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978-0-521-48310-0 - Naples in the Time of Cholera, 1884–1911

Frank M. Snowden

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This is a medical and social history of Italy's largest city during the cholera epidemics of 1884 and 1910–11. It also is the first extended study of cholera in modern Italy, which sets Naples in a comparative international framework.

The book explores the factors that exposed Naples to risk; it examines such popular responses as social hysteria, riots and religiosity; and it traces therapeutic strategies. The disease is also related to larger historical issues, such as the nature of liberal statecraft, the 'Southern Question', mass emigration, organized crime, urban renewal and the medical profession.

Cholera in Naples became a metaphor for discontent with the regime: the 1884 outbreak was a national issue which led to the rebuilding of the city amidst widespread corruption. Despite rebuilding, the city suffered a major epidemic in 1910–11. Stunned, the Italian state launched a campaign of silence. The authorities suppressed the truth, lied to the international community and fabricated statistics. This work thus extends the historiography of cholera in Europe into the twentieth century and analyses the only known case in which a major epidemic was systematically concealed.

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For Judith

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Preface

History is a collective enterprise, and one of my chief pleasures as an author is to express my appreciation to the many people who have contributed to this project. Professors Francesco Barbagallo and Paolo Frascani generously provided me with helpful advice on archives in Naples. Dr M. Soscia, Medical Director of the Cotugno Hospital, was a kind host, and he graciously assisted me in locating materials in the Hospital library and archive. The staffs at the National Library of Medicine at Bethesda, Maryland; the National Archives in Washington; the National Library at Naples; the Archive of the Bank of Naples; the State Archive at Naples; and the Sterling Library at Yale University provided endless and invaluable assistance in locating sources.

Colleagues at Royal Holloway, University of London and at Yale University have given helpful advice and support. Professors Henry Turner, Jr and John Harley Warner read the first draft of the manuscript, and made wise and valuable suggestions. The anonymous readers at Cambridge University Press offered helpful and informed criticism. Naturally, I alone am responsible for any errors that remain.

Research also requires financial support, and the Wellcome Trust made possible numerous field trips to Naples and to Washington, and enthusiastically encouraged my early research proposal. Sabbatical leave from Yale University and a grant from the Griswold Humanities Fund enabled me to bring the work to completion.

Most of all, however, I would like to express thanks to my wife, Judith. She was an inexhaustible source of enthusiasm, advice and humour. It is more than a rhetorical flourish to state that this book would not have appeared without her. The original idea for this project began in our discussions; she encouraged me to continue when I considered abandoning it after first learning of the wholesale wartime destruction of documents relating to the city of Naples in the Giolittian era; and she had the idea that material on the Neapolitan epidemic of 1911 must have survived in American archives.

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Glossary of Italian and Neapolitan terms used in the text

<i>ampliamento</i>	expansion
<i>asilo degli emigranti</i>	quarantine station for emigrants
<i>banchista</i>	unofficial emigrant banker
<i>basso</i> (pl. <i>bassi</i>)	ground-floor slum dwelling
<i>basso ceto</i>	lower classes
<i>caionzari</i>	makers of catgut
<i>carabiniere</i> (pl. <i>carabinieri</i>)	military police
<i>Casa degli emigranti</i>	state-run emigrant hostel
<i>colmate</i>	landfills
<i>colonna infame</i>	column of infamy
<i>comune</i>	municipality
<i>Consiglio superiore di sanità</i>	Superior Health Council
<i>dazio consumo</i>	consumption levy
<i>decimi di alea</i>	builders' contingency fund
<i>Direzione generale della sanità</i>	Department of Public Health
<i>duce</i>	leader
<i>fondaco</i> (pl. <i>fondaci</i>)	slum tenement
<i>gioco piccolo</i>	underground lottery
<i>giunta</i>	executive committee of city hall
<i>insipienza</i>	stupidity
<i>locanda</i>	boarding house
<i>locandiere</i>	boarding-house proprietor
<i>medico condotto</i>	public health doctor
<i>opere pie</i>	Catholic benevolent associations
<i>ottobrate</i>	October harvest festival
<i>padulano</i>	market gardener
<i>plebe</i>	common people
<i>popolino</i>	lower classes
<i>popolaglia</i>	rabble
<i>popolo minuto</i>	lower classes

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questore
risanamento
scirocco
sevaioli
sezione
signore
squarciare
stralci
sventramento
sventrare
untore
vanella
vico
zingaro

Glossary

chief of police
urban renewal
South-East wind
makers of tallow
borough of the city of Naples
gentleman
to rip out
cuts
disembowelment
to disembowel
poisoner
skylight
lane
gypsy