Maps and the Italian Grand Tour
1550-1824

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Project Outline:
The aim of this doctorate is to explore the role that maps played in the Grand Tour. Through an exciting and hugely profitable collaboration between Royal Holloway and the British Library, it will investigate the Italian section of the King's Topographical Collection in the British Library as its primary source. In recent years the Grand Tour has been a popular topic for scholarly consideration, but no truly comprehensive examination of maps in relation to this social phenomenon has been done until now. In doing so, I will employ an iconographic critique of maps, analyse issues around the materiality of maps, and also incorporate more recent debates surrounding embodied and performative approaches to mapping and map use. Maps played a crucial part in preconceiving the imaginations of British travellers to Italy, in both planning and memorialising their journeys, and in constructing their identities as status objects.

WHY RESEARCH THIS TOPIC?
• The Grand Tour has prompted interesting studies on tourism, social and art history, and cultural exchange. But the relationship between maps and British travellers in this phenomenon has not been examined before.
• Maps are now accepted as subjective reflections of the society that made them, and as such they can yield insights into social and cultural attitudes of that society. This novel approach can offer fresh perspectives.
• Maps can be investigated from multiple angles: visual, cultural, and material.

KING GEORGE III's TOPOGRAPHICAL COLLECTION:
• The monarchy's collection of maps from 1660 until 1824, when it was promised to the British Museum.
• 50,000+ item holdings. Italian section accounts for ~5,000 items.
• The collection covers printed and manuscript, local and national maps, as well as topographical views.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:
1. How did the mapped representation of Italy affect British travellers’ perception of the land, and to what extent did these attitudes change throughout the years of the Grand Tour?
2. How does this visual representation compare with written records, such as in guidebooks, travel diaries, and classical texts, and to what extent did this change?
3. What affect did maps as physical objects have on British cultural and social life? What were the networks of production and dissemination? How were maps used by travellers on the road, in the print shop, or in the gentleman’s library?
4. What can we learn about the intellectual and cultural status of maps from their re-representation, as seen in portraits and engravings?

Select Bibliography: