



# GLOBAL GOODS AND THE COUNTRY HOUSE

COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES, 1650–1800

EDITED BY JON STOBART



 **UCLPRESS**



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 **UCL**PRESS

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## Power, friendship and delightfulness: global goods in the residences of an aristocratic family in the Kingdom of Naples

Gaia Bruno

On 9 October 1760, Empress Maria Teresa of Austria wrote to Duchess Margherita Pignatelli: ‘I really appreciate your kind expressions, demonstrating a clear proof of your feelings for me, as for the present [you sent me]: I am much obliged to you, assuring you that I always keep it in mind’.<sup>1</sup> Friendship between the two women was regularly marked through the exchange of gifts, as we understand by another letter sent on 1 April 1772: ‘the expressions with which you manifest your satisfaction with the porcelain I sent you correspond to your feelings that I know very well’.<sup>2</sup> Even if written in an archaic and quite uncertain Italian, these two letters reflect the personal link that connected Margherita Pignatelli with the Austrian court – royal connections which characterised all the main members of the Pignatelli di Monteleone in the eighteenth century. The Pignatelli possessed feudal estates in the Kingdom of Naples and also in the Kingdom of Sicily. In addition, this side of the family descended from the famous Hernán Cortés, a circumstance that made them owners of lands in the Mexican Oaxaca valley.<sup>3</sup> Their deep entanglement in the political web of the times, as well as the vast size of their possessions, makes them an ideal case study to analyse the diffusion of global goods into the houses of the eighteenth-century Neapolitan aristocracy.

The presence of global goods in the houses of the English upper classes has been read as material evidence of their participation in colonialism and empire.<sup>4</sup> But here the question is: are we able to apply this model to a rather different context – the Neapolitan one? Does the presence of similar global goods imply the same engagement with colonial power? The question is important because the diffusion of

global goods into high-ranking estates is well documented by Neapolitan inventories, yet the Kingdom of Naples and its aristocracy did not directly participate in the colonial expansion of European countries in the Far East or the Americas. Thus, one key question is: why do we find such goods in Neapolitan aristocratic houses and what was their actual meaning?

Another issue concerns the importance of the different houses. Although most British aristocratic families had large London houses which contained many of their most treasured artistic possessions, Stobart points to the importance of the country house in the life of the English upper classes. The great house in the countryside was a sort of headquarters from which landowners controlled their estates and where they concentrated a great deal of resources, with the aim of materialising their wealth and power.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, as Labrot has shown, the Neapolitan aristocracy lived a more itinerant life, moving between three houses at least: one in the capital, one on the feudal estate and another in the countryside near Vesuvius.<sup>6</sup> Their respective importance in the life of their owners changed according to personal taste and the political scenery of the time. Apart from some dissident voices,<sup>7</sup> Italian historians of the eighteenth century agree in attributing the main importance to the house in Naples;<sup>8</sup> but this does not mean the country houses were insignificant. The location of global goods should be taken into consideration as an additional factor to understand the relative importance of the different houses in the Neapolitan aristocratic context. Indeed, thanks to their high value, they were central to the materialisation of power.

These questions are all related to the main aim of this chapter, which is to understand the meaning of global goods in Neapolitan aristocratic houses. To do so I use probate inventories from the private archive of the Pignatelli, drawn up in the 1740s and 1750s and today stored in the Naples State Archive. They refer to the family's three most important houses in the Kingdom of Naples, without considering those in the Kingdom of Sicily. Two of the documents are about the family's goods in their palace in Naples, another two list goods at the feudal castle of Monteleone in the province of Calabria Ultra, and the final two are about their villa near the capital, in a place called Barra.<sup>9</sup>

As Jules Prown has shown, in order to understand fully the features of household possessions, a comparison between written documents and museum objects would be ideal.<sup>10</sup> In this specific case a collection of family objects still exists, but it comes from the property of the Sicilian Princess Rosa Fici di Amalfi (1869–1955), wife of Diego Pignatelli (1862–1930) and niece-in-law of the eighteenth-century members of

the family mentioned in this chapter. Fewer, but nonetheless relevant, objects came from the property of her daughter, Princess Anna Maria.<sup>11</sup> The collection is set in the Principe Diego Aragona Pignatelli Cortes Museum in Naples, the nineteenth-century house of the family, which displays its objects to recreate interiors as lived spaces.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of a complete and updated catalogue, we cannot be sure whether the various examples of eighteenth-century Chinese and Japanese objects found in the museum are the same as those mentioned in the inventories. Nevertheless, these objects are an important source that can enrich the analysis of the simple written documents by giving additional information on the material features of the goods.

Based on written sources and partly also on material ones, this chapter analyses the presence of global goods in some of the main houses of the Pignatelli of Monteleone in the Kingdom of Naples during the first half of the eighteenth century. After a brief survey of the diffusion of global goods in the three houses, I focus my attention on the villa in Barra and the palace in Naples in order to identify any difference between the kinds of objects in the two houses and their respective meanings. The reference period for this analysis is the life of the Duke Diego Pignatelli Aragona Cortés (1687–1750): ninth Duke of Monteleone and Terranova, prince of Castelvetrano, Duke of Bellosguardo, prince of the Holy Roman Empire, marquis of the Oaxaca Valley, knight of the Toson d'or.<sup>13</sup> The other key names mentioned in the text are his father Nicolò, first viceroy of the Kingdom of Sicily, his second wife Margherita, and their son and heir Fabrizio.

