RENAISSANCE HISTORY, ART AND CULTURE

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Silvana D'Alessio

Masaniello

The Life and Afterlife of a Neapolitan Revolutionary

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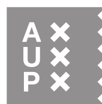

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Translated by Thomas V. Cohen

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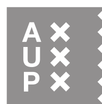

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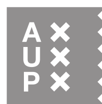

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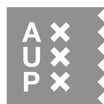
A mio fratello Tommaso,
in memoria



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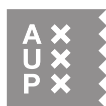

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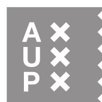

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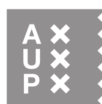

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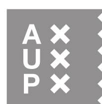

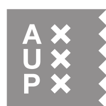

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Introduction to the Present Edition

In June 1647, before the so-called Masaniello revolt broke out, an unnamed author wrote that a placard (*cartello*) had surfaced, issuing threats against the city's nobles and the "mayors" (*sindaci*). According to the author, should new gabelle (taxes) be brought in, these persons would be "dragged" across the entire city. On the other hand, he rather doubted that such an uprising would occur, "if there is nobody to take charge and stir it up, there is no need to fear the outcome, because the People are too abased."[1] He was unaware that a young man of the Lavinaio quarter had already opted to risk his life for the cause. On July 7 1647, Tommaso Aniello d'Amalfi led hundreds of youths to the viceregal palace to compel the viceroy to abolish the *gabella* on fruit, and all other state charges on comestibles. For several days, especially after an attack that aimed to kill him, Masaniello became a sort of viceroy or king of the peninsula's most populous city, one of Europe's biggest.[2] The chronicler Alessandro Giraffi explains the many means by which Masaniello pushed the people towards revolt:

> incouraged the bold, promis'd rewards, threatned the suspected, reproach'd the coward, applauded the valiant, and marvellously incited the minds of men, by many degrees his superiors, to battell, to burnings, to plunder, to spoile, to blood and to death.[3]

It was thus thanks to Masaniello that on the second day of the uprising, the people could count on some 150,000 men in arms.[4] Masaniello was killed on 16 July, but officially the revolt lasted until 6 April 1648, when the new

1 Paris, BNF, Fond Dupuy 674, "Napoli 18 giugno," ff. 28r–29r: 28v.

2 Alessandro Giraffi speaks of 600,000 souls: Giraffi, *Le rivolutioni di Napoli* (Venice: per il Baba, 1647), pp. 106–107; on this author, see f. 58; Tommaso Astarita, "Naples is the Whole World," in *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*, by Astarita (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 1–8.

3 Giraffi's translation in English was published in 1650: James Howell, *An exact historie of the late revolutions in Naples* [...] *rendred to English, by J. H. Esq*^{r} (London: R. Lowndes at the White Lion, 1650), p. 104.

4 This number, 150,000, appears in the chronicle: *I fatti di Masaniello in una cronaca lucchese* (*ms. posseduto dalla famiglia Pollera*), Naples, ms. SNSP XXIII C 4, p. 3; Aurelio Musi, *La rivolta*

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viceroy made his entrance into the city.[5] News of the uprising soon spread beyond the borders of the Kingdom of Naples: the revolt was yet one more ulcer on the great, afflicted body of the Spanish monarchy in the last spasms of its exhausting war against the United Provinces (1568–1648), after the Catalan revolt of May 1640, the Portuguese secession (1640–1641), and the Sicilian revolts (1646–1647).[6] The Kingdom of Naples was the most important source of financial contributions for the Spanish monarchy among its Italian domains: since 1619 (the beginning of the Thirty Years' War), Spain's demand for money had grown; confronted with revolts in Catalonia and Portugal, and the war with France, Philip IV was constrained to ask for new contributions. These needs would require some radical changes in the institutions and social life of the Kingdom of Naples, the complete subordination of the role of the *Eletto del Popolo* to the viceroy, the increase in financial pressure, the growth of a new elite – often parvenus who invested in *gabelle* – and the sale of important positions in the local tribunals.[7] On all this, our sources

di Masaniello nella scena politica barocca, preface by Giuseppe Galasso (Naples: Guida editori, 1989), on the crucial role of Masaniello.

5 Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello*, pp. 265–266; on the night between 5 and 6 April 1648, the count of Oñate (Iñigo Vélez de Guevara) entered Naples as the new viceroy. He was there until 1653; on this period, see Anna Minguito Palomares, *Nápoles y el virrey conde de Oñate. La estrategia del poder y el resurgir del reino (1648–1653)* (Madrid: Silex), 2011, pp. 139 ff.; on his repression directed against the Masanielli and Barberini, see Alain Hugon, *Naples insurgée (1647–1648). De l'événement à la mémoire 1647–1648* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011), pp. 243 ff.; Giovanni Muto, "1649. Napoli tra repressione e rilegittimazione" in Biagio Salvemini and Angelantonio Spagnoletti, edited by, *Territori, poteri, rappresentazioni nell'Italia di età moderna* (Santo Spirito -Bari: Edipuglia, 2012), pp. 127–139.

6 See the remarks of John Elliott on the parallels with these other revolts, or some of them, among which the reaction to outsiders and the determination to fight for the fatherland; *idem*, "Revolution and Continuity in Early Modern Europe," *Past & Present*, n. 42 (Feb., 1969): 35–56; Rosario Villari, *Elogio della dissimulazione. La lotta politica nel Seicento* (Bari: Laterza, 1987), pp. 49–78; Francesco Benigno, "Ripensare le «sei rivoluzioni contemporanee». Considerazioni sul conflitto politico nel Seicento," *Nuova Rivista storica*, XCVI, 3 (2012): 783–816; for a comparative perspective, see Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013); Joana Fraga-Joan-Lluís Palos, "Trois révoltes en images. La Catalogne, le Portugal et Naples dans les années 1640," in *Soulèvements, révoltes, révolutions dans l'empire des Habsbourgs d'Espagne, XVIe–XVIIe siècles*, edited by Alain Hugon and Alexandre Merle (Madrid: Casa de Velásquez, 2016), pp. 119–138; Alexandra Merle, Stéphane Jettot and Manuel Herrero Sánchez (eds.), *La Mémoire des révoltes en Europe à l'époque moderne* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2018).

7 Rosario Villari, *The Revolt of Naples*, translated by James Newill with the assistance of John Marino (London: Polity Press, 1993); Villari, *Un sogno di libertà. Napoli nel declino di un impero 1585–1648* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012); Parker, *Global Crisis*, p. 422: "the viceroys also alienated crown lands and rights (although this reduced revenue), sold public offices (although this undermined

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provide rich details, helping us to reconstruct the city's daily life, in which the revolt took shape.

Masaniello's uprising was only the first phase of the Neapolitan revolt, which began with several demands. Initially, there had been six: respect for the city's "privilege" of Charles V; the abolition of the *gabelle* and fiscal dues first imposed by Charles V; a general pardon for crimes against the regime; parity in voting rights between the people and the nobles and the direct election of the *Eletto del Popolo*, who had become a mere instrument in the viceroy's hands; the inscription of the state's concessions on a "column to be placed in the Mercato square," and, should new *gabelle* be introduced, the people would be allowed to take up arms "without incurring the crime of lese-majesty or any penalty at all."[8] Boxed in by the uprising, the viceroy immediately conceded everything. He then wrote to King Philip IV for help, asking him to dispatch the fleet, which later bombarded the city for several days, from 5 October.[9] On 17 October, Naples declared independence from Spain with a printed *Manifesto*, which also appeared at the end of Giraffi's chronicle. The city then requested support from any power inclined to take the field but on 14 November a French noble, Henri duke of Guise arrived; he had neither the means to succour Naples nor the will to uphold its newborn republic. On 21 February 1648, two of the most important anti-Spanish voices were silenced: the poet Antonio Basso and Salvatore de Gennaro, tagged by an anonymous writer as authors of the October *Manifesto*.[10]

the loyalty and integrity of the civil service and issued bonds (although the interest payable greatly increased expenditure)."

