

John A. Marino. *Becoming Neapolitan: Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011. xii + 342 pp. \$60. ISBN: 978-0-8018-9787-0.

This book — part of a remarkable recent resurgence of scholarly interest in Naples and its Kingdom — examines “the making and unmaking of citizens,” their identity and self-representation through the myths and rituals of early modern Naples under Spanish rule. Among the rituals analyzed here are royal and religious festivals, processions, figurations of sanctity, royal obsequies, painting, architecture, and even games. It brings together a full and rich bibliography with much useful

information and a wealth of facts, making them readily accessible for English language readership.

Marino is interested in the problem of what he terms “citizen identity”: “How did the early modern city hold together? Why did its diverse social components of caste and class not pull it apart?” (2). Broadly, ritual is identified here as central to the binding of the social; and in this it follows the path established by anthropologist Victor Turner. Marino argues that, in the face of dispossession and exploitation of the poor of Naples, the elites threw in their lot with the Spanish against the *popolo*.

Marino, following other recent historians, interprets the contestation of early modern Naples as “the product of a conscious policy pursued by the Spanish occupation to incorporate Naples into its imperial system as the centerpiece of its Mediterranean policy” (113). But he sees the essence of early modern absolutist rule in Naples as “a dialectic without synthesis” whereby superior military force and centralized bureaucratic institutions exerted control by manipulating antagonisms between “indigenous vying parties” (113). While nobles and *popolo* retained “more than the illusion of self-governance” in city affairs, the asymmetrical power relationships of noble patrons, commoner clients, and the poor added up to reinforced Spanish control of power (113).

Broadly speaking, the picture Marino paints is one of cynical manipulation leading inevitably to ossification and failure. The overall trend was toward the victory of the central state and its bureaucratization, as “authentic, autochthonous local rituals were infused with Aragonese customs and Burgundian models by their Spanish Habsburg heirs in Naples and manipulated to become mannered, routinized forms that lost their original content and meaning” (22).

The question of what is meant by ritual and how it produced meanings might usefully have been more critically investigated. Are urban feasts and religious processions, however popular, not inevitably to some extent routinized? And what of the lament for a lost authentic meaning? One might, instead, think of meaning as less inherent within art or actions than produced by their interpreters. Are all cultural forms that include rules, regulation, hierarchy, and structure best understood as rituals? Historical contingency and the role of ritual in producing what it claims merely to represent are perhaps inadequately entertained here. Thus while on the one hand, Marino speaks of *piazze* as “parade grounds for face-to-face interaction in the struggle for power” (4), nevertheless he sees processional positions as reflecting status and honor “among fellow citizens and one’s place in the local social and political structure” (3–4), rather than as actively producing status and honor in a contested field.

These cavils aside, this is a highly useful and reliable book. It gathers together material from a very diverse existing bibliography enriched by archival and other primary sources to offer a fascinating interpretation of a rich range of practices and artworks in relation to one of the most important cultural centers of early modern Europe.

HELEN HILLS
University of York