## The delight of exoticism

The Pignatelli needed to manage their lands and to participate in the social and political life of the courts in Madrid, Vienna, Naples and Palermo. This implies that they, like other aristocratic families, conducted an itinerant existence, moving among the residences they had in these various places, with a lifestyle that is reminiscent, in some senses, of a Renaissance court. Such a lifestyle carried two implications. The first is that objects circulated among houses with their owners. The second is that political relationships were often fundamental to the presence of global goods in the Pignatelli houses.

Let us begin with the castle. The poor road network and transport infrastructure meant that reaching the feudal lands was neither easy nor fast.<sup>14</sup> Living far from the capital could mean being isolated from

the centre of power; for a great many families in the eighteenth century, therefore, their houses in the provinces were largely neglected, as revealed by inventories and confirmed by the existing literature.<sup>15</sup> If we look at the Pignatelli, their feudal castle in Monteleone (Calabria) was no exception: it contained neglected belongings and no exotic objects.<sup>16</sup> Landlords traditionally devoted the period of residence in their feudal possessions to the management of lands, but in the eighteenth century many visited only occasionally, preferring to delegate this activity to reliable deputies.<sup>17</sup> Neapolitan men of letters accused landlords of absenteeism and argued that the neglect of their lands by some aristocrats was the cause of backwardness in the southern provinces.<sup>18</sup> The aristocrats' physical absence from their feudal estates did not exactly coincide with the accusation, but it nevertheless shows a decreased interest in life in the countryside, while living in the urban context of the capital became increasingly important.

Overall, the importance attributed to the different kinds of houses changed with the passing of time. Accordingly, owners moved from a house to another and objects circulated with them, as is clearly shown in the case of the Pignatelli. Between December 1723 and September 1724, Duke Nicolò ordered the transfer of some goods from Naples to Monteleone, as specified in an inventory.<sup>19</sup> This is the last moment of enrichment of furniture for the castle. Later, the trajectory of the objects reveals a shift in the investments in the houses. The villa in Barra was the chief beneficiary: constructed between 1728 and 1766, it received pieces from all the properties belonging to the Pignatelli. Some things were transported from Monteleone, including a collection of paintings noted as 'Quadri che vennero da Calabria' and a six-piece dining table made in Monteleone. This movement of goods suggests that some pieces of furniture were more useful to the duke in Barra than in Monteleone. Indeed, to furnish the villa, goods also came from Spain, the birthplace of Diego (the furniture for the private chapel) and from the Sicilian houses of the family (a living bird and some worked stones).<sup>20</sup> After the death of Duke Diego (1750), the attention of the family seemed to switch to the palace in Naples. This is the reason why in the same inventory we find some annotations indicating that some things were missing because they had been transported to Naples in 1757 and in 1760. Specifically, these were two curtains and two beds, useful for the celebration of the day of the Madonna di Piedigrotta.<sup>21</sup> The presence of the new royal court in Naples (definitive from 1744) was probably the key reason for the new central importance of the urban palace. This is attested firstly by its renovation in the middle of the 1720s,<sup>22</sup> secondly by the arrival of a

collection of books from Calabria,<sup>23</sup> and finally by a high concentration of luxury goods, including exotic items.

As is apparent from these examples, for the Pignatelli the placement of objects followed in some measure the fortune of their houses – fortune that depended on the personal inclination of the owners, but also on the political context in which they lived. Exotic objects were particularly important in this respect as they were key indicators of the importance attributed to the different houses. **Table 5.1** shows that the majority of exotic goods were in the palace in Naples, with Chinese objects being especially evident – in line with the taste of the first half of the century. As for the Indian pieces, it is hard to say whether they came from the East or West, or what their import channel might have been, as the adjective ‘Indian’ could refer to objects from the Americas, India or elsewhere in Asia, as is apparent from a comparison of the seventeenth-century Medici and Habsburgian collections.<sup>24</sup> This was because the term used by the writers of the inventories recalled the original idea of India as a land of marvels and so the adjective came to identify all unusual, exotic and wonderful objects.<sup>25</sup> The table also provides evidence of the Pignatelli passion for animals, birds in particular, which has its material footprint even in the castle, although exotic animals were most evident in the villa at Barra.

**Table 5.1** Exotic objects in the Pignatelli houses (1745, 1751, 1752).

	Exotic objects		
	Chinese	Others	Animals
<b>Naples</b>	The duke’s bed Five pieces of furniture Sixteen vases Three mirrors Twelve paintings One clock The duchess’s porcelain	Three pieces of Indian earthenware Eight Indian paintings The duchess’s Japanese porcelain	Several birdcages Fourteen ostrich eggs
<b>Barra</b>	Six paintings Seven chairs Some pieces of porcelain	Two Greek paintings One peacock fan Two portraits of slaves	One lion Three Turkish ducks Two bears Two ostriches One peacock
<b>Monteleone</b>			Two parrot cages

Source: Naples State Archive, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo del duca di Terranova e Monteleone, 17 June 1751; Inventario delle robbe del ducal castello in custodia del guardarobba Gio Battista Petitto, 23 May 1745; Inventario del palazzo della Barra di tutto ciò che stava in consegna di Fortunato Camerino, 15 September 1752.



