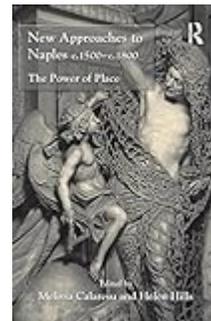




**Melissa Calaresu, Helen Hills, eds.** *New Approaches to Naples c.1500-c.1800: The Power of Place*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013. 264 pp. \$149.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4094-2943-2.



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**Published on** H-Italy (December, 2015)

**Commissioned by** Maartje van Gelder (University of Amsterdam)

The theatrical has long been a framing metaphor for writing about Naples and its inhabitants. The city itself has often been described as a set stage, exemplified by its dramatic sweep on the bay. Neapolitan street life has been interpreted as animated performance: a bustling, ceaseless *commedia dell'arte*. For centuries foreign travelers have expected to meet a ragtag cast of colorful urban characters. The city was seen as the home of performance. Yet theatrical interpretations of Naples are not only of this stereotyped sort, nor have they stayed in the sphere of travellers' expectations. Interpretations based on spectatorship have meant that, as Anna Maria Rao writes in the closing of this volume, "the history of Naples sometimes takes on forms or stereotypes created from a continuous back-and-forth game typical of travellers that is, between 'outside' and local testimony" (p. 220). Recent historiography of the early modern city during the viceroyalty has focused on urban celebration and the staging of political and religious power in the streets and piazzas of the city. In this mode, the contested ground of Neapolitan urban theater is at the heart of dynamics of power.

This collection of essays aims to break away from such theatrical narratives of exoticism, baroque excess, and decrepitude. It also refutes the idea of a peninsula

fractured distinctively between north and south. Instead of seeing Naples as a site where the exotic was observed, this collection focuses on how such cultural images were produced and strives to attain a more complex understanding of what it meant for various forms of power to be represented, without seeing this as an uncontested communication of magnificence. Its goal is to move away from limited visions of Naples as a site of either foreign-observed or Spanish-orchestrated performances. The volume pursues this objective by interrogating narratives of marginalization and backwardness in new ways rather than leaving them behind. It is divided into three sections that speak to the old governing notions of Neapolitan history: "Disaster and Decline," "Topographies," and "Exceptionality."

A marked achievement of this work is how it complicates our understanding of aspects of viceregal Naples and the ways in which civic politics, devotion, and Spanish rule played out in the streets and squares. The first three chapters accomplish this well. The late John Marino's long-perspective account of state formation in the peninsula evades fatalist explanations of Spanish domination. His chapter does not deny the reality of decline but locates it as a general divergence of Italy from northern Europe in the seventeenth century rather than as a

peculiarly southern malaise. The volume reminds us that the history of Naples must be treated as part of the dynamics of the whole peninsula rather than separate from them.

Helen Hills's chapter elaborates on one of the most enduring signifiers of the Neapolitan: the cult surrounding the liquefying blood of the martyred bishop San Gennaro. This case, in particular the chapel built in Naples's Cathedral to house Gennaro's relics, exemplifies the broader question of the nature of Neapolitan piety, prodigious in extent and effect. Her chapter argues for the poverty of interpreting the relationship between the material and the political, social, or religious as one of performance where architecture or objects simply represent pre-existing concepts or agendas. The chapter provides guidance for scholars wishing to engage with the theatrical presentation of sacred or secular power without telling a limited story of a clear message conceptualized, materialized, and then received by viewers. Rose Maria San Juan's study of the devastating plague of 1656 (which deserves more scholarly attention as one of the defining events in early modern Italian history) has similar aims. Her examination of how an image of Saint Francis Xavier had returned from a world tour and therefore created for Neapolitans a worldwide network of physical suffering points us towards the complex geographies of local piety (p. 68). This chapter adds to the insights of Hills's chapter with an emphasis on the unpredictable effects of the material, focusing again on the generation of meaning, this time because of the reproductive potential of print (p. 68). Together these chapters do much to provide new narratives on the material and the spatial in Naples rather than relying on accounts of firm control by religious or civic authorities.