8 Paris, BNF, Dupuy, 674, f. 31r: *Capitoli dimandati dal popolo concessi dal V. Ré*.

9 "Nel tardo pomeriggio del 5 ottobre 4000 soldati mossero da Castelnuovo e dall'arsenale per disarmare il popolo"; "tremila pezzi di artiglieria spararono ininterrottamente per nove giorni […]": Rosario Villari, *Per il re o per la patria. La fedeltà nel Seicento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1994), pp. 67–72. On how the war evolved, see Villari, *Per il re o per la patria*, p. 18 ff.; Vittor Ivo Comparato, "From the Crisis of Civil Culture to the Neapolitan Republic of 1647: Republicanism in Italy between the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe*, vol. I, *Republicanism and Constitutionalism in Early Modern Europe*, edited by Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.169–194; Silvana D'Alessio, *Contagi. La rivolta napoletana del 1647–48. Linguaggio e potere politico* (Florence: CET, 2003).

10 Notice of the disappearance of Basso and de Gennaro surfaces in a rich, untitled, anonymous account: in Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, ms. 4258 (henceforth Anonimo Casanatense, *Narrazione della rivolta*), f. 225r: after transcribing the *Manifesto del fedelissimo popolo*, the anonymous writer notes the authors' names in the margin: "questo manifesto lo ha fatto il detto Salvatore de Gennaro e Antonio Basso."

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Internal divisions, a lack of resources and food, and military defeats brought the revolt to an end. Once it was over, a series of (now generally forgotten) death sentences followed.[11] Many European cities were flooded with letters, reports, chronicles, and other papers about the events in Naples. In this way, the Masaniello episode was reported and used for a variety of local ends. There were many reasons for this: firstly, on account of the great power Masaniello had enjoyed, and his meteoric rise from revolt leader to king, and, subsequently, to saint; and secondly, because, according to some chroniclers, the next *Capopopolo*, Gennaro Annese, lacked the flexibility and sparkle of young Masaniello. But there were also cultural and political reasons; the account that circulated most widely throughout Europe was Giraffi's, but this stopped with Masaniello's death. For many authors, across the centuries, Giraffi's account, translated into English, Dutch, and German, was *the* reference text, so much so that we can speak of an enduring "Giraffi effect."[12] His "instant book" presents a convincing story: the revolt had to happen, but Masaniello, who launched his career justly and judiciously, soon became mad and tyrannical, due to natural causes, and under the pressure of events. Giraffi explained that, like high-flown Icarus, rising too far, he soon came crashing down.

Across several centuries, Masaniello has had enthusiastic and sincere admirers, guided in their opinions by Machiavelli, the people's great defender, or by more recent *maitres à penser*, like Mazzini, inspirer of many nineteenth-century writers. The abbot Carlo Denina, for example, compared Masaniello to the Florentine Ciompi-rebel leader, Michele di Lando, whom Machiavelli had lauded in his *Istorie fiorentine* (III, 17). Di Lando, a wool worker, "showed himself to have an intelligence not inferior to any of the major men that had never had part in that government." Masaniello was:

> that man of singular and incomprehensible genius, Tommaso Aniello, popularly called Masaniello, who, from the humble craft of fishmonger (or seller of fish-wrap, if that is what he was), without the least instruction

11 In spite of the indult's promise of pardon, many were put to death for a variety of motives, including having attempted a new uprising; among others, men close to Masaniello were executed, including his *cognato* (brother-in-law), Damiano Gargano, a shopkeeper. For the executed men, see Antonella Orefice, *I giustiziati di Napoli dal 1556 al 1862*, with a preface by Antonio Illibato (Nuovo Monitore Napoletano, digital edition, 2017).

12 I have drawn my expression, "Giraffi effect," from one of the most stimulating books from my studies of literature and history: *Effetto Sterne. La narrazione umoristica in Italia da Foscolo a Pirandello*, edited by Giancarlo Mazzacurati (Pisa: Nistri Lischi, 1990).

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> in letters, without practice in either court nor army, knew how to dress so well, and to bear the character of a general, of a prince, and father of the fatherland, that was surely a miraculous thing.[13]

Denina is silent about Masaniello's decline and end. Other writers, in the nineteenth-century, corrected Giraffi's version to write a more moral story, where the madness was not natural, but provoked by the Spanish viceroy, with a drink designed to drive the man off his head. One such writer was Irish Lady Morgan, who thought it possible that Masaniello had ingested a "poisonous drug."[14] Thus, many wrote that the famous *Capopopolo* had been poisoned. Thanks to this adaptation, the story gained allure; its hero became an example of the cruelty of the viceroy and his ministers, and nineteenth-century readers were quick to draw parallel with the current Bourbon kings.

Masaniello's fame is best explained with an eye to many texts, in a variety of languages, written about the first days of the revolt, in a continual rewriting of the seventeenth-century sources, or a re-elaboration of fragments holding elements of truth. Sam Cohn recently wrote of the "famous" Neapolitan *Capopopolo*, in an essay on popular resistance, in which he lists many leaders who arose from among the commoners, both medieval and early modern.[15] There we meet first the medieval names of Jan Breyde, and the weaver Pieter de Coninck, who fought to lift off the French yoke in the second Flemish revolt of 1323–1328:

> […] leaders such as Clais Zannekin, Zeger Janszone, and Jacob Peyt came from the peasantry. In 1368 the weaver Hans Weiss led a revolt that brought craft guilds to power in Augsburg. But others have been less known such as the Genoese galley-man Piero Capurro, who in 1329 organized a mutiny

13 Carlo Denina, *Delle rivoluzioni d'Italia libri ventiquattro*, vol. IV (Venice: Giovanni Gatti, 1779), XXIII, ch. VII, p. 253. In 1378–82, the Ciompi of Florence wanted higher pay and the right to form a guild. Denina, born at Revello, near Cuneo, knew the Frenchmen of the Enlightenment (albeit he quarrelled with Voltaire over religion). See his entry in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (henceforth *DBI*), by Guido Fagioli Vercellone, vol. 38 (1990).

14 Lady Morgan, *The Life and Times of Salvator Rosa* (Paris: A. Belin, 1824), p. 283; the remarks of Lady Morgan were later picked up by other authors, backing a Risorgimento based on the people's efforts. For this Mazzinian goal, see Gian Luca Fruci and Alessio Petrizzo, "Risorgimento di massa (1846–1849)," in *Nel nome della nazione. Il Risorgimento nelle testimonianze, nei documenti e nelle immagini* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2010), p. 150.

15 Samuel K. Cohn Jr, "Authority and Popular Resistance," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350–1750*, vol. II, *Cultures and Power*, edited by Hamish Scott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 418–439.

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> against the aristocratic commander, Aiton Doria, because of his failure to pay back wages.

Cohn then looks to the early modern:

> After the fifteenth century, leaders of popular revolt from the ranks of peasants and artisans had certainly not disappeared, as with 'Captain Cobbler' and 'Captain Poverty', who were leaders of the Pilgrimage of Grace revolt in England in 1536; George Brunner of 'humble origins', who led a peasant uprising in Austria in 1597; 'Captain Pouch' who led the Midland Rising of 1607; and perhaps most famously, the charismatic, crazed fishmonger, Masaniello, who led (at least in the streets) the Neapolitan revolt of 1647 against Spanish Habsburg rule.[16]

Masaniello is probably of these the most famous because many letters, chronicles and other genres of texts were written about him, a man come from below who was able to punish those who had introduced further taxes on foodstuffs or tormented the helpless lower classes. The painter and poet Salvator Rosa wrote a poem for him, telling how he had smashed to death a "hydra of evils."[17]

My book on Masaniello was published in 2007, on the invitation of Giuseppe Galasso; it was conceived as a biography-mythography of Masaniello, on whom we had very few entirely historical essays. The early-1980s debate between Peter Burke and Rosario Villari testified to the interest of the revolt's first days,[18] but subsequent writings surveyed the entire event, giving those

16 On this point, Parker wrote: "Although his reign lasted only nine days, the humble fisherman achieved an iconic status that anticipated that of Che Guevara in the twentieth century: artists captured his likeness in paintings, medals and wax statuettes": *Global Crisis*, p. 527. There was an earlier rebel of the same name, Tommaso Aniello, from Sorrento; he fought against the imposition of a Spanish-style Inquisition in May of 1547. The revolt, which also had noble support, did succeed: Giraffi, *Le rivolutioni*, p. 12; Renata Pilati, *Arcana seditionis. Violenze politiche e ragioni civili. Napoli 1547–1557* (Naples: Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici, 2014), p. 141.
17 Salvator Rosa, *Poesie, lettere edite e inedite*, edited by Giovanni Alfredo Cesareo (Naples: Tipografia della Regia Università, 1892), p. 54; the poet's praise evokes the many-headed monster of Greek myth, a beast that, in conservative thought, characterized the plebs. See Christopher Hill's classic essay, "The Many-Headed Monster in Late Tudor and Early Stuart Political Thinking," in Charles H. Carter (ed.), *From the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation. Essays in Honor of Garrett Mattingly* (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. 296–324.
18 Peter Burke, "The Virgin of the Carmine and the Revolt of Masaniello," *Past & Present*, n. 99, (May 1983): 3–21; Villari, "Masaniello: Contemporary and Recent Interpretations," *Past & Present*, n. 108 (Aug. 1985): 117–132; Burke, "Masaniello: A Response," *Past & Present*, n. 114 (Feb.