Exploring the villa in more detail, this would generally be the ideal place to spend the summer months, away from the heat of the city and engaged in amusing activities. Neapolitan aristocrats owned country villas from at least the sixteenth century. At that time, the favourite places were Posillipo and Chiaia, but both became less popular with the passing of time because of the difficulty of reaching them.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, the plain below Vesuvius gained favour because of the fertility of the soils and the ease of access. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, therefore, a great many villas were constructed in the area: most had agricultural land attached and were built around a rustic courtyard.<sup>27</sup> With the construction of the Royal Palace in Portici (1738–42), the area experienced a new wave of popularity. An impressive number of villas were built, side by side, on the route from Naples to Portici, which became known as the ‘golden mile’. These houses were different from earlier villas because they did not have productive lands but were instead built primarily as a place of sociability. Their main doors and balconies were on the street, then a courtyard gave access to the garden, separated by real agricultural spaces.<sup>28</sup> This setting was described as ‘delightfulness’, something that united the Latin concept of *otium* with a high sense of lavish pleasures in which aristocrats spent their spare time. In Barra, the Pignatelli constructed their own villa.<sup>29</sup> Historians have pointed out the contrast between the original keen interest of the owners in building the villa and its present state of neglect.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, while the building still exists, it is unfortunately not an historical house but rather is subdivided and inhabited by different families, part of the densely populated environment of the Vesuvian towns.<sup>31</sup>

The villa Pignatelli in its golden age was depicted on the famous 1775 map made by Duke Giovanni Carafa di Noja and was one of the first villas designed based on modern design criteria.<sup>32</sup> Actually, the building was never entirely completed, so this representation is partly fictional, but the incomplete nature of the house was not so exceptional at the time for Neapolitan aristocrats, who frequently preferred to start new works instead of completing ongoing projects.<sup>33</sup> Particularly important was the large external space (still existing, with its café and pavilions, even if largely abandoned).<sup>34</sup> At the time of the Pignatelli, the garden was used for leisure activities such as parties and balls. A contemporary engraving (1732) depicts a serenade to celebrate Duke Diego’s investment in the Toson d’or.<sup>35</sup> Even if it is not clearly specified which place is depicted, the set with its ephemeral apparatus seems to correspond to the famous French garden of the villa in Barra. Beyond the garden was a rural estate that was used for hunting.

The Neapolitan upper class of the eighteenth century took the idea of building a quiet place from the Roman model, in which the villa should be immersed in nature but well distinguished from wilderness through the cultivation of the garden. Here spaces should be articulated to host fruit trees, evergreen plants, medicinal herbs, mazes of flowers and flowerbeds and fountains.<sup>36</sup> Flora and fauna were often enriched with exotic species. All was set around the concept of delightfulness. In concrete terms, this meant creating an environment which rested and delighted the spirit of the owner and the guests. Exoticism was important in achieving this. The 1750 inventory listed 'the animals, quadrupeds and birds, in the country house in Barra' (unfortunately, we are not so lucky to have a similar inventory of the plants):

a female lion, two bears, one male and the other female, a porcupine, two ostriches one male and the other female, fifteen fallow deer, four of them white, fifteen deer, four [sic] female and a male, twelve boars plus nine born in 1750, eighteen ducks, three of them property of the marquis, two Turkish duckling, four guinea fowl, a peacock, seventeen chicken including four rooster, two partridge, twelve pheasant, a cage with canaries, another cage with grey doves, two big fishes.<sup>37</sup>

This list comprises an interesting mix of global and local beasts. Some of them (particularly the fallow deer, boars and ducks) were part of the duke's hunting reserve. Hunting was one of the favourite activities performed in the context of the country villa and was particularly important among the aristocracies of all Europe for its impact in strengthening sociability.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the passion of the first Bourbon kings and their Neapolitan court for hunting is well known.<sup>39</sup>

Then there were the exotic animals, first a female lion. As studies of the collections of the Medici courts have revealed, the lion was the core of the collection of exotic animals because it symbolised the authority of the prince.<sup>40</sup> Other animals, such as peacocks and ostriches, were also used for their secondary products, such as feathers and eggs.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the Pignatelli also had a large peacock fan in the villa and two ostrich eggs, displayed in the duke's bedroom at the palace in Naples.<sup>42</sup> While ostriches were rarer, and therefore held a certain cachet, the cultural value of the peacocks is more complicated to define. In Neapolitan gardens such birds have been seen as one of the oldest symbols of exoticism, being among the delights of villas since Roman times.<sup>43</sup> By the eighteenth century, the blue peacock was widespread in Europe, making

it less prestigious than the white variety imported from India from the Renaissance, for example, into the Medici aviaries.<sup>44</sup>

