

Abstract

This paper specifically examines representations of the relationship between the physical and moral maps of the capital city of Naples in topographical studies of the same over the course of the long eighteenth century. As its objects of study, this paper takes a number of texts that were written to offer what were plausible descriptions of the city of Naples in the early modern period. While I could have included maps of the city here, I rather have chosen to consider the sorts of texts that could have accompanied them, texts that gave social content to the sort of imagery and growth pictured in the most famous examples of Neapolitan cartography. Thus, I will discuss well-known histories, encomia, guides and literary descriptions of the city, and I will do so to the end of providing a genealogy of the idea of Naples as a metropolis. With its genealogy of the idea of Naples as a metropolis, more specifically, this paper gives content to when and why the city of Naples emerged as a site of modern scientific inquiry. It is the premise of this paper that Naples first became a subject of science when early moderns came to experience the capital's territory as embedded in processes larger than those initiated and controllable by the civic polity. As I will show, the semantic reclassification of the capital as a metropolis therefore articulated and generated concern about the apolitical nature of the laws of the capital's growth and the behavior of its inhabitants. Put somewhat differently, that reclassification inflected and perpetuated the new sense of the capital as a physical territory in which the operation of natural laws could be observed. Likewise, it posited Naples as a world laboratory, or global field of inquiry, wherein the process of accumulation and integration of human capital could be documented and generalized. As this paper thus suggests, the idea of Naples as a metropolis most urgently posed the aporia of the social and behavioral sciences: that is, the question of how to account for the demonstrative behavior of extra-political groups and individuals. Consequently, this paper reminds us how ideas about the nature and obligations of metropolitan society pre-dated those of the nation, which viewed from the vantage points of both the early modern past and present looks a bit like provincial episode in the push towards the more ambitious project of both knowing and making the cosmopolitan.