



Becoming Neapolitan

Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples



JOHN A. MARINO



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Becoming Neapolitan

This project began as an inquiry into the noble *seggi* (political wards or neighborhoods) of the early modern city of Naples. Because the *seggi* archives in the Archivio di Stato di Napoli were destroyed during World War II, primary sources had to be gleaned from wide reading in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century printed books published in Naples. Early printed books and manuscripts preserved in Naples at the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli and the Biblioteca della Società Napoletana di Storia Patria and in Rome at the Vatican Library and the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma are the foundation upon which this very different book than the one originally imagined is based. Intellectual support for my research in Italy has benefited from generous friendship and conversation with Giuseppe Galasso, Rosario Villari, and Giovanni Muto.

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Ritual studies of Renaissance and early modern Italian cities by Richard

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mind in early modern Naples rather than in San Diego. Last but not least, Cynthia Truant and our children Sara and Marc, who have suffered most from my frequent absences during the obsessive hunting for and gathering of materials away from home or the many hours spent cooped up in my study reading and writing, have been constantly in mind. Studying rituals and ceremonies public and private make one keenly aware of the importance of their form and meaning in one's own life and one's own family. I regret that I was not able to complete this project during the life of my father, Joe Marino, whose many sacrifices for my study and education deserve special remembrance and to whom I dedicate this book.

Becoming Neapolitan

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Urbs et Orbis

The Problem of Identity and Solidarity

At the culmination of the French invasion of Italy that began in 1494, the French king Charles VIII was in the city of Naples to accept the fealty of its citizens and take the oath of allegiance after his conquest of the Kingdom of Naples. The *seggio del popolo* (the city ward of the commons) had been dissolved by the Aragonese conqueror Alfonso the Magnanimous forty years earlier in 1456; and when, on Sunday 16 May 1495, persons in the French king's entourage asked for the people and citizens of Naples, certain noblemen replied that *they* were the people, the citizens, and noblemen of the town. The non-Neapolitans present expressed their surprise to the king that such a town would have no citizens except noblemen.

A few days later at the Church of San Lorenzo, the seat of the city council, a native citizen and *aromatario* (a member of the spice dealer and druggist guild) named Batista Pirozo asked Carlo Mormile, a nobleman of the *seggio* of Portanova (one of the five noble city wards), what his most Christian Majesty, the King of France, had commanded regarding the city statutes and ordinances. Mormile retorted, "Why do you concern yourself about this city? We are the nobles and citizens of Naples, and you have nothing to do with it, you loathsome vermin!" Batista went around to the influential citizens and merchants of the city repeating Mormile's insult. The next morning they marched in their robes six hundred strong, two-by-two, to the Castel Capuano. They stood in the courtyard awaiting the king, who, on seeing them from the window, asked who they were. They responded that they were the citizens of the Neapolitan *popolo*, whereupon the king turned to Carlo Mormile, Lancilotto Annese, and the other noble councilors who had said there were no other citizens in Naples, who now did not know how to respond. Charles brought eight of the six hundred before him and learned from them their true number and their grievances. The king then granted them

permission to unite in a council and congregation at the Church of S. Agostino, which became the center of the restored *seggio del popolo*.¹

This famous confrontation in the city of Naples between its nobility and commons (*popolo*) recounted by the contemporary chronicle of Notar Giacomo dramatizes the problem of citizen identity and solidarity in the early modern city. Who were its citizens, and how were they made? How did the early modern city hold together? Why did its diverse social components of caste and class not pull it apart? How was civic culture created? Such conflict over urban space, civic symbols, and municipal power cuts to the quick of the ambiguity in Neapolitan urban life and of the overlapping and contending relationships within the early modern city in general: namely, voluntary and involuntary association; solidarity and social stratification; and cohesion and conflict among opposing parties, factions, clans or families, classes, and neighborhoods, as they engaged in agonistic relationships among themselves and with centralized authority.²

Piero Ventura's important work on Neapolitan citizenship has focused on the legal and political making of citizens.³ Ventura cites a 1671 manuscript by Michele Muscettola, a nobleman of the *seggio* of Montagna, in which he divides Neapolitan citizens into four types: natives born or conceived in the city or its nearby villages (*casali*); children of the native-born who were born elsewhere; those made citizens by the city council representatives (*eletti*); and foreigners or residents of the Kingdom of Naples who, according to the royal decree of 1479, would buy or build a house to live in the city and marry a Neapolitan.⁴ All citizens of the Neapolitan capital enjoyed exemption from direct taxation of the hearth tax paid by residents in the kingdom and from customs duties on imported and exported goods in the city or in the kingdom.⁵ They were subject, however, to periodic parliamentary aids (*donativi*) and to various gabelles, which taxed consumption of flour, wine, grain, meat, cheese, salami, olive oil, fish, and other products. Citizens were eligible to hold office, had the right to vote for elected officials, and were guaranteed certain judicial privileges. As citizens, no distinction was made between noble and commoner; nevertheless, the common legal formula "cavalieri, cittadini e abitanti" did distinguish three groups: nobles of the *seggi*, commoners, and noncitizen foreigners. Aggregation into the noble *seggi* became more difficult and was virtually frozen by the end of the sixteenth century; such a closure, affecting "new men" trying to enter the exclusive ranks of the old city nobility, was widespread across all the Italian states at this time.