The chapters in the section "Topographies" continue this interrogation of categories of place and locality, by viewing them in association with literature and other cultural products of the city. Harald Hendrix traces how Naples became a city to be consumed through its cultural identity and examines the question of the genre of city guides, which were notably abundant in Naples. He establishes how this literary history created topographical priorities for both locals and foreigners. Urban identity was produced, in Hendrix's argument, through debates in which literary merits had great authority: a humanist reading of the city. He hints at a later falling away of this in favor of vernacular traditions and material wealth, a development that would be fascinating to understand in more detail.

Dinko Fabris's chapter on Neapolitan musical collections is illuminating as an account of the practical challenges and possibilities of writing Neapolitan history. Such musical collections were spread across Europe through the movements of antiquarianism. The Second World War damaged and scattered collections both through outright destruction and the ensuing poverty that led Neapolitans to sell antiquities for nearly nothing. In reconstructing such musical collections it is necessary to rely upon scholarship from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the essential works of the archivist Salvatore di Giacomo. All these themes are common to historians of many aspects of Naples and Fabris's careful work of reconstruction is a welcome insight into the practical methods required.

Helena Hammond extends the volume's perspective on what early modern Naples means with her treatment of the Bourbon's *siti reali* (royal enclosures), taking us both out of the city of Naples and, at times, out of southern Italy. She moves away from the urban focus of most of this volume to demonstrate that rustic imagery was also central to the Bourbon monarchy. She also makes the important point that Bourbon Naples was not an isolated kingdom: it was from here that the Bourbon monarchs administered their other holdings in Italy, most importantly the Farnese fiefdoms near Rome and Farnese palaces within Rome itself. Hammond's work shows the mutual ties between texts and images for the rural topography of the south. Her analysis centers on images of the king Charles of Bourbon hunting, especially by Claude-Joseph Vernet. These sites are naturalized and the increasing amount of land placed under royal control is elided in such images, which present a state of nature tied firmly and logically to sovereignty.

The section "Exceptionality" begins with Paola Bertucci's account of the museum and library of Ferdinando Spinelli, the prince of Tarsia. The attempt to host an experimental academy in his library, Temple of Minerva, stumbled and failed, becoming a watchword for overinflated ambitions without the true scholarship to sustain them. In this account the ephemeral library becomes a tale of a prince's desire to represent his knowledge in turn stifling the real production of knowledge. This chapter further develops this volume's teasing at the connections between production, performance, and representation. But if, as Bertucci interestingly suggests, the physics cabinet in Palazzo Tarsia produced new forms of social interaction, it remains underdeveloped what the nature and significance of these forms were (p. 164).

Melissa Calaresu gives agency back to the Neapolitans in the production of exoticized depictions of themselves in her study of *presepi*, nativity figures that depicted vast ranges of characters far beyond the standard cast, extending to street-sellers and other atypical Neapolitan figures. Exoticized images and claims of Neapolitan uniqueness were not imposed singularly from the outside. But how should we understand this native desire to establish that distinctiveness (p. 201)? For the fascinating evidence of popular ownership of such nativity figures this remains an open question. The question of the complex lives of these representations (and whether they were always interpreted as ethnographic) shows us how little we know about how most Neapolitans lived, the matter of their lives, and their attitudes towards domestic space. Melissa Calaresu's work shows how rich the study of objects that could otherwise be laid aside as caricatures can be. A strong underlying theme in this volume, although not one that is given its own section, is antiquarianism and collecting in the history of Naples. Dinko Fabris, Paola Bertucci, and Melissa Calaresu all pay attention to practices of collecting and questions of Neapolitan culture and scholarship.

