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Cincia Recca

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Résumé

Marie Antoinette of France and Maria Carolina of Naples, both consorts, contributed to a flourishing of matronage, reproducing conceptions of royal femininity that embraced both the private and public roles they were expected to fulfil. However, while the political role of the first Queen has been largely reconsidered, her sister Maria Carolina has not yet been adjudicated impartially. This is somewhat curious, because Maria Carolina inherited from her sister the same disregard towards the Revolution and this, as perceived by the Jacobins, was duly proposed in their acrimonious criticism of her political role.

This paper aims to focus on this criticism, analysing how the charges against Maria Carolina in the post-French revolutionary period, were a political duplication of the Jacobin attacks on Marie Antoinette from 1791 onwards. From this point of view, the paper will focus on the portrait of Maria Carolina in 1793 revolutionary Paris by Giuseppe Gorani, an Italian Jacobin noble. His Mémoires Secrets – where Maria Carolina was represented as a wicked woman in the same terms previously employed to denounce her sister Marie Antoinette by the French Republicans – was well known across Italy. This subject dominated the main pamphlets and brochures published in Naples in 1799, during the brief duration of the Neapolitan Republic, because it legitimised the rebellion against the monarchy. After the fall of the Neapolitan Republic, the political attacks on Maria Carolina continued likewise in France, where many Neapolitan patriots were obliged to flee. Analysing Giuseppe Gorani’s Mémoires we gather that the portrait of Marie Antoinette’s sister was painted according to the main stereotypes of French revolutionary political culture.

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