In the eighteenth century, living animals had a high aesthetic value, being among the delights of the house. Unfortunately, we do not have any contemporary representation of the Pignatelli menagerie. In order to visualise the aesthetic value of animals we can look to the Pignatelli Museum, where there is a collection of 21 different birds, including a peacock, made in chased silver (Figure 5.1). There are bigger and smaller birds represented; some are exotic and others local; all are represented in a natural attitude to simulate the actions of walking or pecking. But living animals had meanings beyond the aesthetic. Possessing them was a matter of magnificence, a central concept in aristocratic ideology.<sup>45</sup> Due to the high cost of acquiring and keeping exotic beasts, their presence was proof of the family's wealth.<sup>46</sup> In aristocratic culture, of course, being rich did not mean accumulating a fortune, but rather spending it in order to support a lifestyle characterised by liberality and magnificence – behaviours which often created problems of indebtedness.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, while the Pignatelli lands below Vesuvius and in the other places were productive, family expenses were always higher than their incomes. This was rather common among noble families of the Kingdom of Naples because of the different kinds of expenses they had, but it was by no means unusual among the other aristocrats in Europe.<sup>48</sup> Having said that, Diego Pignatelli was particularly indebted.<sup>49</sup>

Animals were also an important part of the gift economy that, on a global scale, interconnected different courts. Popes and princes were



**Figure 5.1** Silver birds, chiselled on silvers, various sizes, nineteenth century. Reproduced courtesy of Museo Principe Diego Aragona Cortés, Naples.

honoured with such precious gifts, most of them coming from countries around the Indian Ocean.<sup>50</sup> The first monarchies to possess exotic animals were those which had power over colonies in Asia, Africa and India: the Ming and Qing Chinese dynasties, the Indian Mughal and the Ottoman emperors. Then there were the European powers which controlled the routes to exotic lands: Portugal and Spain first, then the Low Countries and England.<sup>51</sup> If a family did not live in a country which either ruled colonies or controlled trading routes, the possession of exotic beasts was probably due to its relationship with one of the more powerful dynasties. Most of the animals listed in the Pignatelli villa were with all probability brought from the Indian Ocean via the intermediation of the Ottoman Empire. There is a lack of documents on the provenance of such animals, and the adjectives used in the inventories are often generic. Nevertheless, we can determine their provenance partly from the species – the lion and the peacock, in particular – and partly from place name adjectives: a *pecorone* (sheep) from Barbaria and two ‘Turkish’ ducks. These animals, destined only to be admired, were clearly distinguished from the more local beasts.

The Pignatelli menagerie had multiple functions. Keeping a collection of exotic beasts certainly testifies to the wealth of the family, who could afford such a lavish hobby; but it was also the result of diplomatic relationships with the Near East. In the villa, the animals were displayed not only for their aesthetic value, but also as a symbol of familial and economic power. We do not have any explicit evidence on why the collection was in the villa and not in the palace of Naples. Probably, it was a matter of space: the palace had its own internal garden, but it was much smaller than that at the villa. More deeply, we can guess that the animals were a leisure attraction for the Pignatelli guests, one of the delights used to facilitate aristocratic sociability in the countryside.

## Global porcelain in the palace

Given their provenance, these animals could be called exotic. For other goods, we are able to recognise more clearly a global trajectory. Perhaps the most renowned category of exotic object in the eighteenth century was porcelain from China and Japan. Actually, the Pignatelli inventories list both Chinese objects – that is, original, truly imported – and objects in a Chinese style, but probably manufactured in Europe. The villa at Barra held a few examples of such goods: the duke’s bedroom was furnished with some pieces in a Chinese style, including two paintings

in the antechamber and seven chairs of red and yellow velvet with Chinese motifs (Table 5.1).<sup>52</sup> As for the porcelain, a final annotation to the 1752 inventory noted that in one room there was ‘all the Marsiglia porcelain together with the Chinese one and a few others from Vienna’, although the inventory went on to specify that ‘some of these pieces of porcelain have been found broken’.<sup>53</sup> Although the villa was built during the golden years of the taste for chinoiserie, the influence of this fashion does not seem to have had a fundamental impact on the house interiors. Even more interesting is the damage apparently suffered by such goods. Although the inventory does not include values for the objects, we know that pieces of porcelain from China, Vienna and Marsiglia were valuable because here and in other aristocratic houses we notice a difference between imported porcelain and earthenware of local production called ‘faenza’, which was for daily use.<sup>54</sup>

In truth, however, these pieces in Barra were secondary to the main part of the Pignatelli collection in the palace in Naples. The first feature to reflect on is their collocation within the house. There were pieces in several rooms, but the most interesting spaces were the duke’s bedroom and the duchess’s cabinet, where Chinese objects were concentrated. Helen Clifford, among others, has shown how precious Chinese wallpaper was predominantly used in the private spaces of houses.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, we are often inclined to think that luxury objects were positioned in ‘front-stage’ rooms frequented by guests.<sup>56</sup> Of course, the concept of privacy in the aristocratic house was not completely comparable to that pertaining today. The birth of a sense of intimacy has been a matter of debate,<sup>57</sup> but it is known that the aristocratic house was similar to a court: it required many servants with different duties, organised in a hierarchical order, as well as spaces with different ceremonial and social purposes.<sup>58</sup> This means that private and public spaces were tightly connected. Thus, the rooms of the duchess’s apartment had the two functions of displaying precious objects for guests invited to this side of the palace and of delighting the eyes of their owner.