The history of Naples is often plotted as a failure. Anna Maria Rao closes the volume with a reflection on such missed opportunities in the historiography of Naples. The particular historical moments she addresses are the revolt of 1647-48, the Neapolitan Enlightenment, the 1799 Neapolitan republic, the Feudal Question, and the French Decade. Discussing what a southern Italian historiography could mean, this essay's clear consideration of the other parts of the kingdom beyond the city of Naples reminds us of the tendency to elide city and kingdom. Her piece also provides some valuable hints towards ways out of the tension between the exceptional and the exotic. Many things that have become regarded as particularly Neapolitan—the idea of a *plebe* separate from a narrower band of classes that sit above them—were clearly never specific to Naples. The subsequent career of these stereotypes is tied into ideologies of modernization and critiques of the *ancien régime*.

Most of the contributors do not seek to meet the aims of the volume by presenting Naples as a typical Italian or European city. Instead, Naples remains exceptional. This stance has its merits. In general terms, the specific characteristics of Naples should not be denied in service of a normalizing agenda. Moreover, the powerful narratives of marginalization and exoticization cannot simply be wished away from Neapolitan history. They were not essential truth but they had power and shaped ex-

perience. The long-ingrained sense of uniqueness (and, at times, inadequacy) needs to be a subject of analysis. Yet such a stance also poses risks. Tension remains in the assertion of exceptionality and the denial of the exotic. It remains difficult to escape outright from the framing of Neapolitan against outsider due to the volume's sustained conversation with these old myths of Naples. One way forward would be to trace the varieties of lives and legacies of many different waves of migration amidst (and against) which Neapolitan identity was forged. Critical engagement with old historiographical concerns and myths of Naples is at times very useful, but can also make it hard to escape the terms set by these inherited tropes and forge new interpretations.

The editors rightly challenge the emphasis on the golden triangle of Rome, Florence, and Venice in English-language scholarship, but it would have been welcome for them to guide the reader towards more of the rich Italian-produced scholarship on the south of Italy. There are notable absences from the Italian-language historiography, such as some of the valuable work on the production of Neapolitan stereotypes; for one example, the volume does not refer to Giuseppe Galasso's *L'altra Europa: Per un'antropologia storica del Mezzogiorno d'Italia* (1982). A point that John Marino makes is that reading Italian history as if it were Florentine history is a particular Anglo-American fault (p. 17). It can be added that reading southern Italy's history as if it were the history only of the city of Naples is also an unfortunate Anglophone tendency. At times this collection elides the history of the city and the kingdom. Many of the missed opportunities critically engaged with by Anna Maria Rao, such as feudalism and underdevelopment, require thinking about the other cities, towns, and provinces of the kingdom. Future historical work needs to avoid isolating the city of Naples as an island by connecting it not only to central and northern cities but also to the other urban centers and rural provinces of the south.

This volume stands as a firm rejection of uncritical visions of Neapolitan history and brings the richness of studies on Neapolitan culture to a wider audience. The major achievement of the volume is its jettisoning of too-simple models of cultural-political or cultural-religious dynamics in the city, especially with regard to its Spanish rulers and foreign observers. It should gain a wide readership amongst scholars interested in early modern Italy and the Habsburg world, and pose new questions for the numerous scholars engaged in studying the urban rituals and ceremonies of Naples. Yet it should also

encourage scholars to tackle new research questions with new methods and new sources. There are countless paths to take, but the most pressing issue is that the history of the bulk of the Neapolitan population, the so-called *plebe*, remains understudied. A range of intriguing subject matter and methodological innovation is gathered in this vol-

ume: this richness offers scholars the very welcome opportunity to leave behind interlocution with sterile debates and instead take inspiration for their own new approaches to early modern Naples.

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**Citation:** Stephen Cummins. Review of Calaresu, Melissa; Hills, Helen, eds., *New Approaches to Naples c.1500-c.1800: The Power of Place*. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. December, 2015.

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