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initial days less than full attention. After a period of research,[19] focusing especially on the manuscript chroniclers, it became clear that there was much material, in some cases previously unknown, that helped to answer some questions like: what was Masaniello's role during the revolt? Did he really become ambitious and haughty? Was the poison rumour groundless? What impact did the death of Masaniello have on the revolt itself?

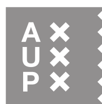
Standing back from the story, it becomes clear that Masaniello was crucial not only because he was able to involve countless men and women, but also because he helped to keep the revolt – in the first days – within the limits of an uprising that didn't question the Spanish sovereignty over the Kingdom of Naples. Reading the most detailed accounts, we understand that the young fisherman, had he followed his instincts, would swiftly have crossed the perilous red line between uprising and rebellion.[20] For example, one anonymous author knew that, early on, Masaniello had ordered the capture of the great fortress above the town, Castel Sant'Elmo, but Cardinal Ascanio Filomarino (who was archbishop of the city) convinced him to renounce the enterprise.[21] Thus, the castle, a looming symbol of Spanish power over Naples, remained in Spanish hands. Masaniello's decision appeared in line with the objectives and the approach adopted during the revolt, but, in the long run, as conflict with the Spaniards arose, it turned out to have been

1987): 197–199; already published by then was Rosario Villari, *La rivolta antispagnola a Napoli. Le origini, 1585–1647* (Bari: Laterza, 1967). In that volume, Villari likened the uprising to a peasant revolt. When the accord between the "feudality" and "royal power" broke down, he argued, a revolutionary movement arose. His reading is quite different in his *Un sogno di libertà*, pp. 118 ff. According to Elliott, what was novel in 1647–48 was the rapport between the rural and urban movements: Elliott, "Reform and Revolution in the Early Modern Mezzogiorno," *Past & Present*, n. 224 (August 2014): 283–296; on Villari's volume, see *Studi storici*: vol. 54, n. 2 (2013), with essays by John A. Marino, Giovanni Muto, and Anna Maria Rao, and vol. 61, no. 2 (2020) on Villari's works more generally.

19 I took my first university degree with a thesis on the printed historiography of the Masaniello revolt, under the direction of Giorgio Fulco, author of many essays on baroque culture, to whom I am greatly indebted.

20 For the distinction between uprising and rebellion, see Angela de Benedictis, *Tumulti. Moltitudini ribelli in età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013).

21 Anonimo Casanatense, *Narrazione della rivolta*, f. 40r ff. Castel Sant'Elmo was built at the behest of Charles V, after his 1535 visit. It was the capital's principal fortification: Carlos José Hernando Sánchez, "Una visita a castel Sant'Elmo. Famiglie, città e fortezze a Napoli tra Carlo V e Filippo II", *Annali di Storia moderna e contemporanea*, 6 (2000): 39–89, at p. 58. To take royal castles signaled rebellion: Tutini and Verde write that Masaniello defended the choice to remain faithful to the king, against fellow Neapolitans antipathetic to all Spaniards. *Racconto della sollevatione di Napoli accaduta nell'anno MDCXLVII*, edited by Pietro Messina (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1997), p. 56.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rather naïve and ill-fated.[22] In other words, Masaniello shared with the legists who counseled him – Giulio Genoino, Cardinal Ascanio Filomarino, and others – the illusion that the viceroy would act in the people's favour, and correct the abuses and skewed arrangements that had allowed the *gabelle* and exactions.[23]

The seventeenth-century sources revel Masaniello's loyalty to what he called *popolo mio* (my people), his determination to die for the fatherland, and to see it freed of the *gabelle* that he himself had suffered under since he was a lad. We can discern there, too, his ability to convince even his more cultured audience with long speeches adorned with fragments from other discourses (evidence that he himself was a good listener). In other words, he knew well how to tune in with an interlocutor wiser than him and how to scant his secondary aims for his main goal: to free the city of the *gabelle* and to let the people enjoy the fruits that his fatherland offered so abundantly.[24]

22 After the first armed clashes between Neapolitans and Spaniards, the *capitoli* were rewritten and presented to the viceroy on 7 September; among other things, the people asked to take over Sant'Elmo (condition IX), but for obvious reasons the viceroy would not concede: Agostino Nicolai, *Historia o vero Narrazione Giornale dell'Ultime Rivoluzioni della Città e Regno di Napoli, scritta e data in luce da Don A. N., consigliere di Stato del Ser.mo Sign.re Duca di Lorena, e suo Agente in Corte Cattolica* (*dedicata a don Giovanni d'Austria*) (Amsterdam: Jodoco Pluymer, 1660), p. 187; on this and other chroniclers, see Elias de Tehada y Gabriella Percopo, *Nápoles hispánico*, tomo V, *Las españas rotas*, 1621–1665 (Sevilla: Ediciones Montejurra, 1964), p. 294; Giuseppe Galasso, *Napoli spagnola dopo Masaniello* (Florence: Sansoni, 1982), vol. II, pp. 94 ff.; Aurelio Musi, *La rivolta del 1647–48*, in *Il Regno di Napoli nell'età di Filippo IV* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2014).

23 A companion of Masaniello, Mercurio Cimmino, advised taking the castles: Tutini-Verde, *Racconto della sollevatione*, pp. 29, 60; Genoino's voice, however, was louder against taking the Sant'Elmo. On the anti-Spanish Tutini, closer to the republicans Antonio Basso and Vincenzo d'Andrea, see among recent writings: Hugon, *Naples insurgée*, pp. 286 ff. (about Tutini and Fuidoro); Silvana D'Alessio: "Tutini, Camillo," *DBI*, vol. 97 (2020); Laura Giuliano's introduction in Tutini, *De' pittori, scultori, architetti, miniatori et ricamatori napolitani e regnicoli*, edited by Giuliano, presentation by Francesco Caglioti (Matera: Edizioni Giannatelli, 2021).

24 The term *patria* was used by both Masaniello and the plebs; see e.g. Giraffi, *Le rivolutioni*, p. 20. There, Masaniello affirms that there is no more glorious and noble action than to honour the *patria*. Indeed, the plebs themselves used the term *traditori della patria* for those who invested their money to skim income from the *gabelle* (p. 70). For the term's recurrence during the revolt in political writings, see Villari, *Per il re o per la patria*; Aurelio Musi, "'Non pigra quies'. Il linguaggio politico degli Accademci Oziosi e la rivolta napoletana del 1647–48," in *'Italia dei Viceré. Integrazione e resistenza nel sistema imperiale spagnolo* (Salerno: Avagliano, 2000), pp. 129–147; there is a useful survey on Neapolitan literature from Pontano to the authors of the *Manifesto* in Giovanni Muto, "Fedeltà e patria nel lessico politico napoletano della prima età moderna," in *Storia sociale e politica. Omaggio a Rosario Villari*, edited by Alberto Merola, Giovanni Muto, Elena Valeri, and Maria Antonietta Visceglia (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2007), pp. 495–522. If, indeed, the people stressed its own fidelity, it is very interesting that Masaniello himself had begun to speak of the necessity of defending the *patria* from tyrants.