Apart from their position in the house, it is interesting to analyse the different kinds of objects which formed the collection. Firstly, the 1763 inventory of the palace listed 26 pieces of chinaware of different sizes.<sup>59</sup> We know that some of them were a gift from Empress Marie Therese to Duchess Margherita Pignatelli, as is documented by the 12 letters stored in the Naples State Archive. One of these contains references made by the empress to the reciprocal exchange of porcelain and the long-standing nature of their relationship. On 30 November 1770 she wrote: ‘with this letter I give you another sign [of esteem] due



to the memories that I always keep of people I met during my youth'.<sup>60</sup> Apart from the biographical information, the documents are important because they give meaning to the collection of exotic objects. In this sense, the 26 pieces of chinaware belonging to the duchess were global objects because they came from the Far East; they were then passed on by the court of Vienna where, according to the logic of the gift economy, they became a tool to strengthen a personal and political relationship. As noted earlier, the link between the Habsburgs and the Pignatelli of Monteleone was not restricted to the friendship between these two women but was larger and stronger. After the Spanish War of Succession (1700–14), when the Austrian Habsburgs ruled the Kingdom of Naples and the Kingdom of Sicily, the Pignatelli were among their favourite families. Duke Nicolò was invested as first viceroy of Sicily; his son Diego received the important collar of the Toson d'Or in appreciation of his fidelity. Later, when Carlo di Borbone attacked the kingdom, Diego tried to organise a defensive army but was defeated (1744).<sup>61</sup> Thus, the 26 Chinese vases were also a clear sign of belonging to a political group, much like the sleigh brought from Vienna and the portraits of the emperors, still stored in Barra ten years after the final victory of the Bourbons.<sup>62</sup>

The duchess's porcelain collection was not limited to these gifts from the empress; they included a great many other pieces imported from China and Japan. The 1763 inventory lists in a separate room 'five small statues, three representing women and two representing men' ('5 statuette, tre di donne, due di uomini'), which were Chinese and part of the collection of gifts from the empress, and 'a showcase with small statues of Chinese porcelain, depicting two shepherds and a little dog' ('uno scarabattolo con statuette di porcellana della China rappresentanti due pastori e un cagnolino'), a typical European subject and probably made for export.<sup>63</sup> These appear to have been genuine Chinese objects, but there was a growing range of European porcelain also available. The development of imitation techniques has been studied with particular attention, from the first attempt of imitation in the Meissen factories, established in 1710–13, to the latter case of Josiah Wedgwood.<sup>64</sup> Scholars in Britain have underlined how the desire among middle-ranking people to acquire imitation products could have driven the production of novelty, so-called import substitutions and therefore served as an important stimulus for the consumer revolution.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, in the Netherlands, historians have demonstrated that imported items were present in noticeable quantities even in the houses of middle-status people and migrants.<sup>66</sup> Such a study in the context of the Kingdom

of Naples does not yet exist, so we are not able to understand fully the diffusion of exotic goods and imitations among the Neapolitan middle rankings of the eighteenth century. However, the products of the Capodimonte workshop, created following a mercantilist logic to reduce imports of goods,<sup>67</sup> quickly became luxury items to be collected by elites along with other prestigious European productions, such as Meissen and Sèvres. Nevertheless, exotic goods retained great importance for Neapolitan aristocrats well into the nineteenth century. We can see this in the collections of the Pignatelli Museum. These include many examples of Chinese porcelain very similar to the ones mentioned in the inventories, with the advantage that we can see rather than simply imagine their physical qualities. These include an animal with its offspring, variously identified as a cat or a dog, made in majolica, white with black and brown spots and 25 centimetres tall (Figure 5.2). There is also a group of three priests which was probably displayed on a table or desk. Details of their faces have vanished, but it is still possible to see the brilliant colours fixed through the original Chinese technique: green, yellow and purple.

One particularly important set of oriental porcelain is the set of four Japanese cups with the family coat of arms painted on them.<sup>68</sup> Such armorial china was widespread in Europe at the time.<sup>69</sup> In the British context, sets could be imported through the East India Company and, as Katie Smith has pointed out, used by men in particular as symbols



**Figure 5.2** Chestnut bookcase with the Pignatelli coat of arms, nineteenth century. On the top: chinaware, eighteenth century. Reproduced courtesy of Museo Principe Diego Aragona Cortés, Naples.

of autonomy, honour, reputation and self-control.<sup>70</sup> They form part of a wider practice of emblazoning goods with symbols of noble title. The 1751 inventory notes the family arms on some pieces of furniture – namely the chests at the entrance – as well as silverware and the servants’ livery.<sup>71</sup> These were all goods with a high level of visibility in and beyond the house. The museum also contains a great many surviving objects marked with the coat of arms, again allowing us to see the extent and impact of this practice. In the dining room, for example, they appear on the chairs, the cutlery and the glasses, all produced during the nineteenth century. In the library, a chestnut bookcase, carved with figures on its sides, has in the centre the coat of arms with the three *pignatte* (jars), the symbol of the family. Arranged on the bookcase are three interesting eighteenth-century examples of pieces of Chinese porcelain (Figure 5.3).

