Tommaso Astarita, ed. *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*.
Brill's Companions to European History 2. Leiden: Brill, 2013. xvi + 520 pp. + 62 b/w pls. $233. ISBN: 978-90-04-23670-7.

If compared with artistic and intellectual capitals such as Florence, Venice, or Ferrara, Naples and its kingdom generally play a minor role in shaping scholarly perceptions of the Italian Renaissance. An enduring nationalistic bias, often combined with widespread assumptions on the cultural potential of politically dependent cities, has traditionally led scholars to interpret the history of Naples during the viceregal years and the first Bourbon rule (1503–1799) as a period of decadence and oppression. By bringing together an interdisciplinary group of twenty-one specialists, Astarita's companion succeeds in debunking this historiographical commonplace, while offering a new point of departure for future studies on early modern Naples.

After a brief introduction addressing issues of periodization, the volume is organized into three parts, which deal respectively with Naples as a city, the economy, and politics of the kingdom (its society and religion, its culture and intellectual life). With Marino's historiographical overview, Merto's discussion of urban structures and population, and Valerio's excursus on maps and visual representations of Naples, the first part provides the reader with a historiographical, physical, and visual introduction to the subject of the volume. Also, it underlines the recurrent conflict between the prosperous demographic and urbanistic reality of viceregal Naples, and the difficulty by which historians and cartographers registered it.

The second part focuses on the economic and political aspects of the Spanish domination. Sabbatini demonstrates the crucial role Spain played in nurturing commercial growth in terms of finance and logistics. Sodano discusses how the viceroys were able to centralize the government through the use of existing institutions such as the nobles' *seggi*. Musi makes a strong case for the centrality of the vice-kingdom in European politics, while emphasizing the decline of Naples during the eighteenth century. In closing the section, Hernando Sanchez explains how the absence of the king resulted in urban ceremonies and symbolic appropriations of urban spaces staged by the Spanish population of the city.

The third part delves into the culture of the urban nobility, lower classes, religious minorities, and marginal groups. Novi Chavarria discusses the prominent role aristocratic women played at court and in the numerous convents of the city. Spagnoletti reviews the difficult cohabitation of Spanish administrators and local nobility during the vice-kingdom. Mazur focuses on the numerous Jews, Greeks, and Muslims living in Naples — a city torn between the intolerant views of its Catholic king and the tolerance imposed by the needs of its thriving harbor. Romeo underlines the limited power of Naples's Inquisition, whose efforts were frustrated by an independent archbishop and an ungovernable plebs. Guarino illustrates how viceroys used state rituals and festivals as instruments of social control, and Gentilcore explains the failures of Neapolitan administration in dealing with plague epidemics.

The last section rehabilitates the viceregal years by looking at the artistic and intellectual life of the city. Napoli emphasizes the difference between Naples and other Italian cities in terms of patronage and the status of painters — a difference that often resulted in painters dedicated to decorative arts. Similar conclusions emerge from Cantone's history of Neapolitan ecclesiastic and residential buildings, which underlines the versatility of Neapolitan architects in working with different materials. While focusing on patronage in music and the arts in general, DelDonna and Carriò-Invernizzi agree that the Bourbon dynasty represented a reversal if compared with the viceregal years. Countering Venturi's characterization of Neapolitan enlightenment, Calaresu shows how both utopians and reformers emerged from the same cultural milieu, while Canepa interprets the lack of major literary institutions as an enriching, rather than a limiting, factor. Cocco emphasizes the heterodox vocation and political concerns of scientists based in Naples, such as Della Porta or Campanella, who translated the philosophy of Telesio into projects of social reform.

Despite their different methodologies — which span from traditional investigations of finances and mechanisms of representation to explorations of rituals and gender — all the contributors agree in rehabilitating the viceregal years, and the seventeenth century in particular, as a moment of economic, demographic, architectural, and intellectual growth, while downsizing the innovations commonly ascribed to the eighteenth century. In doing so, as Marino and Rao clearly point out in the first and last chapters of the volume, the case of Naples — a city whose cultural excellence matched its condition of political dependence — transcends the borders of the Italian south, and raises issues that are relevant for global history and postcolonial studies at large.

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