# INTRODUCTION

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An eighteenth-century state, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was constituted, developed, and died between 1734 and 1799. It was born as a monarchy in 1734, and ended as a revolutionary republic in June 1799. Conquered again by the Bourbons, after a phase of anarchy, it became a sort of Mediterranean despotism, a Catholic variant of Asian or Moslem despotic states. Its destiny – monarchy, republic, anarchy, despotism – could well have been taken from the pages of the *Esprit des lois*. But it was dramatic history.

At the time it takes a new form, a society should acquire again, according to Rousseau, 'in this new age, all the vigour of a nation being born'. But for the Kingdom of Naples it was not as easy as it was for Corsica: perhaps it was not even a nation. The south of Italy lost its independence in 1503, and had been absorbed into the Spanish empire. Then, in 1707, it passed under the dominion of Austria. In 1734 Philip V recovered it for Spain, erected it as an autonomous monarchy and put his son Charles at its head. Sicily was also part of the new Kingdom. The capital was Naples, and for Sicily a viceroy was appointed.

It was the year in which Voltaire revealed to Europe the stupefying greatness of the English political system, in his *Lettres philosophiques*. However, at least for the first decades, from Naples people looked to Paris for the solution to the immense problems that had to be solved. It was a question of transforming and often creating bureaucratic, administrative and institutional structures; intervening in the systems of the production and circulation of goods; assuring stable forms of civil liberty; and guaranteeing the modern framework of *sociabilité*. It was necessary to enter the very mind of the people, and overcome their proverbial superstition and laziness. In them a new culture had to be propagated, guaranteed by an efficient educational and university system. The life of the Kingdom of Naples shows us what it meant in the eighteenth century to construct and modernise a state in the age of

Enlightenment. It was not just a question of making the institutions efficient, starting from the military: it was necessary to give a new vitality to civil society and form the ethos of a new citizenship.

The essays in this volume are contributions to the following inquiry: not only what a state was, but *how* a state was built in the eighteenth century. Great importance must be given, in this sense, in Naples as in other places, to the formation of public opinion and the opinion of the élites, which would be able to participate, and make the entire Kingdom participate, in the cosmopolitan circulation of the ideas of the eighteenth century. 'Dans la naissance des sociétés, ce sont les chefs des républiques qui font l'institution; et c'est ensuite l'institution qui forme les chefs des républiques.' This laconic reflection on the part of Montesquieu seems to have been at the centre of the awareness of the Neapolitan *philosophes*. For this reason, in all these essays an attempt has been made to study relationships with government, reform activities, and the proposals of the élites, both from the point of view of relationships among groups, and in studying the ways in which the groups were formed. We have tried to write a cultural history of Neapolitan society in the eighteenth century, or rather, to borrow an apt expression of the most important historian of the Italian Enlightenment, Franco Venturi, we have tried to write a political history of the ideas that were circulating in Naples in those decades. From one point of view, we have therefore tried to reconstruct the movement of the principal political groups in southern Italian society; on the other, the nature of the Enlightenment intellectuals has emerged. In Naples, throughout the century, the intelligentsia was very close to the action of the government, both with Genovesi and later, with Galanti and Filangieri. The Enlightenment in Naples was above all an urge to reform, a support, even a direction for the transformations, more than a search for an autonomous space for criticism. One of the essential points in the awareness that these élites had of their condition was in fact that of the backwardness of all southern Italian society. Fighting this backwardness meant fighting for Enlightenment. Much was done, even in the image which appeared outside of Italy of what was happening in Naples. Evidence of it was given, to cite just one name, by Voltaire.