The 1750 and 1763 inventories make clear the predominance of the Chinese style in the interiors of the Naples palace. Different pieces of furniture labelled as in the ‘Chinese style’ were set in the duchess’s and the duke’s bedrooms. This was in accordance with the prevailing taste in the first half of the eighteenth century, but they were accompanied by some pieces of furniture in ebony wood that, with its dark appearance, was very common in the houses of the upper classes during the period of the Spanish vice-kingdom (1504–1707).<sup>72</sup> In the duchess’s bedroom, for example, various pieces of furniture decorated with Chinese motifs (‘*stipi dipinti alla chinese*’) were placed near two small ebony commodes (‘*due piccoli commò di legno d’Ebano*’).<sup>73</sup> In the duke’s room, the main pavilion bed was hung with green damask decorated with Chinese figures.<sup>74</sup>



**Figure 5.3** Cat with kitten, China, eighteenth century. Reproduced courtesy of Museo Principe Diego Aragona Cortés, Naples.

On a purely aesthetic note, the exotic motifs seem to match well with a dark background, as is clear from some other objects, including a black Chinese bureau chiselled in gold and a Chinese pendulum clock, black and gold, with golden pomes.<sup>75</sup>

These are the main kinds of goods from the Far East which appeared in the Pignatelli palace in Naples: Chinese and Japanese porcelain gifted by the empress of Austria – luxury goods that materialised and consolidated a political and personal friendship – as well as pieces of chinoiserie and porcelain, probably manufactured in Europe, that signalled the wealth of the family, who could afford to refurbish the palace interiors according to the current taste of the time. However, there were other exotic goods that reflected the family's connections with Mexico.

In the duke's bedroom there were two earthenware jars described as 'Indian'.<sup>76</sup> We know that the adjective is generic and could be used to refer to goods from the East or West, so it is impossible to determine their provenance from the inventory alone. Nevertheless, these objects are an interesting example of the process of 'domesticating goods from overseas'.<sup>77</sup> Anne Gerritsen has shown for the Netherlands that objects from faraway lands acquired multiple meanings during their route to the European homes.<sup>78</sup> Her theorisation of hybrid objects is based on the case of imported Asian goods that acquired the status of Dutch things by their use and circulation in Dutch society. The Pignatelli earthenware jars show a different process: the global creation of an object. The raw material – a sort of clay, 'varro, ovvero creta delle Indie' – was Indian,<sup>79</sup> but the manufacturing was commissioned by the family, as is apparent from the coat of arms carved into the surface of the earthenware. The origin of the two jars remains unknown, even if by carving their symbol on an Indian piece of clay the Pignatelli created a hybrid object and a symbol of their global power. The practice of imprinting the coat of arms on earthenware was quite rare, while commissioning armorial chinaware was quite common. Indeed, in the British context, sets could be imported through the East India Company and, as Katie Smith has pointed out, used particularly by men as symbols of autonomy, honour, reputation and self-control.<sup>80</sup>

The only object in the palace inventory which unequivocally recalled the New World was the portrait of Hernán Cortés, part of a collection of six paintings of family ancestors located in the gallery.<sup>81</sup> However, the museum holds another object that reflects the family connection with the New World: a bust of Cortés in the ballroom. The bust was donated to the museum in 1960 by Princess Anna;<sup>82</sup> it is made of gilded bronze





**Figure 5.4** M. Tolsà, Hernán Cortés, golden bronze on granite column and marble base, 1794. Reproduced courtesy of Museo Principe Diego Aragona Cortés, Naples.

and displayed on a granite column with a white marble base which again includes a plaque of the family coat of arms (Figure 5.4). According to the existing literature, the bust was created in 1794 by Manuel Tolsà, a Spanish artist who emigrated to New Spain to decorate the Cortéses' tomb. The statue remained in Mexico until the first half of the nineteenth century, when it disappeared during the War of Independence and mysteriously arrived in Naples.<sup>83</sup> The object was created by a Spanish artist but made in Mexico, and by unknown means arrived at the Pignatelli house in Italy. In this sense the bust might be considered a global object, for it connected Spanish imperialism and craftsmanship, exotic Mexican raw materials and a European destination. Its acquisition in the Pignatelli collection makes clear that its function was to materialise the genealogy and, with this, legitimise the right of the descendant to rule on those lands, so that it can be considered more properly a sign of the global power of the family.



## Conclusion

The Pignatelli family, with all its lands and possessions, offers important examples that are useful for understanding the meaning of the presence of global goods in Neapolitan aristocratic houses. These goods' presence was primarily the result of global political links rather than the result of a direct form of colonialism. Although the Pignatelli was one of the few families in the Kingdom of Naples to possess land overseas, there is little evidence that they imported objects or animals from their possessions in Mexico. The painting and the bust of Cortés are the most concrete examples, and the earthenware jars might reflect a link to Mexico; but it is impossible to determine, based on the inventories, if other commodities, such as objects in silver for example, also came from Mexico.

