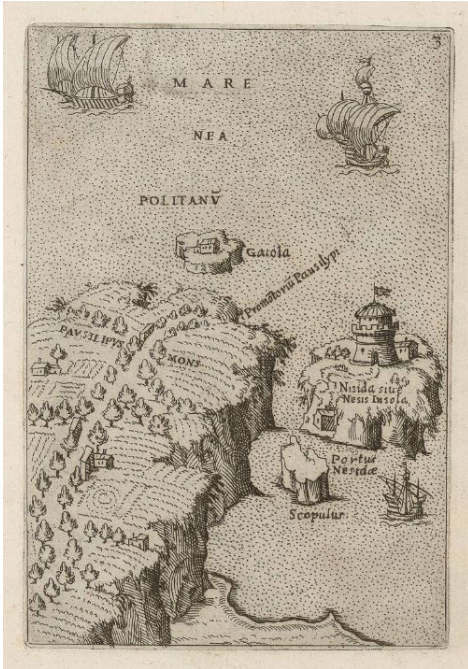


Fig. 16- *Nisida siue Nesis Insola*. In Francesco Villamena, *Ager Puteolanus sive prospectus eiusdem insigniores*, 1652, Roma, p. 5.

The first engraving in the volume is precisely that of Nisida. It is interesting to note how Villamena devoted himself in detail to the representation of the iconic tower by joining together typological elements of Angevin and Aragonese derivation. Most surprising, however, is the presence of an additional elevation level with a curvilinear roof located above the crenelated crown, which leads one to speculate whether it was present during the 17th century (fig. 16). Other examples, more

traceable to that of Pompeo Sarnelli of 1709, are a series of replicated models starting in 1652 with that of Villamena and, backwards, with Giacomo Lauro (1628) and Giovanni Orlandi (1625), arriving up to the first 'topographic map' (with allusions of depth) of the Phlegrean area by Mario Cartaro (1586), although the same territory, in a marginal way, is depicted in earlier maps. The area depicted, includes the *Promontorium Pausilipi*, the *Promontorium Miseni* and the *Palus Patrie* associating, according to the cartographic style of the time, the pictorial landscape with the topographic view (fig. 17).



Fig. 17- Mario Cartaro, *Explicatio aliquot locorum quae Puteolis spectantur*, Roma, 1586.

Except for Giovanni Orlandi, all other authors depict the island of Nisida with a crenellated tower seen in a frontal direction and named *Arx Nisidæ*, an ancient term for an urban agglomeration (stronghold), referring to a place of refuge, located on a rise and equipped with natural defenses, later complemented by other man-made works to make the place more inaccessible (VC).

3. Conclusion

Starting backwards in time, from 'modern' to the oldest views sources (Fino, 1900), the aim of contribution was to systematize and catalog the knowledge of Nisida iconographic cultural heritage. An indispensable action for comparison with the current spatial configuration of the island, the outcome of a team research activity (in other contributions presented here), mainly based on the acquisition of knowledge through architectural survey (Ferri Missano, 1987; Cardone, 1992; Discepolo, 2001; Cardone et al., 2016) (RM).