After 1789 Neapolitan society had to deal with the effects of the French Revolution. There was a dramatic breaking down of previous relationships. The court took a position with the anti-French coalitions. The élites slowly and painfully approached republican ideals. The path of reformism was closed off. The only way open was that of revolution: it exploded in Naples when it was already dying out in France. The revolutionary republic took power and then lost it again a few months

before the *coup d'état* of 18 Brumaire. However, in contrast to the French situation, Bourbon power in Naples, with the terrible repression it imposed, physically destroyed or intimidated those intellectual élites which had been formed in the course of the century and which had assured the rebirth of the Kingdom. Enlightenment was no longer an active force in the political life of Naples, which had passed from the ideals of Giannone to the reality of a clerical state. But it remained as a stimulating force in civil society. For this reason we have decided not to present merely the story of the Neapolitan republic, preferring instead to show how the heredity of the Enlightenment remained alive in the ideas and the memories of the élites, and even in some of their economic strategies. In this way a civil development, however halting its progress may have been, was guaranteed to southern Italian society in the nineteenth century.

Our objective is thus to present the history of an eighteenth-century society, during the period of a rapid curve through formation, decline and fall. We have preferred to articulate a single theme, rather than give isolated images. This explains the absence of several important figures (Vico and Galiani, for example). We have left out the analysis of Sicily, which had a life of its own. But a book on Naples in the eighteenth century seemed appropriate to us because it could lead to reflection on the value of the Enlightenment experience in today's culture and because, with the presence of what seem to be contrary movements, the historical roots of our contemporary reality can be discovered. The path chosen is that which seemed to us to give the most lively answers to questions that have the purpose, as is always the case in historiography, of clarifying both the past and the present.

This book was a collective effort, but any errors or failings are to be attributed only to the editor.

G.I.
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CHAPTER I

# THE CAPITAL AND THE PROVINCES

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## THE THEORETICAL AND HISTORIOGRAPHIC DEBATE

The events involving the capital and the provinces in the Kingdom of Naples in the eighteenth century cannot be fully understood without taking into account the complex relationship that had always linked these two realities. The awareness of this relationship is particularly strong in the juridical and political theory of the eighteenth century, which emphasised the distinctive aspects of contrast and – on the part of the provinces – of emulation and even of protest. It became evident in the controversy raised by Enlightenment intellectuals from the second half of the century onward. The interest of Neapolitan intellectuals in the provinces can be dated back to the second half of the seventeenth century, when Cartesian criticism and economic ideology began to weaken the certainties of the dominant élite regarding the validity of the existing order, which was based on the primacy of jurisprudence and on values deriving from the Aristotelian-scholastic system. The diffusion of the new ideas helped both to highlight the malfunctioning and imbalance of the existing political and social organisation, and to begin a critique of the very values upon which that organisation had been founded.

Benedetto Croce had already pointed to the renewed flourishing of Neapolitan culture beginning in the second half of the seventeenth century. Recent studies have further developed Croce's observations, highlighting the intellectual ferment which grew from that period through the first thirty years of the following century, giving life to a jurisprudential 'pre-Enlightenment' which had such exponents as Pietro Giannone, Pietro Contegna and Serafino Biscardi.[1] The comparison with other European models of development, especially in England and Holland, suggested to these thinkers the necessity for a deeper analysis of the situation in the Kingdom of Naples. Thus all the problems which

impeded the growth of the country were to be examined, from relations with the Holy See to the conflict among social groups or the maladministration of justice.

Raffaele Ajello has emphasised the importance of these jurists, who elaborated and diffused a true 'ideology of development', laying the basis for the formation of a 'productivist mentality' and thus for the economic and moral rebirth of the country. This group began to hypothesise innovative solutions to individual aspects; to submit the legal system to severe criticism; to readdress the problem of law and order, which was one of the most important obstacles to the development of the economy and of internal commerce; and to criticise ecclesiastical privileges and immunities. They denounced the distance of the Court as one of the causes of the weakness of the idea of authority, and consequently of the 'languor' of the judicial system. Its inadequacies, as Biscardi pointed out, were aggravated by the presence of a capital full of useless, lazy people, whose iniquity went unpunished because of the immunity and privileges which their citizenship guaranteed. The capital was indeed the seat of the most important lawcourts (the malfunctioning of which was reflected in the life of the city and the Kingdom), and because the ample privileges granted its administration were recognised and confirmed by all the sovereigns in turn, it was almost an autonomous power standing against the entire country. Paolo Mattia Doria, too, described the capital as the tyrant of the Kingdom; its privileges 'nullify almost all the authority of royalty.'[2]