The location of global goods also says something interesting about the importance attributed to the different houses. Neapolitan aristocrats maintained an itinerant lifestyle but put their main attention on the urban palace in the capital, where, not surprisingly, the most precious collections of exotica were located. The Pignatelli gained some of their Chinese objects through their friendship with the Habsburg dynasty; others, imported and not produced as an imitation, demonstrated the degree of wealth of the family and allowed them to refurbish the houses' interiors according to the current taste of fashion. Wealth was strictly connected with power and reflected the ability of the Pignatelli to insert themselves into the global channels of politics. This power was physically expressed through engraving the family coat of arms on different commodities, a common practice among European nobilities. One final explanation of the presence of global, exotic objects in their houses is that such goods were acquired and displayed as part of an aristocratic ideology that required families to spend economic resources in pursuit of a lifestyle of magnificence and delightfulness, a concept materialised most clearly in the menagerie at their suburban villa. In conclusion, the meaning of global goods appears to be multiple: a sign of power, a material footprint of personal and political friendship, and a means of conducting a lavish and delightful lifestyle.

## Notes

- 1 '... ben grate mi sono le di lei cortesi espressioni, ricavandone, come anche dal Regallo, mandatomi, un contrassegno evidente dei suoi sentimenti a Mio riguardo: gliene sono molto obbligata, assicurandola, che sempre ne conservo la memoria ...', Naples State Archive (NSA),

- Archivi Privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, busta II, letter of Maria Teresa of Austria, Vienna, 9 October 1760.
- 2 ‘... corrispondono le espressioni colle quali palesa le sue soddisfazioni sulla porcellana mandatale ai sentimenti che sempre le conosco ...’; NSA, Archivi Privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, busta II, letter of Maria Teresa of Austria, Vienna, 1 April 1772.
  - 3 Calcagno, *Notizie genealogico-storiche*.
  - 4 Finn and Smith, ‘Introduction’.
  - 5 Stobart, ‘Introduction’.
  - 6 Labrot, *Il barone in città*, 27–9.
  - 7 Musi, ‘Introduzione’, 7; Sodano, ‘Tra localismo, impegno internazionale e corte’, 160.
  - 8 Labrot, *Il barone in città*.
  - 9 NSA, Archivi Privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX: Inventario del palazzo del duca di Terranova e Monteleone, 17 June 1751; Inventario dell’Eccellentissima casa di Terranova Pignatelli formato sotto li 28 April 1763; Notamenti di robbe del Guardarobbe di S.E., December 1723–September 1724; Inventario delle robbe del ducal castello in custodia del guardarobba Gio Battista Petitto, 23 May 1745; Inventario del palazzo della Barra, May 1750; Inventario del palazzo della Barra di tutto ciò che stava in consegna di Fortunato Camerino, 15 September 1752.
  - 10 Prown, ‘Mind in matter’.
  - 11 Museo Principe Diego Aragona Pignatelli Cortés, Inventario completo (con opere e libri) sempre descritte, 1960.
  - 12 Molajoli, *Il Museo*; Spinosa, *Il Museo di Villa Pignatelli*; Tecce, *Il Museo Pignatelli*.
  - 13 Cancila, ‘Pignatelli Aragona Cortés e Mendoza, Diego’, 637–9.
  - 14 On the street system of the time see Bulgarelli Lukacs, ‘Le comunicazioni nel Mezzogiorno’.
  - 15 Galasso, ‘Il barone in città’, 297.
  - 16 Bruno, ‘Le residenze dell’aristocrazia’, 64–7.
  - 17 Covino, ‘La gemma preziosa’, 234.
  - 18 On the feudal question in the Kingdom of Naples see Rao, *L’amaro della feudalità*.
  - 19 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Notamenti di robbe (1723–4).
  - 20 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo della Barra (1752).
  - 21 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo della Barra (1752).
  - 22 Bisogno, *Nicolò Tagliacozzi Canale*, 155–6, 174–5.
  - 23 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo (1751).
  - 24 Keating and Markey, ‘“Indian” objects’.
  - 25 Keating and Markey, ‘“Indian” objects’, 286, 297.
  - 26 De Seta, ‘Il sistema residenziale’, 11–12.
  - 27 De Seta, ‘Il sistema residenziale’, 22.
  - 28 De Seta, ‘Il sistema residenziale’, 25–6.
  - 29 Trombetti, ‘La villa Pignatelli’; additional information is also available in Rizzo, *Il presepe*.
  - 30 di Mauro, ‘Villa Pignatelli di Monteleone’, 213.
  - 31 De Seta, *Ville vesuviane*, 360–6, reported a survey of the destination of 143 Vesuvian villas.
  - 32 *Mappa topografica*, table 20. All the tables of the map are visible on the website of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, <http://digitale.bnnonline.it/index.php?it/149/ricerca-contenuti-digitali/show/85/>.
  - 33 Pane, ‘Introduzione’.
  - 34 di Mauro, ‘La villa Pignatelli di Monteleone’, 215.
  - 35 Bisogno, *Nicolò Tagliacozzi Canale*, 171.
  - 36 Giannetti, *Il giardino napoletano*, 12.
  - 37 ‘Nota degli animali quadrupedi e volatili sistentino nel detto casino della Barra: una leonessa, due orsi uno maschio e l’altro femina, un’estrice, due struzzi uno maschio e l’altro femina, numero 15 daini, quattro d’essi bianchi, numero 15 cervi quattro femmine ed uno maschio, cinghiali di corpo numero dodici e n 9 piccoli nati nel 1750, n 18 anatrele cioè tre di esse dell’ecc. marchese, due papare turchesche, quattro galline faraone, uno paone, n 17 galline incluso 4 galli, 2 pernici e 12 faggiani, uno gabbione con razza di canari, un altro