This book examines the making and unmaking of citizens—not their legal status or rights, but their identity and self-representation—through a study of the myths and rituals in early modern Naples under Spanish rule, especially from

the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century under the reigns of three absentee Spanish kings: Philip II (1556–98), Philip III (1598–1621), and Philip IV (1621–65). This book analyzes how the rationale, invention, elaboration, mechanisms of transmission, and change over time in Baroque rituals affected authority, solidarity, and identity in Spanish Naples. Three optics—the church, the nobility, and the *popolo*—allow us to see how Spanish rule and church reform joined forces to impose themselves upon and transform commoner traditions from above. The problematic in this book derives from Machiavelli’s discussion on how to gain and maintain a new state, as described in *The Prince*, chapter 3: “On Mixed Principalities”—that is, a newly gained principality “if it is not altogether new but rather an addition (so that the two together may be called mixed)” and, in particular, “when new possessions are acquired in a province that differs in language, customs, and laws.”⁶ For Machiavelli, the inherent difficulties stem from the changeability of the people, the offense to new subjects caused by occupying troops, the alienation of former local allies, and the necessity to avoid new laws and taxes in order to form one body from the old and new states in the shortest time possible. Machiavelli examines the opposite of gaining and maintaining a new state with his primary example: why “Louis XII, king of France, quickly occupied Milan and quickly lost it.” Here we will be looking at the reigns of the three Philips of Spain, the rhetoric of good government and virtue, and solidarity among the citizens in Naples, over the sweeping trajectory from the Spanish conquest to their co-option practices and the eventual loss of Naples.

The city of Naples had a strong tradition of decentralized, neighborhood-based political organizations, both noble and popular, through the Middle Ages. Five noble neighborhood districts, consolidated from an original twenty-nine, were called *seggi* (seats) but also *tocci* (a corruption of the Greek *topos*), *teatri*, *piazze*, and *portici*. All these names conveyed the same meaning, that of a specific place in the city. In addition to a particular urban space, the word “seat,” “place,” “theater,” “square,” or “portico” carried with it two other ideas: one defined a political identity in Neapolitan city government; and the other, social distinctions between nobles and commoners, as well as among nobles themselves, who were divided not only by their competing *seggi* affiliations but also from other nobles who were not aggregated into the *seggi*.⁷

Who one was in Naples was inextricably linked to where one was from. One’s residence or affiliation within one of the city’s five noble districts (*seggio* of Capuana, Montagna, Nido, Porto, or Portanova) or its lone popular district (*seggio del popolo*), as much as one’s right of precedence in the order of march in parades and processions, reflected one’s status or honor among fellow citizens

and one's place in the local social and political structure. After the Spanish conquest of 1503, the streets and piazze of early modern Naples continued to be the parade grounds for face-to-face interaction in the struggle for power among royal officers, religious and secular clergy, resident nobles, non-noble citizens of the *popolo*, and a sea of plebeians.

Other early modern Italian cities under princely or signorial regimes witnessed similar contests between neighborhood associational groups and their rulers to control the city's social and symbolic geography.⁸ Whether the six *seggi* of Naples, the eighteen *alberghi* of Genoa, the sixteen *gonfalon*i of Florence, the seventeen *contrade* of Siena, the six *sestieri* of Venice, or the fourteen *rioni* of Rome, the city's traditional wards or quarters wrestled with centralizing administrations to retain their monopoly over municipal government and local affairs. The overall trend from late medieval to early modern states concerned the victory of the central state, its bureaucratization, the power of its ministers, and the increased authority of its ruler.

Larger territorial states might subordinate the decentralized government of neighborhood organizations and leave them as atrophied medieval remnants. Even in this case, though, social rivalries and violence could continue and must be understood as normal rather than dysfunctional to the fabric of urban life if we are to understand why the sociopolitical power structure of any particular city persisted so long.⁹ In Naples, however, the Spanish viceroy, the surrogate for the absentee king, short-circuited "normal" conflictual relationships. The Spanish conquerors implemented a conscious policy of fortifying and reorienting the city's urban landscape with an army and navy of occupation, as well as manipulating the social structure of the city by playing rival groups against one another. Under the viceroys, garrisoned troops played an essential role in reshaping the city's political fortunes; and patronage to a nonaristocratic bureaucracy of magistrates and judges (*togati*) and foreign merchant creditors (especially Genoese) had a lasting impact on the development of citizen culture. Four contemporary voices, two outsiders and two insiders, provide a good perspective on the fomenting crisis of political alienation in Naples under Spanish rule.

