

Changing Social Representations of Political Order c. 1800

Governmental Concepts in the Correspondence of Maria Carolina of Naples-Sicily

The edition and analysis of a part of the correspondence of Maria Carolina, queen of Naples-Sicily (1752–1814) is at the centre of the planned research project. She was a daughter of Maria Theresia and Emperor Franz I Stephan and grew up at the court of Vienna. In 1768, she was married to Ferdinand IV, ruler of the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily. Subsequently, she participated actively in the political consideration and decision-making processes.

With her dense correspondence with family members, rulers and diplomats Maria Carolina included herself in a broad communication network, with which she commented on the political developments in Naples-Sicily, Austria and all of Europe with her apprehensions, advice, and wishes and which she tried to navigate. Thereby, coping strategies, values and beliefs of ideal governing become visible. The long duration of her correspondence with over more than 30 years enables to comprehend and grasp the continuities as well as the changes of these values and ideas in their particular context. To what did she adhere to – maybe exactly in view of the political upheavals? In which areas can changed approaches be discerned? What happened to the enthusiastic ideas of the Enlightenment under the effect of the current affairs of the wars? In this project, Maria Carolina will therefore be analysed through her correspondence as “pars pro toto” for the rulers in this transitional period.

From the wealth of Maria Carolina's correspondence, the letter exchange with her brother Emperor Leopold II (1778–1792), her daughter Marie Therese (1790–1807), and Emperor Franz II/I (1790–1814) are chosen for this project. The sample comprises by and large 967 letters (651 by Maria Carolina, 157 by Leopold, 35 by Franz and 124 by Marie Therese). In a first step, the principal investigator and the two designated associates will create a critical online edition of the letters with “open access”; and afterwards in a second step the sample will be analysed in view of changing or permanent ideas of political order. Concerning the content, the approach is based on the concept of “social representations” by Serge Moscovici. He defines such representations as the shared ideas of a social group, which experience changes over time and which can be investigated by analysing the use of language. With this focus on language and terminology the project is situated within the context of the research on political communication. Central for the analysis are above all three areas: the evaluation of the networks of people, the governmental structures of the territories, and at a higher level the overarching relationships in Europe.