References

- Annali Civili del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (1834), volume V, maggio-agosto. Tipografia del Real Ministero degli Interni del Real Albergò dei Poveri, Napoli, pp. 47-48.
- Cardone, V. (1992). *Nisida. Storia di un mito dei Campi Flegrei*. Napoli, Ed. Electa Napoli.
- Cardone, V., Zerlenga, O., Cennamo, C. (2016). Architetture della difesa a Nisida. In Verdiani, G. (ed.), *Defensive Architecture of the Mediterranean: XV to XVIII Centuries*, Vol. III, pp. 387-394.
- Cirillo, V. (2016). Modelli rappresentativi di città in “Regno di Napoli in Prospettiva di Gio. Battista Pacichelli”. In: Capano, F., Pascariello, M.I. & Visone, M (ed(s).), *Delli Aspetti de Paesi. Vecchi e nuovi Media per l'Immagine del Paesaggio: Rappresentazione, memoria, conservazione*, Tomo II. Napoli, FedOA - Federico II University Press, pp. 67-76.
- Croce, B. (1984). Nisida. In *Napoli Nobilissima*, III, II, pp. 17-23.
- De Seta, C. (ed.) (1998). L'immagine della città europea dal Rinascimento al secolo dei Lumi. Milano, Skira.
- De Seta, C., (2004). Tra oriente e occidente. Città e iconografia dal XV al XIX secolo. Napoli, Electa Napoli.
- di Luggo, A., Zerlenga, O., Pascariello, M.I. (2018). Rappresentazione e comunicazione del paesaggio tra tradizione e innovazione. In: Capano, F., Pascariello, M.I. & Visone, M (ed(s).), *Delli Aspetti de Paesi. Vecchi e nuovi Media per l'Immagine del Paesaggio: Rappresentazione, memoria, conservazione*, Tomo II. Napoli, FedOA - Federico II University Press, pp. 29-33.
- Discepolo, B. (2001). Nisida, l'isola. L'ambiente, l'architettura, i progetti. Napoli, Graffiti.
- Docci, M., Gaiani, M., Maestri, D. (2017). *Scienza del disegno*. Torino, CittàStudi Edizioni.
- Ferri Missano, A. (1987). *Nisida*. Napoli, Edizione Circolo Nuova Italdider Bagnoli, pp. 23-24.
- Fino, L. (1990). Il vedutismo a Napoli nella grafica dal XVII al XIX secolo: con cenni sulla pittura, l'architettura e le trasformazioni urbane. Napoli, Grimaldi.
- Illustrated London News*, 1857, v. 31, July/Dec. 1857. Available at: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101059281194&seq=266&q1=nisida> (Accessed: 25 August 2023).
- Illustrated Times*, 1856, 1 November 1856, pp. 9-18. Available at: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1856-11-01?NewspaperTitle=Illustrated%2BLondon%2BNews&IssueId=BL%2F0001578%2F18561101%2F&County=London%2C%20England> (Accessed: 26 August 2023).
- Ippoliti, E. (2023). Immagini. Il campo ampio del Disegno. In Zerlenga, O. & Cirafici, A. (ed(s).), *Nuove frontiere nel disegno*. DADI_PRESS, pp. 153-154.
- L'Univers illustré* (1866), Paris, p. 132.
- Marotta, A., Netti, R. (ed.) (2019). The Chappe telegraph from the French Revolution to Napoleon's Empire. Communication from war to peace. Roma, Aracne.
- Naples*, 1835-1900. Available at: <https://galerie.biblhertz.it/it/5-03-album-1835-1900/> (Accessed: 3 September 2023).
- Pane, G., Valerio, V., (ed(s).) (1987). La città di Napoli tra vedutismo e cartografia: piante e vedute dal XV al XIX secolo. Napoli, Grimaldi.
- Parrino, D.A. (1715). *Nuova guida de forastieri per l'antichità curiosissime Di Pazuoli* [...], Napoli, p. 126. Available at: <https://dlib.biblhertz.it/m2/?manifest=https://dlib.biblhertz.it/iiif/be40183150/manifest2.json> (Accessed: 7 September 2023).
- Poliorama Pittoresco (1844). Napoli.
- Sarnelli, P. (1709). *La guida de' forestieri curiosi di vedere e di riconoscere le cose più memorabili di Pozzoli, Baia, Cuma, Miseno, Gaeta* [...], Napoli. Available at: <https://dlib.biblhertz.it/m2/?manifest=https://dlib.biblhertz.it/iiif/be40182970a/manifest2.json> (Accessed: 6 September 2023).
- Sarnelli, P. (1784). *La guida de' forestieri curiosi di vedere, e di riconoscere le cose più memorabili di Pozzoli* [...]. Napoli, p. 216. Available at: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/50/Medical_Heritage_Library_%28IA_b28760748%29.pdf (Accessed: 7 September 2023).
- Villamena, F. (1652). *Ager Puteolanvs sive prospectvs eivsdem insigniores*. Roma. Available at: <https://dlib.biblhertz.it/m2/?manifest=https://dlib.biblhertz.it/iiif/epoz1422520/manifest2.json> (Accessed: 10 September 2023).