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The contemporary sources, especially the handwritten ones, help revise the version of the facts imposed after Masaniello's death, which held him largely responsible for his own demise. This version, propagated by Giraffi, has been repeated over and over by many historians, until not long ago. Giraffi writes:

> If *Masaniello* that Saturday on which a *Te Deum* was sung in the Cathedrall Church, had renounc'd all his usurp'd authority and power into the hands of the Viceroy, and return'd, as he sayed and sware he wold, to his former vocation of selling fish, he had deserv'd that the Neapolitan people should have erected him Colosso's, and statues of gold, to the eternall memory of his magnanimous undertakings, brought to such a marvellous perfection: but a boundless ambition did cast such a mist before his eyes, that breaking the reines of reason, upon the Lords Day it self his brain began to turn, doing so many acts of foolishnesse and cruelty [...].[25]

Thanks to another unprinted source, we know that, after the oath ceremony at the cathedral, Masaniello assumed the role of "war captain and general of all the army."[26] Surely, it would have worked out better, especially for him, if Masaniello had not accepted any role from the viceroy, but his "yes" on that occasion can be viewed from the perspective that many witness suggest to us. Once assigned by the viceroy the task of seeing the *capitoli* (terms of agreement) be respected, Masaniello's advisers began to have somewhat more cordial relations with the palace. It is important to notice that Genoino was not elected President of the Camera della Sommaria (a financial organ) on the day of Masaniello's funeral, as we read, but rather earlier, on 13 July, as documents in the State Archive in Naples clearly prove.[27] That appointment, on that earlier date, signals an accord between Genoino and the viceroy, one that Masaniello almost surely knew about, and that boded ill for the revolt. Meanwhile, Genoino's role of president was an honour that put him on weak footing with the viceroy. According to Marino Verdi and Camillo Tutini, observers at the time, this job would wear him down sorely, as it

25 Howell, *An exact historie*, p. 173; discussion of resigning appears in the work of Schipa: "Tanto il Genuino quanto il cardinale vollero e ottennero da Masaniello promessa e giuramento che, a fine pienamente raggiunto, egli avrebbe fatto a tutti deporre le armi e da parte sua rassegnato al comando"; Michelangelo Schipa, "La così detta rivoluzione di Masaniello. Parte prima. L'eroe popolare (1918)," in Idem, *Studi masanielliani*, edited by Giuseppe Galasso (Naples: Società napoletana di Storia Patria, 1997): p. 412.

26 Giuseppe Pollio, *Historia del Regno di Napoli. Revolutione dell'Anno MDCXLVII insino al MDCXLIII scritta dal Reverendo D. G. P. Napoletano*, Naples, BNN, X B 7, f. 38v.

27 Villari, *Un sogno di libertà*, p. 345. For the documents in the ASN, see Chapter VII in this book.

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entailed a great mass of problems, involving twelve other presidents, one for each province of the kingdom; besides, his post would make many others jealous.[28] With the advantage of hindsight, the two chroniclers were sure that the viceroy had come out ahead. Doubtless, the people's faith in the viceroy and the breathing space he had won were precious for the Spanish front. Moreover, the strategic Sant'Elmo fortress remained in Spanish hands.[29]

This preface also allows me to make another point, in reply to a brief observation on a passage of my book made by Rosario Villari (an historian from whom all who study the revolt have learned hugely). In a footnote of his *Un sogno di libertà*, he wrote that it was unlikely that Masaniello, shortly before his death, had tried to flee to Ischia as I had written.[30] It is not a central question, but, after rereading the two main sources on this, I am pleased to confirm that this is what they suggest. Returning to one of the two sources I cited, the chronicle by Tizio della Moneca, when the author reaches the sixteenth day of the revolt, he writes of an attempt by Masaniello to take refuge in Ischia's great off-shore castle, held by the marquis d'Avalos, a noble officially faithful to the Spaniards, but thoroughly done with the viceroy's rule, as later events would show.[31] I quote here the passage from Della Moneca's account:

> On Tuesday morning, the sixteenth of the present month, Masaniello gave orders that under pain of death no person dare approach his house with arms,

28 Tutini and Verde, *Racconto della sollevatione*, p. 80.

29 In the second *capitoli* [items of accord], the people asked for the castle; the viceroy swore he would back their request with the king. And the Duke of Arcos promised a bishopric to the son of Polito. The attempt to conquer the castle came to an end. See Villari, *Un sogno di libertà*, pp. 447–448.

30 Villari, citing Capecelatro's *Diario*, writes: "Five feluccas were sent to induce the people of Ischia to revolt and to obtain from the island's governor the consignment of the fortress. The episode is interpreted by S. D'Alessio (*Masaniello*, pp. 159–160) as an attempt by Masaniello to flee, but this has no confirmation in the story or the judgment of Capecelatro," p. 625, note 123. On this point, Capecelatro writes: "Among these follies of his, he mixed in a work worthy of the greatest esteem, if he had succeeded, for he sent five feluccas with forty musketeers and his nephew to the island of Ischia, to ask Giovanni Battaglino, who governed it for the Marquise of Pescara, to send him the keys of that very strong castle." *Diario di F.C. contenente la storia delle cose avvenute nel Reame di Napoli negli anni 1647–1650*, edited by Angelo Granito (Naples: Stabilimento tipografico di Gaetano Nobile, 1850), vol. I, pp. 91–92, this passage suggests that Masaniello tried to seize the powerful Ischian fortress, which belonged to the Avalos family. Andrea d'Avalos, Prince of Montesarchio, was very probably esteemed by Masaniello, who mentioned him as possible head of the grain supply (*grassiere*).

31 During the revolt, the prince offered his fealty to the Duke of Guise; after having cooperated with the Spaniards, he conspired against viceroy Oñate, and so was taken to Spain and not freed until 1652: see Michelangelo Schipa, "La congiura del principe di Montesarchio (1648)," in *Idem*, *Studi masanielliani*, p. 537; Maria Sirago, "Andrea d'Avalos, Principe di Montesarchio, generale dell'«armata del mar Oceano» (1613–1709)," *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, CXXV, 2007: 173–209.

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> and out of fear posted guards around, as far out as one can throw a stone, so that no person went through. Meanwhile, in the market one saw few people, and all was very quiet. After that the said Masaniello sent six well-armed feluccas [light sailing ships] from the Molo Piccolo to carry a message to Giovanni Battaglino, governor of the island (in place of his excellency the marquis del Vasto, its governor in the name of His Majesty), asking him to give him [Masaniello] the keys of the fortress, and the royal castle, and he wanted to station as a guard there the people [of Naples]. He was designing to make that place a refuge for his person. Battaglino, seeing so great a piece of mischief, and, even more, because that castle was one of the world's great fortresses, standing on a very high cliff of naked rock, separated from the larger island by more than a musket shot, and you walk there by way of a little bridge [a low causeway] ten palms wide, and when there is bad weather the water goes over the top of that bridge, so that on account of its strength it withstood a two year siege by Pasha Barbarossa [...].[32]

As we see here, Della Moneca writes of an attempt by Masaniello to conquer the castle as "a refuge for his person." The passage confirms both his fear of death and his lucidity at the time.

I would like to return for a moment to the question of madness. As readers will see, I have chosen to give voice to a variety of sources to show how the theory of a "provoked" or artificially induced madness is far from frivolous or groundless, as suggested by a number of writings, from Schipa to today.[33] To take such a position would require us to ignore several seventeenth-century records. We would be dismissing a series of telling clues and attestations that we find especially in the manuscript chronicles, among them that of Giuseppe Pollio, an eyewitness, who wrote for posterity a dense *Historia del Regno di Napoli*:

> The said Tommaso Aniello seemed possessed by demons, so great were the pains in his body on account of the drink he had received, so that

32 Tizio della Moneca, *Istoria delle revoluzioni di Napoli dell'anno 1647 del D. T. della M.*, SNSP XXVII C II, f. 62r.

33 For scholarly doubts regarding the alleged poisoning: Schipa, *Studi masanielliani*, p. 417: "Ripensando ora ai casi menzionati, quanta fede meriteranno le dicerie, propalate poi, circa la responsabilità del viceré nella demenza del Capitan generale? Che appunto quella sera di sabato venisse preparata la 'bevanda per farlo impazzire'?"; according to Villari, for example, the rumour of Masaniello's madness was an expedient to facilitate the decision to eliminate him: Villari, "Masaniello. Interpretazioni contemporanee e recenti," in Villari, *Elogio della dissimulazione*, p. 84; see also his *Un sogno di libertà*, p. 341: "La pazzia di Masaniello fu, in sostanza, la sua insubordinazione [...]."