These considerations belonged to the theoretical approach of the juridical tradition. But they produced the first awareness of a 'problem of the capital and of the provinces'. The results of these reflections passed into the thought of Genovesi via Intieri, Broggia and Doria, after the installation of the Bourbon régime, when economic ideology found new maturity. It was, in fact, criticism of the régime which offered the opportunity for proposing new theoretical starting points, in the light of various cultural conceptions ranging from Newtonianism to neo-mercantilism. Intieri, in spite of his criticism of 'dottorismo e . . . ministero' (the judiciary in the capital), expressed his faith in modern civilisation and its progress, 'blessed the century, the prince, the nation', and proclaimed his love for his chosen country (he came from Tuscany) and even for its capital, whose greatness was a check against tyranny. Broggia, on the other hand, showed himself to be sensitive to the social implications of the government's policies, and defended the rights of the 'industrious and hard-working poor', whom he defined as 'the best part of the state . . . the part that struggles and works hard'.[3]

All these elements can be found in a form which is more mature, filtered through a new sensitivity, in the writings of Genovesi, alongside the more specific influences which he derived from late mercantilist and proto-libertarian theories.

With Genovesi, the problems of the provinces gave rise to a genuine manifesto for the economic and moral reawakening of the country, and developed into a true social doctrine, cloaked in patriotic form. Genovesi's patriotism is indicated by the importance of the Kingdom in his thought and his perceptible attachment to it. It is indicated by the attention to an 'inch by inch' knowledge of the country, its history, its problems and needs, of the mentality of its people.[4] A 'national consciousness' is born from such knowledge, according to Galasso, and can be transmitted to his students. As Venturi had pointed out, Genovesi transformed his teachings into a school, and from a school into a party, which was spread by his students to every province in the Kingdom. A way of thinking was born, which was different from that of the jurists of the first half of the century: the problems of every individual province are seen as part of the global context of the nation by 'provincial' writers who define themselves primarily as such; one need only think of Michele Torcia and Domenico Grimaldi on Calabria, or Melchiorre Delfico on the Abruzzi.

It was this new characteristic which gave the discussions a xenophobic tone and incorporated a demand for redress on the part of the provinces, a note of opposition and protest against the capital, with clear ideological significance. This meant an attack on the determined centralism initiated by the Spanish rulers, and continued by the Bourbons, in spite of the many projects for decentralisation. It is in Galanti that we find the most powerful and embittered protest, which inspired his project of administrative reform, defined as 'polymunicipalism'.

The centrality of this protest against the 'monster' capital in the thought of the Neapolitan *philosophes* has attracted the attention of historians. Venturi had emphasised the European significance of the phenomenon in the eighteenth century, as a contrast between the outlying areas and the dominant cities, an economic and social reaction. Galasso has considered the importance of the real cultural supremacy which was a result of political and historical events which had increased both the privileges of the city and its prestige, and had confirmed it as the representative of the interests of the Kingdom with respect to Madrid and Rome, both of which threatened the 'liberties' of the Neapolitan nation. Ajello, while recognising the imbalance between the capital and the outlying regions, has emphasised the 'exchange' which sprang from it:

> if for centuries the city of Naples had absorbed and used the material and intellectual resources of the provinces, it had thus started a process which did not move in just one direction. It severely impoverished the outlying areas of the Kingdom, but it worked to elevate the tone of the capital, which was for the south the seat and the undisputed sign of its civic life, and thus gave significance to the entire nation, since it achieved a specific and important presence in the Italian and international context.