- gabbione dentro il giardino di tortore, due mafroni', NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo della Barra (1750).
- 38 Stone, *An Open Elite?*, 214–15.
- 39 *Un elefante a corte.*
- 40 Cockram, 'Interspecies understanding', 277.
- 41 Cockram, 'Interspecies understanding', 280.
- 42 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo (1751).
- 43 Giannetti, *Il giardino napoletano*, 21.
- 44 Groom, *Exotic Animals*, 93.
- 45 Cockram, 'Interspecies understanding', 279.
- 46 Cockram, 'Interspecies understanding', 284–9.
- 47 Montroni, 'L'indebitamento dell'aristocrazia'.
- 48 Rao, 'La questione feudale nell'età tanucciana', 84–90; Labatut, *Le nobiltà europee*, 147.
- 49 Cancila, 'Pignatelli Aragona Cortés e Mendoza, Diego', 639.
- 50 Cockram, 'Interspecies understanding', 281.
- 51 Groom, *Exotic Animals*, 7–12.
- 52 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo della Barra (1752).
- 53 '... tutta la porcellana di Marsiglia unitamente alla porcellana della china ed altra poco da Vienna ...'; 'nota bene detta porcellana si è trovata più pezzi rotti', NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo della Barra (1752).
- 54 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario di tutti li mobili, suppellettili, et altre robbe di S.E. sig. duca di Monteleone, nel casino della Barra quali si consegnano a Monsieur Giovanni Enrico Hermans suo giardiniero e guardarobba in detto casino, 25 October 1765. Other examples come from the Carafa di Ielsi castle in Molise: NSA, Processi Antichi, Sacro Regio Consiglio, Ordinamento Zeni, fascio 239, Atti di annotazione dei beni mobili ritrovati nel palazzo di Ielsi, carte 4–7. For a brief discussion of the difference between porcelain and faenza see Bruno, 'Civiltà materiale', 6–9.
- 55 Clifford, 'Chinese wallpaper', 64.
- 56 Weatherill, 'The meaning of consumer behavior', 213.
- 57 Pardaille Galabrun, *La naissance de l'intime*.
- 58 Muto, 'Il segretario a corte', 593–6.
- 59 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario dell'Eccellentissima casa (1763).
- 60 '... non posso [fare] a meno di accompagnarlo di questa lettera per darle un nuovo contrassegno per essere immancabile la rimembranza che sempre conservo di quelli che ho conosciuto fino dalla mia gioventù ...', NSA, Archivi Privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, busta II, letter of Maria Teresa of Austria to Margherita Pignatelli, Vienna, 30 November 1770.
- 61 Carignani, 'Il partito austriaco', 54.
- 62 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo della Barra (1752).
- 63 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario dell'Eccellentissima casa (1763).
- 64 Berg and Clifford, 'Global objects', 104; Haggard, *The Concise Encyclopedia*, 306–13; McKendrick, 'Josiah Wedgwood'.
- 65 Berg, 'New commodities'; Berg, 'From imitation to invention'; Berg, 'In pursuit of luxury'. On the consumer revolution see Trentmann, *Empire of Things*, 43–71 (from the Italian edition).
- 66 McCants, 'Asiatic goods'.
- 67 Clemente, 'Innovation in the capital city'.
- 68 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario dell'Eccellentissima casa (1763).
- 69 Smith, 'Manly objects?'.
- 70 Smith, 'Manly objects?', 114, 117.
- 71 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo (1751).
- 72 De Fusco, *Storia dell'arredamento*.

- 73 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario dell'Eccellentissima casa (1763).
- 74 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo (1751).
- 75 'Un burò alla cinese di nero storiato d'oro'; 'un orologio a Pendolo con sua cassa lunga di pianta alla cinese nero ed oro con pomi dorati', NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo (1751).
- 76 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo (1751).
- 77 Gerritsen, 'Domesticating goods from overseas'.
- 78 Gerritsen, 'Domesticating goods from overseas', 228.
- 79 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo (1751).
- 80 Smith, 'Manly objects?', 114, 117.
- 81 NSA, Archivi privati, Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, serie Napoli, busta LIX, Inventario del palazzo (1751).
- 82 Inventario completo (1960).
- 83 Causa, 'Il busto di Cortéz dal Messico a Napoli', 30.

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