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> he had no rest day and night, so that many persons of judgement were forced to take the said Tommaso Aniello and with kind words they led him upstairs in his house. All told, those who led him had more tears in their eyes, than pleasure.[34]

Another very clear testimony comes from an anonymous author:

> On that Monday of the month of July, Masaniello said that he wanted to take all the silver goods of the churches, and he began to act in a delirious fashion, so that the acted like a madman, as he was in fact going off his head, or perhaps because he was not eating, or because he was not sleeping, or because he had picked up some smell, or eaten or drunks something that made him mad, and he was always drinking, and he threw himself into the fountain that is at the market, and said that he felt a great burning in his stomach.[35]

There is a not banal clue in a poem:

> Tanto fé, tanto oprò, che come volle
> L'empio Marran, fè il mio Tomaso folle
> E fu da congiurati l'infelice
> Nella Chiesa Real del Carmin morto.[36]
>
> He did what he could, and saw to it, as he desired,
> that wicked Spaniard, he made my Tommaso mad,
> And, the unlucky fellow by the conspirators,
> in the royal Carmine church, was killed.

A reader of the sources could learn more about this matter from their pages relating to Sunday, 14 July. Meanwhile it is worth to keep in mind that, in those days, the use of opium or other drugs was common, whether to eliminate an enemy or political foe[37] or to capture someone to shake him

34 Pollio, *Historia del Regno di Napoli*, f. 11v.

35 Anonimo, *Relatione della sollevatione della città di Napoli dell'anno 1647*, in BAV, Misc. Arm. III 2, ff. 355r–362v: 359r.

36 *Partenope offesa. Racconto delli pietosi successi di Napoli composta da C.L. Anne*, with a dedication to Gennaro Annese, Napoli, Biblioteca dei Girolamini, ms. 38.3.13 f. *Marrano* was pejorative slang for Spaniard. It implied that Spaniards were all Crypto-Jews.

37 Pau Claris, the famous leader of the Catalan revolt (Dec. 1640) was very probably poisoned (he died in February 1641); Parker, *Global Crisis*, p. 746: Alessandro Pastore, *Veleno. Credenze,*

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down for news.[38] Obviously, whoever commissioned or committed such a deed took pains to see that no one told. Thus, it is no accident that, on this matter, there is a notable difference between the first printed accounts and those manuscripts. The printed accounts by Giraffi and Gabriele Tontoli cast their lot with the natural madness hypothesis, as they are mindful that Masaniello almost never ate and that he was flagging sorely from excessive fatigue (true indeed, but this does not exclude the use of compounds that fog the mind). Moreover, both writers evoke exemplary historic personages who fell for a variery of reasons, from pride to madness.[39]

The present English volume, in observance of an agreement with the Italian publisher, is quite faithful to the Italian version of 2007, but it has been brought up to date in some notes and a few passages in the text. However, I would like to take advantage of this foreword to cite one unpublished source that I have recently consulted. It was written by a foreigner, a monk, who, while living in the convent of the Carmine, at the market, managed to send his reader an account of the revolt's first days.[40] His point of view is marked by fear of the people in arms, and by evident antipathy for the young man who had unexpectedly taken charge and was firing off orders about everything and impeding normal life. His report is nevertheless packed with evidence about the climate of those first days, both inside and outside the convent; it helps us to picture certain scenes. For instance, the monk describes Masaniello's influence over "all the people":

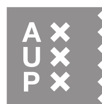
> In the opinion of all the people, the fellow was thought a monster of nature, a miracle of heaven. They called him "the man of God, the heavenly oracle, a sent messenger, an angel in the flesh." His speech was heeded as if divine. He gave orders in such a way that men thought his commands to be from heaven. His words seemed judgments; nobody could understand

crimini, saperi nell'Italia moderna (Bologna: il Mulino, 2010), with various examples of poisoners from every social class from the lowest to the princes, both in Italy and elsewhere.

38 The nunzio Spinola tells us that a man was caught in Rome, induced to drink opium, and then brought to Naples for grilling, because the viceroy wanted information about a conspiracy: letter of 18 March 1656, in Venice, ASV, Segreteria di Stato, Napoli, vol. 56, f. 39r.

39 Giraffi gathers together assorted personages, from Alexander the Great to Caesar, infected with madness and tyranny: *Le rivolutioni*, p. 177 ff.; Gabriele Tontoli, *Il Mas'Aniello, overo Discorsi narrativi la sollevazione di Napoli* (Naples: R. Mollo, 1648), pp. 48 ff., summons, among others, Tarquin the Proud; such talk was common in an age when "novelty" carried a stigma. See Rosario Villari, *The Rebel* in *Baroque Personae*, edited by Rosario Villari, translated by Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago, IL and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 100–125.

40 BNF, Paris, Fond Dupuy, ms. 674: *Relation des mouvemens de Naples èn annes 1647–1648*, f. 13v.



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> how a man so lowly, so devoid of powers, could do or say so much. In the end they found a horse, and when he mounted he seemed a sack with clothes on, an ape on horseback [...]."

A little further on, the monk suggests that Masaniello learned by night what he had to say by day. And he adds some important details about the rebel's devotion to the Virgin of the Carmine: "he was asked what had moved him to making this rising. He answered (I do not know if by chance, or by guile, or even for the truth) that he had been inspired by the Madonna of the Carmine and by the Carmelite saints." The monk tells us that he had probably been inspired by a painting in their "dormitory, where there is portrayed the Madonna of the Carmine, with our saints, male and female, so it is a likely thing that the representation of those things made him answer in that fashion." The Carmelite then turns his mind to the church of the Carmine, giving a clear image of how it had become a refuge and discussion place for thousands of men and women. On the third day, it was the destination for the standard-bearers (*alfieri*) of the People, who came seeking the Virgin's protection. "They entered on their knees and commended themselves and their [military] companies." The monastery seemed to be like the "synagogue of Jerusalem." "All the bees in Hybla [a Sicilian place famed in Antiquity for honey] would not have made so great a buzz. It was all full of armed men, who were not part of the companies."[41] On the day of the armed plot to kill Masaniello (Tuesday, Day 9), the monk was in the convent. He thus describes in great detail the panic that followed the gunshots, the wounding, and the climate of fear that infected him, as it did everyone.[42] He was in the church when shots rang out, and witnessed a scene that was seen by other writers too, but he made sure to recount it. It is one of the very rare scenes where Masaniello's mother surfaces. In the moments right after the plot, Masaniello, afraid, asked for his mother's blessing.

> Prostrate on the ground, with tears in his eyes, he asked for the maternal blessing; the mother was crying, Masaniello was crying and they made a concert of sobs. In the end the lord cardinal ordered the mother to give the benediction. Masaniello left. The cardinal was very affectionate with the mother. He went up into the pulpit, and issued a decree to the market,

41 Ibid., f. 6v. The monk's displeasure at having to put up with the turmoil is clear; it was all at the desire of "signor Masaniello." Note that the title "signor," attached to Masaniello, signalled an exceptional event. As for the bees, Hybla, in Sicily, was famous in Antiquity and in Greek bucolic poetry for its honey.

42 Ibid., f. 10r.

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> that no one should go into the church armed, under pain of decapitation. It was not a decree, but a holy precept, because the precepts of God are not so promptly observed.[43]

Soon thereafter, Masaniello was reconciled with the cardinal (he first thought him an accomplice of the bandits who had fired at him), and thanked him for what he had done for the people. Calling him "devoted to the people," Masaniello then had the viceroy acclaimed, with "express demonstration of fidelity towards the crown of the king of Spain, and he also gave an order to the people, that all the houses of the nobles should put before their doors the arms of the king and of the People, under pain of being burned." So, the monk helps us see the fragility of Masaniello the hero, and to grasp the mix of courage, fear, desperation, search for comfort, and doubt that made him stay on as Capitan Generale after the attempt on his life, despite the plots and the ambiguous conduct of some men he saw as models, like the cardinal.

Other details in this source prove how elaborate the viceroy's strategy was, which aimed to isolate Masaniello and crack the popular front. It helps to prove that from the Monday on, people began to speak of "crazy" Masaniello. That was the day after, as all records recount, he stopped at the viceroy's palace, and then went, in the viceroy's gondola, to the Posillipo shore with men from his entourage. On the Monday, writes the monk, "they began to discover that Masaniello was a madman" because, in arrogant fashion, he commanded many persons living in the Lavinaio district to leave their houses, so that he could demolish them to erect a palace for himself. He had a knife in his hand, with which he threatened anyone who was slow to move away or who approached him. That evening, the viceroy's gondola came to fetch him. It arrived at the shore by the Carmine, so that the people, already struck by Masaniello's violent and bizarre behaviour, saw it. In the eyes of the "barefoot folk," disenchanted and habituated to betrayals, that gondola signalled an unpardonable change in status. "That evening, [Masaniello] went out for pleasure in the viceroy's felucca, which came to fetch him at the port at the feet of our convent." The monk goes on: Masaniello stepped into the sea with his shoes on. To the barefoot poor, those shoes, too, must have seemed like a sign of a blameworthy change.

