

[Helen Hills](#) is principal Investigator working with Dr Melissa Calaresu (Cambridge) on:

Topography and History in Neapolitan Culture: Visual and Literary Representations of Naples c.1500-present: Three Workshops at the Universities of York and Cambridge 2008-09

Rationale and Research Context:

Our Workshops have three inter-related aims: (a) to draw together Neapolitanists from across UK, USA and Europe, for whom no institutional focus yet exists, in order to facilitate lively intellectual interaction; (b) to examine the principal historiographical currents that have operated and that continue to operate within scholarship on Naples, particularly in relation to visual and literary representations of Naples from c.1500 to the present; (c) to generate discussion and academic papers to form the basis for a special issue of an academic journal devoted to Neapolitan cultural history.

Neapolitan cultural history remains largely ignored and marginalized; it continues to be subjected to a 'core-periphery' model and eclipsed by studies of cities in northern and central Italy, especially Rome, Florence, and Venice. References in broad surveys remain patchy and often derogatory in tone. Yet Neapolitan culture and its representations demand focused attention. As the centre of Spanish colonial power within Europe during the Vicerealty, and with a population second only to Paris in early modern Europe, Naples offers important points of comparison with non-European sites which were subject to European colonialism. Yet while European colonization outside Europe has received intense scholarly attention, its cultural impact and representation within Europe remain under-explored. Furthermore, in the sphere of the visual arts Neapolitan urbanism, architecture, painting, and sculpture were of the highest quality during this period, but vary considerably, though in under-researched ways, from those of any other centre in Italy and cannot be understood adequately through a discourse of cultural subordination either to Rome or to Madrid.

Recent years have seen significant inroads in terms of adventurous scholarship focused on Naples. Ground-breaking scholarship on Neapolitan history, the visual arts including architecture, and music, have produced new paradigms not only for the study of Neapolitan history and culture, but also for that of the peninsula as a whole and beyond. Indeed, the current quality and quantity of academic scholarship on the cultural history of Naples is unprecedented. However, much of this scholarship is occurring in fragmented points across Europe and the USA; there persists comparatively little intellectual porosity in work by Neapolitan scholars themselves.

Consequently, a significant gulf is opening up between the general perception of Naples as backward and provincial, and a new interrogation of the lively, but often isolated, debates that have emerged on this subject. Our Workshops aim to explore and exploit that gulf through a series of inter-related scholarly papers which will trace, account for, and counter the bifurcation between reputation and reality in Neapolitan scholarship. We will draw attention to these developments, trace their relationships and divergences, and examine their consequences for scholarship of Neapolitan cultural history.

We aim to raise the profile of scholarship on Naples by focusing on it directly, as an important city in its own right, and by critically investigating the ways in which its cultural

history epitomizes key historiographical traditions within Italian historical scholarship, and cultural-scholarly prejudice both within the academy and beyond. We pose the question as to what extent the historiography of Naples might usefully be thought of as a metaphor for Italian cultural history as a whole; while also treating Naples as a focus to reveal and test developments posited within Italian cultural history.

While it is no longer tenable to discuss Naples in terms of the old 'core-periphery' model, we examine how that model has affected the terms in which its histories have been written, and the histories of the early modern Italian peninsula. Papers will explore the applicability of ideas and theories developed in postcolonialist studies to the study of a European city subordinated, denigrated, and exoticized in historical and cultural discourses, in ways which find apparent parallels in colonialist discourse.