Finally, 'the events of 1806–15 and of 1860 . . . let loose feelings of discontent which had long been repressed, and set off sterile mechanisms of accusation and demands for redress'.[5]

Similar sentiments can be found among the Enlightenment philosophers, stimulated by the tension of the political debate and by the urgency of the problems. These attitudes arise from emotional engagement with a concrete problem, the specific relationship between the capital and the provinces, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. My inquiries into the organisational structures of the phenomenon in the eighteenth century have indicated that a connection exists between the relationship between capital and provinces and the conflict among social groups in the Kingdom. This chapter sets forth some of the major results of these inquiries.

## THE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES OF THE CITY AND THE PROVINCES: THE TWO SYSTEMS OF THE KINGDOM

If we consider the organisational system in the Kingdom at the beginning of the eighteenth century, we can immediately verify its 'dualistic' character. On the one hand we have approximately two thousand local communities or *università*, a term which indicated the origin of the local autonomous authorities as private entities, a concept which remained valid. They carried out their social, economic and legal business autonomously, on the basis of regulations, statutes and customs which guided their internal relations and local administration. The *università* elected their local rulers autonomously, had their own parliaments and a whole series of municipal administrators. The principal function of these local rulers was to see to public needs, which included organising the *annona* (the food supplies for the city), using funds obtained from local taxes.

On the other hand, there was the system of royal lawcourts, central, provincial and local, which covered the entire country in a tight network whose function was to administer justice, and consequently to control all economic and social life in the provinces. This royal judicial system also included a 'subsystem' of entities which directed the

economic and financial life of the provinces, at the top of which was the *Regia Camera della Sommaria*. It exercised jurisdiction and control over all questions to which the royal financial administration was a party or in which it had an interest, and generally supervised all *università* which were classified as 'dedotte in patrimonio', i.e. in financial difficulty.[6]

Although it operated with full autonomy within the laws and customs of the Kingdom, the *università* used this court system as an intermediary with the top political and administrative bodies in the capital. The feudal system also had a role in this dualism, with an influence on both sides. After their conquest of Naples in 1503, the Spanish considered the barons to be *officiales regii*, royal officials, and the power of the barons continued to be exercised in various ways in local government, both political, economic and administrative, influencing the appointment and conduct of local officials.

The moment at which the south of Italy became a Spanish vice-regency has therefore been rightly judged decisive, occurring at the same time as the major European monarchies were initiating absolutism and forming modern states. England was then undergoing a similar kind of evolution, as has been demonstrated by recent research emphasising the importance for the foundation of the British Empire of the financial system and provincial organisation. It was at precisely this time that the Kingdom of Naples came under the Habsburg dynasty. Thus, the development of Naples was conditioned by the needs of the imperial policy of Spain, following very precise and tightly connected directives. In internal defence precedence was given to the security of Milan, the 'antemural del Reyno', rather than to guaranteeing the security of the 'unarmed border' of southern Italy. In economic and fiscal policy, the Neapolitan economy was colonised and trapped within the system of *arrendamenti* (tax-farming). Finally, in internal policy, there was a compromise with the dominating social and political forces (nobility, legal community, high local church authorities).

This compromise meant that 'ministerial' power (the judiciary and governmental élites) was promoted in the capital, whereas the provinces were abandoned to feudal power. The prestige of the central judiciary contributed to the growth of the capital, whose *ministero togato* (the judiciary) gained renown throughout Europe, above all for its attitude towards the Holy See and its resistance to the introduction of the Spanish Inquisition. The organisation of the provinces followed the model of the capital and was centred on the *Udienza* (literally 'hearing'), which was a court made up of three *uditori* ('hearers') and a *fiscale* (a lawyer expert in financial administration), headed by a *preside* (president). Strengthened by reforms introduced by Philip II, the *Udienza*

became the principal means of royal organisation of the provinces. It acted as intermediary between the local governing bodies and the top level of political and juridical power in the capital, represented by the highest courts: the *Sacro Regio Consiglio*, the *Consiglio Collaterale*, the *Gran Corte della Vicaria* and the *Regia Camera della Sommaria*.