> He wanted to walk in the water with his shoes on, and to be carried across in people's arms. He stripped naked, and had a good swim. Then, he entered the gondola and went for a ride, and when he returned, he

43 Ibid., ff. 9v–10r.

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> likewise desired to descend on his own from the felucca, and to walk in the water with his shoes on, nor did he wish to be carried in the sedan chairs that had been readied, and he went, acting crazy, down the streets.

With such behaviour, the viceroy and the leaders of the people could move against him.

Other interesting statements, towards the end of the monk's account, after Masaniello's funeral, teach us more than we once knew about the viceroy's stance. After taking possession of the goods found in Masaniello's house, the viceroy, frightened and also keen to keep the plebs on side, began to call himself "*capo del popolo*" and to exercise rough justice in the harsh fashion of his late enemy. He thus commanded that whoever spoke against the *capitoli*, the recent settlement, or against the current rising, should be arrested "by the people itself, and brought to him, giving an excellent reward to the person who brought him, if on any day from now on a person is caught," writes the monk, "and sometimes three, or four are hanged, and they cut off their heads, and they send them to the galleys, and now one runs into a goodly number." Masaniello, now dead, had left a model, a dress to put on, or a spirit to appropriate. The monk adds, "among the others, one day an old man mounted a horse with sword in hand, persuading the people to rise, and to follow him, for he said that he had inherited the spirit of Masaniello; he was arrested and taken to the viceroy, to receive the punishment like the others; and another was beheaded, a man who wanted to take our Madonna, the crucifix, and then he tried to persuade the people to set fire to the monastery."

It is no accident that the terms *Capopopolo* and Masaniello were interchangeable. As late as 1658, a junta of rebels called its leaders "Masanielli."[44] When we study the history of the myth, we encounter as many attempts to evoke the old *Capopopolo* as we do condemnations of him, on the grounds that he had been a bad or stupid councillor.

Only the seventeenth-century accounts, cited in the first half of this book, can bring us close to the true Tommaso Aniello and perhaps the reader will come to appreciate Tutini and Verde's comment: "those of the people's party should have taken care of Masaniello, to guard him, and protect him, and not allow him to traffic with the Spaniards, and when they sent him that bouquet of flowers, not allow him to sniff it, when they invited him to take his ease at Posillipo, not to let him go [...]."

44 Pietro Messina, Introduction in Tutini-Verde, *Il Racconto della sollevatione*, p. xxvii. On the more recent uses of the term "masaniello" in the sense of a generic rebel, see Aurelio Musi, *Masaniello. Il masaniellismo e la degradazione di un mito* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2019).

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The two authors say a thing we do not expect when one speaks of heroes: “to protect him.”[45]

*

And now, a few words to thank my new “benefactors”: above all Samuel Kline Cohn, with whom I share interests both in popular revolts and in epidemics. Without his invitation to propose my book to Amsterdam University Press and his kind and generous support, this English edition never would have come about. I am very grateful to Erika Gaffney for her intelligent, sensitive mediation with the publishing house and her constant attention in my regard. I thank the publishing house for the permission to publish this translation and I thank Thomas Cohen for the ever-youthful enthusiasm that he brought both to my invitation to translate this volume and to our entire interaction. Sometimes life delivers more than we expect of it, as certainly it did this time. Tom, a veteran historian of sixteenth-century Italy, believed deeply in the project and translated in lively fashion even the prickliest Neapolitan words and expressions.

One aspiration from which this translation was conceived was to contribute to a larger cause.[46]

45 Obviously, when one tries to define a hero, one never bring up his fragility. One stresses his exceptional virtues, even superhuman, thanks to God (for some seventeenth-century writers): the hero is “a person called forth by God and one who possesses extraordinary gifts exceeding the common condition of men. He accomplishes miraculous deeds that other mortals cannot imitate, deeds which produce the most triumphant success”: Matthiae Christianus and Georgius Pfankuch, “De Virtute Heroica,” in *Collegium ethicum III* [...] (Gießen: Kaspar Chemlinus, 1613), pp. 193–224, quoted and translated by Ronald G. Asch, in “The Hero in the Early Modern Period and Beyond: An Elusive Cultural Construct and Indispensable Focus of Social Identity?,” *Helden, heroes, héros.* Special Issue I, 2014: DOI: 10.6094/helden.heros.heros./2014/QM, pp. 5–14.
46 The larger cause is, of course, the increase of the general knowledge of the troubled history of Naples in the wake of many works, among them: Tommaso Astarita, *Between Salt Water and Holy Water: A History of Southern Italy* (London: W.W. Norton, 2005); the essays in *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society, and Religion 1500–1700*, edited by Thomas Dandelet and John Marino (Leiden: Brill, 2006); John Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan: Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Astarita (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*; Melissa Calaresu and Helen Hills (eds.), *New approaches to Naples c. 1500–c.1800: The Power of Place* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013) and also *A Companion to Early Modern Naples*; Gabriel Guarino, *Representing the King’s Splendour: Communication and Reception of Symbolic Forms of Power in Viceregal Naples* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010); Alain Hugon, *Naples insurgée*; Céline Dauverd, *Church and State in Spanish Italy: Rituals and Legitimacy in the Kingdom of Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 185–217.

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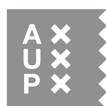
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Premise

If ever an event in the history of Napes, before the revolution of 1799, left a resounding echo, it is the so-called Revolt of Masaniello, which began on 7 July 1647, and ended with the city's surrender to the Spaniards on 6 April 1648. The revolt at once seemed exceptional. In a matter of days, Masaniello, a young man born in Naples, dressed as a sailor – red cloth hat, white loose leggings – became "head" of the entire city, so populous a place that it ranked alongside London or Paris. The written words of witnesses show their astonishment at the absolute obedience this young man commanded. The Venetian resident (the proper title for ambassadors not to a sovereign, but to a mere viceroy) laid it all out plainly: on 10 July, the people's head was

> a young fisherman, about 24 years old, whom, though he went barefoot, everybody in like fashion obeyed, named Tommaso Aniello d'Amalfi [...] whatever occurred to him, he issued as an order, and anyone who disobeyed he decapitated at once, with no recourse, having, to secure himself from traps, commanded upon pain of death that no one dare wear a cape, and that at night everyone should keep a light burning at the windows.[1]

There is now a great body of scholarly literature about the revolt. It runs from the works of Michelangelo Schipa, *La cosi detta rivoluzione di Masaniello* and *La mente di Masaniello*, dating from 1913 and 1918, to those by Rosario Villari on the origins of the event, on its assorted moments, and on the writings that arose throughout its course: his *La rivolta antispagnola a Napoli. Le origini 1585–1647* and *Per il re per la patria*, to name but two. There is the volume by Aurelio Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello nella scena politica barocca* (1989) and his many essays. There are also the Masaniello pages of Franco Benigno in *Specchi della rivoluzione* (1994), and, finally, there is Giuseppe Galasso's reconstruction of the entire revolt, in the volume of the *Storia d'Italia* devoted entirely to the Kingdom of Naples.[2]

1 *La rivoluzione di Masaniello vista dal residente veneto a Napoli*, edited by Antonio Capograssi, in *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, n.s., XXIII (1952): 167–235. The Venetian resident was Andrea Rosso.