In 1559, the year that Philip II created the Council of Italy—which comprised the three Spanish-ruled states of Milan, Naples, and Sicily—the Venetian ambassador to Spain, Michele Suriano, reported that "as for the morale of the Neapolitans, I can only repeat what they themselves always say: every government sickens them and every state displeases them."¹⁰ According to Suriano, Spain's long half-century rule had "extinguished all the passions of the kingdom" to the

point that the King of Spain “could not rely on the loyalty of these subjects.” In fact, “the present discontent of the nobles and *popolo*” stemmed from disaffection because of heavy taxes on the nobility, neglect of the *popolo*, and “the many defects in the government.” Forced parliamentary aids (*donativi*) on the nobility and ever-increasing gabelles on city commoners, who had come to the capital to avoid direct taxes in the provinces, were impoverishing everyone with the result that the kingdom suffered three main defects: the burdensome billeting of Spanish troops, privilege and patronage given to Spaniards and so-called janissaries (the name given to the children of Spaniard-Neapolitan intermarriage), and unequal justice in not granting the nobility its rightful place of honor over an “insolent and presumptuous” *popolo*. No metaphor expresses the conflation of complaints better than the derogatory expletive janissaries for the children of Spanish-Neapolitan mixed marriages, because these elite Turkish troops and administrative servants of the sultan’s household were conscripted young boys taken by force from their subject Christian families in the Ottoman Empire. The accusation of favoritism to a fifth-column offspring of foreigner-citizen marriages captures the Neapolitans’ sense of political exclusion, alienation, betrayal, and loss.

An erudite Neapolitan *popolano*, Camillo Porzio, sent Don Iñigo López de Mendoza, marquis de Mondejar (viceroys, 1577–79) upon his appointment in 1575 an analysis of Naples in the same vein as that of the Venetian ambassador Suriano.¹¹ Porzio distinguished three kinds of men in the Kingdom of Naples—peasants, nobles, and barons—who shared a stereotypical personality profile in that they desired change, had little fear of the law, highly valued honor, loved appearance more than substance, and were courageous and deadly; but, “on the present [Spanish] rule, they all agree they are little content.”¹² Excessive taxation, lost housing, closed access to offices, and disregard for due honor to rank were the leading strands of criticism adopted by contending castes during the long prelude to the revolt of 1647.

A second foreign expert’s diagnosis of the problem of Naples comes from Giovanni Botero’s 1590s world history, *Relationi universali*, which includes an excursus on Naples in a section on the capital city’s province of Terra di Lavoro. According to Botero, the area and population of the city of Naples would have been even larger were it not for a Spanish law against further construction.¹³

It is in compass seven miles, but narrow: of late times it is much augmented, and would increase continually, if the King of *Spaine* had not forbidden a further increase of building; whereunto he was moved, partly by the complaints of the Barons

(whose Tenants to enjoy the liberties granted to the *Neapolitans*, did forsake their owne dwelling to seat themselves there): partly by the danger of rebellion, which in so mighty a City cannot easily be repressed.¹⁴

The motives for the law limiting urban construction and population growth are identified as twofold: baronial complaints (*querele*) against their rural subjects (*sudditi*), who were escaping both feudal jurisdiction and dues in order to gain the capital city's liberties (*essentioni*), that is, its privileges and immunities;¹⁵ and the ubiquitous danger of popular uprisings (*sollevamenti popolari*) in so big a city.

The revised 1630 English translation, “now once againe enlarged according to moderne observation,” adds a paragraph on Naples not found in Botero's original Italian that portrays Naples in a degenerative spiral from the home of Philosophy and the Muses to military occupation under the heavy hand of Spanish rule:

Naples was first the receptacle of *Philosophie*, secondly, of the *Muses*; and now of Souldiery; the moderne inhabitants having their eares daily inured to the sound of the drum & fife, and their eyes to the management of Horses, and glittering of Armour. For the ambitious *Spaniard* now governeth this Kingdome by a Viceroy, directed (upon occasions) by the Councell appointed for Italy, which innovation hath principally befallen them, by their dependencie upon the Popes; who knowing (by reason of the brevitye of their lives) not otherwise to govern than by spleene, passion, and private respect, have continually disquieted the estate, until a third man hath bereaved both parties of their imaginary greatnesse. And this is the *Spaniard*, who making right use of former defaults, hath secured the peece: first, by taking all power and greatness from the Nobility, (more than titular;) and secondly, in suppressing the popular throughout the whole Kingdome by forren souldiery.¹⁶

From the antipapist, anti-Spanish, English perspective, Naples's former place in philosophy and the liberal arts had been replaced by an occupying army whose martial tunes and armored cavalry erased the arts and the sciences. The “ambitious” Spaniards introduced the institutional innovations of a viceroy and Council of Italy to take Naples away from its capricious papal overlord, and even from the Neapolitans themselves, by usurping local noble power and suppressing the *popolo* through force of arms. Both states, papal Rome and the Kingdom of Naples, remained bereaved in mourning for their lost “imaginary greatness.” The daily presence of the sounds and sights of Spanish military occupation had ushered in wailing mourners in bereavement for lost glories.

As insiders, seventeenth-century Neapolitans themselves knew the consequences of cohesion or conflict in society at the time of the revolt of 1647. Nesco-