The supremacy of the judiciary became the model for political and social organisation, founded on the values professed by the judges, who ranked in popular opinion as the *sanior pars* (best part) of the nation and the source of all knowledge, holders of power by consent. The power acquired by this judiciary resulted in an 'anomalous' development of Neapolitan society, as Raffaele Ajello has pointed out. Their supremacy went so far as to humiliate the nobility and push them aside from all the central points of command, and conditioned the subsequent development of southern Italian institutions, condemning them to bureacracy and compromise. Hence, the 'dualism' previously mentioned: alongside and in opposition to the judicial system in the centre and in the provinces, we can set another 'system'. The nobility, excluded from central government, maintained its power in the provinces, exercising political and administrative control over the *università*. But even in the centre the nobility retained a very important instrument of control: it dominated the administration of the capital, and this constituted a mighty obstacle to the affirmation of absolute power. The government of the city was made up of seven elected members: six from the nobility, representing the five *Seggi della Capitale* (districts of the capital) into which the nobility was divided, and the *Eletto del Popolo*, elected from among the *dottori* (lawyers), merchants, rich men and shopkeepers who represented the 'people'.

Through the *Capitoli, grazie e privilegi* (concessions and privileges) that it managed to obtain from the Spanish monarchy in exchange for *donativi* (voluntary contributions of money to the king), the capital kept its autonomy and even reached the point of claiming the right to deal with the Spanish monarch as an equal. Especially after the abolition of the *Parlamento generale* (General Parliament) in 1642, the *Seggi* of the nobility claimed to represent the interests of the entire Kingdom vis-à-vis the Habsburg monarchy. As a consequence, the *Seggi della Capitale* became a model and were recognised by the local administrations as protectors and guarantors of their autonomy and privileges. In the provinces, too, the nobility organised itself into a defensive 'closed nobility' in order to maintain political and administrative control over local government.

The ideology of nobility, the ties of values and lineage, was the connecting factor between the centre and the province in this system,

which was based on these local, autonomous administrations dominated by the nobility. The nobility of the Kingdom affirmed its right to govern the country by virtue of birth and blood. The ideological supremacy of the Neapolitan nobility, which included the most important baronial families of the Kingdom, and the progressive aggregation of the major families of the provincial nobility into the *Seggi* of the capital, also gave economic primacy to the nobility of the Neapolitan *Seggi*. This supremacy influenced the economy of the provinces directly and indirectly, and impoverished them economically and financially. The drain caused by the ecclesiastical revenues held by numerous prelates, younger sons of the southern nobility, who lived in Rome, was added to this situation.

The opposition between these two social orders, the judiciary and the nobility, expressed two different models of life, culture and social organisation. Thus, in the more than two centuries of viceroyalty a juxtaposition was created between organisational systems operating at various levels, each of which used a different method of mediation and also a different point of reference at the highest level of the political system.

## THE INDEPENDENT KINGDOM

The advent of the Bourbon monarchy in 1734 occurred in a contradictory context. The enthusiasm of the intellectuals regarding that event must be set alongside an international and domestic political situation based on an extremely precarious balance. The juridical pre-Enlightenment had shown the need for a direct point of reference at the top of the political system, as the determining factor for the beginning of an important process of reform. The expectations of the intellectuals came up against the dynasty's need to install itself firmly in the country by means of a régime which tended toward absolutism.

The problems faced by the new monarchy were immense.[7] The major political and social forces (the ecclesiastics, the nobility, and even the judiciary, although the latter at least provided a framework in the centre and the provinces) held such large amounts of power and were in such conflict among themselves as to constitute a serious impediment to the functioning of the new régime.

The first problem of the new government was how to adjust the delicately balanced international and domestic situation. To this end it pursued a policy of compromise with the major political and social forces. As a consequence, the programme of reform was put aside. The principle of continuity was given precedence, leaving unaltered the