2 Schipa, "La mente di Masaniello e la cosiddetta rivoluzione di Masaniello," in *idem*, *Studi masanielliani*, pp. 319–324; Rosario Villari, *La rivolta antispagnola a Napoli. Le origini 1585–1647* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1994); Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello*; Vittorio Dini, *Masaniello.*

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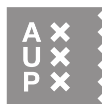
What has so far been lacking, however, is a study of Masaniello that casts light on who this man was – a figure certainly among the most famous of Neapolitans – what his role was in those July days, how his power grew from day to day to make him "king" of the city, and how, soon after, he lost first his reputation and then his very life? The historian Michelangelo Schipa attended less to Masaniello than he did to the man who seemed to be his guiding mind, the octogenerian *dottore* of law, Giulio Genoino. To Schipa, Masaniello was a mere tool in Genoino's hands. From the days when he was chosen *Eletto del Popolo* (representative of the Popolo), under Viceroy Osuna (1616–1620), Genoino long intended to effect reform that would give the people the same power as the nobles. He believed that he could use the youngster to bring about this design, at a moment when discontent regarding the many *gabelle* (excise taxes) was at its peak. According to Schipa, rather than attend to Masaniello, one should focus on the *dottore*: the "Revolt of Masaniello" was in reality the revolt of Genoino. According to Musi, however, Schipa's vision overlooks things that surface in contemporary records. It fails to recognize the crucial role the young man from Lavinaio played in those few days; Masaniello drew together diverse strata of the Neapolitan plebs, guaranteeing the revolt's success. Musi cites a passage from an acute observer:

> At this point there appeared a lowly fishmonger who not only commanded a numerous body of people of the sort from Naples, and the adjacent *casali* [districts], but also ruled with prudence (and he was just a youngster), and discoursed with acuity and ingenuity [...] and the soldiers were amazed to see that a man who had never handled arms, or seen a field or a fortress, could hold forth and lay out trenches, and defence works, and sentinels and patrols.[3]

L'eroe e il mito (Rome: Newton Compton, 1995); Giuseppe Galasso, "Il Regno di Napoli. Il Mezzogiorno spagnolo e austriaco (1622–1734)," in *Storia d'Italia* vol. XV (Turin: UTET, 2006), tome 3, pp. 247–552, ch. VIII–XV; now the historiography is much wider. Just a few titles: Francesco Benigno, *Mirrors of Revolution: Conflict and Political Identity in Early Modern Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010); Alain Hugon, *Naples insurgée,* and the Spanish edition: *La insurrección de Nápoles, 1647–1648. La construcción del acontecimiento* (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 2014); Villari, *Un sogno di libertà*. I refer to other works by these same authors and by others on subsequent pages.

3 Maiolino Bisaccioni, *Historia delle guerre civili* (Venice: F. Storti, 1655), p. 121.



The young man proved capable of a certain autonomy: besides the abilities cited from Bisaccioni, he could also handle the unexpected.[4]

Other scholars, too, have been baffled by Schipa's exposition of the revolt and his treatment of the *Capopopolo*. That said, they do approve of his analysis of the cultural background to the uprising. Vittorio Dini writes of Schipa: "he speaks of Genoino as 'the mind of Masaniello,' but this is an exaggeration, over-rating Genoino's role and under-rating Masaniello's."[5]

The present book is an historical biography, using both published and unpublished sources.[6] My research has turned up two sources never before cited: the first, the more interesting, is an account of the revolt down to April 1648. It survives as a single copy, which I consulted at the Casanatense Library in Rome. It is in rather good condition, and seems to be a transcription of a lost original.[7] Very likely in the author's own hand, the manuscript lacks a first page; thus we have no title or author's signature or name. In its first pages, the author does depict himself in passing. It was, he says, just one day after the revolt's outbreak. The viceroy summoned him, through a knight, a friend of his who was in prison, whose name he fails to furnish, telling him to go to Castel Nuovo, the seat of viceregal rule. He writes: "That morning, when I was called to Castel Nuovo by a knight, my friend, who was jailed on the orders of His Excellency, I went to the castle, at the moment when His Excellency went out onto the stage with all the nobility, the Council of State, and the Collateral Council."[8] This passage, and other information within the story, suggest that the author was close to the viceroy and his ministers. Still, it is unclear to whom he was writing; whoever this reader is, the author uses the familiar *tu* pronoun, a sign of social equality:

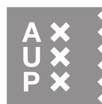
4 An example of Masaniello's confronting the unexpected: in those days, "he circulates among the shops and sets the prices of foods," Musi, *La rivolta di Masaniello*, pp. 117–118.

5 Dini, *Masaniello*, p. 25.

6 See also the excellent work of Bartolommeo Capasso, *La piazza del mercato di Napoli e la casa di Masaniello* (1868) and *La casa e la famiglia di Masaniello, ricordi della storia e della vita napoletana nel secolo XVII* (1893), now republished in Capasso, *Masaniello. La sua vita la sua rivoluzione*, edited by Luca Torre (Naples: Torre, 1993), pp. 19–59, 64–136. As for the biographies in circulation, I return to them below. They are rich in interesting passages, but also keen to round out the myth, the story of which I will be presenting here.

7 Catalogued as: Anonymous, *Narrazione della rivolta*. The chronicle, which is missing its first page, is an account of the revolt. In the pages devoted to the events from August onwards, it is much more passionate. The author becomes partial, very critical of the people, and invites them to withdraw, in light of the character of the Spaniards, who are incapable of pardoning. Down to 18 April (to folio 412r), the chronicle is continuous. There follows a letter to Don Juan de Austria and other texts, to folio 491.

8 Ibid., f. 22v.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"Masaniello sent Honofrio Cafiero, an arrogant roughneck from Santa Lucia, who, when he has time, will explain his [Cafiero's] nature to you [a te]."[9]

What makes this source so special is its extraordinary richness of information about Masaniello. Clearly, the author swiftly became aware of the young man's determination and chose to track him and gather what news he could about him. His information is generally reliable; not only do we sometimes find confirmation of things we know, but it also targeted a reader who seemed to wish to learn exactly what was happening. The anonymous author had his own position, of course, but he did not write to propound his own reading of those July days. Clearly, he was aware both of the revolt's legitimacy and of the Spaniards' superiority and their determination to keep hold of the kingdom.

The initial pages of the account reveal that it was clear to the anonymous writer that the people were in no state to suffer more burdens. The citizens, he writes, had no

> place of recourse, given that their cries were not heard, nor were their tears beheld by anyone [...] Under so great a weight, the most faithful people of Naples, almost Atlas, who bore the upon its shoulders a world of *gabelle,* and the weight of new impositions about to fall on it, cast its lot with fate, which had brought it so low, but still, faithful as it was to its king, believing that what it was suffering was necessary for the maintenance of the kingdoms of his Catholic Majesty, inclined its head, and let itself be burdened in accordance with the judgment, and tyranny, of him who ruled it.

Nor does the author mince words about those persons responsible for the *gabelle*, and in particular about those who had introduced the last most detested tax on fruit. At the onset, they had fooled the people, saying that the viceroy would abolish the *gabelle*, which he did, but only just before the rising. Their goal, writes the Casanatense Anonymous (we label him this way, to distinguish him from the many other anonymous authors), was "to trick them, to suck their blood from their hearts, as their veins did not suffice."[10] These words, which distance the victims, suggest that the writer was by origin not a fellow Neapolitan, but a Roman; further research on the manuscript might support this hunch.

9 Ibid., f. 41r.
10 Ibid., f. 6v.

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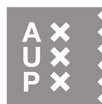
Meanwhile, as we shall soon see, thanks to this account we know more about Masaniello's actions in the revolt's first days. The leadership of the young man from the Mercato was acclaimed after the third day, the morning after a conspiracy failed to harm him. It was a coup not only by the nobles, but also by some leaders of the *popolo.* From the same source, we also learn useful new things about Masaniello's past and about his family, which was very poor and distressed (his mother worked as a prostitute).

According to the manuscript's author, Genoino still played an important role. On the first day of the revolt, the plebeians had demanded the "privilege" of "Cola Quinto" (Carlo Quinto, Emperor Charles V). They meant the charter that conceded to the people the same political power as the nobles: if they had not learned from Genoino, how could the plebeians know such things? Nevertheless, Casanatense Anonymous, writing in great detail, asserts that Masaniello was already determined to take part on his own account and that he had two basic goals: the abolition of the *gabelle* and, when the revolt ended, a general pardon. He therefore listened to the legal *dottori*, not solely to Genoino, and, with them, he drafted demands to put before the viceroy, on matters that ample public backing had consigned to his hands. Masaniello may have had a certain respect for Charles V; very likely he shared a mythic-holy vision of the king, fostered by the Spaniards.[11] But Genoino, the author implies, was no Spanish loyalist. To put it better, on the one hand, the *dottore* acted as if he was faithful; on the other, he hoped that Naples, like Catalonia, which was also rebelling, might free itself from Spain.[12] Thus, Masaniello was very dependent on what the sly *dottore* suggested,

11 For the divinity of the monarchy, see John H. Elliott, "Poder y propaganda en la España del Felipe IV," in *Homaje a José Antonio Maravall*, edited by María del Carmen Iglesias, Carlos Moya Valgañón, and Luis Rodríguez Zúñiga (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, vol. III, 1985), pp. 15–42; within the monarchy, there was continual allusion to the sanctity of the king; for other countries, the king of Spain was always the "más católico de los reyes"; on the inside, this fostered cohesion. Thus, when the revolt broke out, a ready mechanism clicked into place: "the image of a supremely just king, remote but always accessible when needed, adjusts an escape valve in societies that are subject to social and economic exploitation, or to administrative abuses. When the rebels shouted 'via el rey y muera el mal gobierno,' as they did in Catalonia and in Spanish Italy in the 1640s, the security mechanism functioned as was intended."

12 In many places, the author suggests that Genoino disliked the Spaniards: Casanatense Anonymous, *Narrazione della rivolta*, f. 65r, where he asserts that the "impertinence" of the demands put to the viceroy, after the first days of the revolt, was due to the *dottore*, "nemico dei cavalieri e degli Spagnoli." The author appears to dislike the *dottore* strongly. Still, it is likely that Genoino tried to aim for reform while keeping a rapport with Madrid, but he was also hostile to the Spaniards, given his clear picture of how the *gabelle* were brought in, and also his own history of persecution, as we shall soon show.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and many agreed with him. Later in this book I will rely on other pages of this work so useful for my reconstruction.

The other source never before cited is a *Vita di Masaniello*, also from the seventeenth century, currently held at the Vatican Library.[13] The author seems to have written for a broader audience than that of the Casanatense author: he, too, offers important information, some of it novel. He was the first to recount the sailor's early life: he gathered information and tried to reconstruct the man's past. According to him, Masaniello had served the Duke of Maddaloni and then, dismissed by the duke, had gone to serve a fishmonger "named Mattia Catania, with whom he remained for a long time, and gained very little, except the ability to distinguish among the fish and learn their various names." What is most interesting is what he says about Masaniello's histrionic nature. True, he seems here to revert to the stereotype of the dramatic Neapolitan, yet this portrait shares traits with other accounts: he was a fellow who made his way by knowing how to please whomever he chanced to meet: "his nature was agreeable, so that many wanted him present when talk was afoot, in conversations, in song, and in playing a certain *cetra* [a kind of mandolin], which he had learned to do in the house of his master, so that, when he was cheerful, he drew a goodly crowd."[14]

The *Vita di Masaniello* is also a single copy, part of a series, in three volumes of papers on the revolt in the Vatican Library series *Urbinatenses Latini.* The document testifies to the great interest the event aroused, and to the swift spread of the desire to know about it. In the other two volumes of this collection appear accounts of the executions under Masaniello's rule, and of events of the time, both known and novel.[15] The handwriting in the three volumes seems consistent throughout, but the author's identity and intentions remain an open question.[16]

13 Anon., *Vita di Masaniello cioè sue fortune nella Ribellione suo Comando, honori e morte dal Sig. D. Capiciolatro nel tempo istesso di detta Ribellione divisa in quatordeci giornate undici vivente detto Massaniello, e 3 doppo la morte di esso, con la morte del Abbate Gio. Antonio Grassi uno de Congiurati in detta morte al detto Masaniello*, Vatican City, BAV, Urb. Lat. 1746, ff. 328 (T. I).

14 Ibid., f. 2r.

15 Aside from the *Vita di Masaniello*, the volumes are: *Tomo II, Di Relationi diverse di Giustitie fatte in Napoli molte delle quali seguite in tempo di Massaniello et altre doppo la Ribellione di alcuni Capi di essa*, Vatican City, BAV, Urb. Lat. 1747, ff. 409, and *Tomo III. Delle Revolutioni di Napoli cioè la congiura di Giovannello, Simon Valenzo Peroni, e Filippo Colonna e sue morti*, Vatican City, BAV, Urb. Lat. 1748, ff. 202.

16 What makes the identity of the author more complex, but also more interesting, is that in the second volume of the series, in the margin of a story of the death of "Pellegrino di Gio. Angelo," appear a few words saying that it is by Alessandro Giraffi (f. 146r), the writer of the first

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To reconstruct the Masaniello affair, the present book also pays particular attention to some other sources that are already known but little used or utterly neglected: those by Giuseppe Pollio, a cleric of the time, by the *dottore* Tizio Della Moneca, and by the deeply pious *dottore* Tarquinio Simonetta, among others.[17] It has relied heavily on such sources and inserted passages that bring to light events and actions by Masaniello, to reanimate those July days, among the most intense ever in the history of Naples.

We must stress how dramatic the whole event was.[18] Masaniello fell victim to a well-contrived plot: which would cost him first his credibility and then his life. The biography presented here recounts this history and tells a deeply tragic tale: it was precisely when Masaniello, grateful to the viceroy for the gracious concessions granted under pressures he had brought to bear, started to act like his most devoted subject, that the "fall," which would lead him to his death, began.

Our story does not end with that event, or with the majestic, thronged funeral that followed. The book has two parts: the first reconstructs those days of revolt where Masaniello played a role; the second explores the basic texts that reoffered and relayed the image of the *Capopopolo*, down to recent years. Readers will see Masaniello rewritten down the centuries, depending on the goals and cultural backgrounds of the authors. "Masaniello as hero" was primarily a theme in just one season, the Risorgimento. Then, he served to bolster a search by many hands for figures to propose to the people of Naples, to stir them to free themselves from foreign rule. Other scholars have also followed this route, but we pushed further, to discover that Masaniello often played an important role in the history of Naples, and it is for this reason that he has been – and still is – viewed as part of the city's identity.

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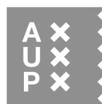
printed account of the revolt, who was certainly very close to Cardinal Filomarino: "Un'esemplare cronologia. Le rivolutioni di Napoli di Alessandro Giraffi (1647)," *Annali dell'Istituto Italiano per gli studi Storici*, XV (1998): 287–340; see now the edition in French, by Jacqueline Malherbe-Galy, Jean-Luc Nardone (Toulouse: Anarchasis, 2010).

17 In my account, I will refer to all the authors cited in this list; see also the useful references in Saverio Di Franco, "Le rivolte del regno di Napoli del 1647–48 nei manoscritti napoletani," in *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, CXXV (2007), pp. 327–457.

18 For Masaniello's theatricality, see Antonio Ghirelli, "La tragedia di Masaniello," in Ghirelli, *Storia di Napoli* (Turin: Einaudi, 1973), pp. 48–63.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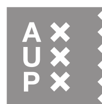
As I go to press, I wish to thank the many persons who have given me suggestions and advice, or simply imparted the serenity of spirit needed to complete it. Above all, Professor Giuseppe Galasso asked me to write it, showing confidence in me. It goes without saying that in all my research, I consulted his writings, always precious for the story that I was writing. In particular, I owe him gratitude for alerting me to the importance of Mazzini for Masaniello's nineteenth-century fortunes. I thank Professor Aurelio Musi for keeping an eye on this work, especially in its final phases, reading an earlier draft of the book, and making comments. I owe him thanks for the support and for the useful comments during that process. And then I must thank Professor Enrico Nuzzo, for his generosity and our dialogues in the pleasant atmosphere of the *mense* of the University of Salerno. Friends and colleagues have helped me in various ways: I thank in particular *Professoressa* Michele Benaiteau, who was a fundamental intellectual anchor for me; and also Professors Maurizio Cambi, Giuseppe Cirillo, Giacomo de Cristofaro, Vittorio Dini, Roberto Esposito, Antonio Gisondi, Christiane Groeben, Franco Moretti, Aniello Montano, Silvio Perrella, Francesco Piro, Marco Russo, Amneris Roselli, Domenico Taranto, Stefano Villani (I hope I am not forgetting anyone), for all sorts of aid and counsel; Dr. Mariolina Rascaglia, Patrizia Nocera, and, in general, all the staff of the manuscripts section of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli; to my friend and colleague Saverio Di Franco, for our exchange of ideas on many afternoons at the Nazionale di Napoli. Thanks, finally, to my family and to Manuel, for patience and *joie de vivre.*



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