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Masaniello's parabola: from David to Antichrist

Bartolommeo Capasso wrote that the viceregnò was 'the grimmest period of our history'¹.

The chronicles of the revolt of 1647 are of course useful to know the economic conditions of Naples. In some of them, the pages on the fires that punished those men who had voted for the taxes or invested in taxes or who in different ways had helped the last viceroys are particularly interesting. Antonio Fiordelisi's essay, *Gli incendi in Napoli ai tempi di Masaniello* (Napoli, 1985) can be integrated with information drawn from chronicles that Fiordelisi didn't know or didn't use like the *Istoria delle rivoluzioni di Napoli dell'anno 1647* by the doctor of law Tizio della Moneca (at the Società napoletana di Storia patria), *I tumulti e revolutioni della città e regno di Napoli [...]* by Giacomo Mayorica, friar at the monastery of Saint Severino of Naples, an anonymous chronicle preserved in Rome, to mention only some of the principal accounts².

These sources are valuable for: 1) the further information about the 'incendiati' (those who were hit by the fires); 2) the ways in which they had become rich and 'hated' and finally the goods that they had bought in order to appear as rich and noble as the established noblemen.

A more analytical consideration of those who were damaged by the fires allows us to understand that the increase of taxes since the beginning of the century had led to the construction of a new class, a newly rich group, who came from varied origins (the ex baker who invested his little money to try to change his fortune, the poor doctor of law who abandoned his ethical values, those who came from outside the city and wanted to try to establish roots for themselves with a secure career)³. These people were intensely hated as we can see from the criticism of them that we find in the chronicles that I have already mentioned. This operation can enrich our knowledge on how the 'tax system' affected the city. Masaniello's direction of and participation in the fires are some of the reasons that explain his rise to prominence.

The many poems written in his honour, soon after his death, testify that he was also appreciated by a not inconsiderable group of cultured men. Masaniello was considered a liberator sent by God and compared to David (in my paper I will give the elements necessary to reconstruct his image during the revolt).

The end of the revolt – for which the plague seemed just the punishment – marked the embitterment in the propaganda against the leader who had become symbol of the people who were defeated, those who were defeated at considerable cost.

1 B. Capasso, 'Relazione del presidente Comm. Bartolommeo Capasso fatta all'Assemblea Generale della Società la sera del 30 gennaio 1888', in *Archivio storico per le province napoletane*, XIII, 1888, pp. 181-198: p. 189. On the great archivist and historian, see the essays in G. Vitolo (ed. by), *Bartolommeo Capasso. Storia, filologia, erudizione nella Napoli dell'Ottocento*, Napoli, Guida, 2005.

2 T. della Moneca, *Istoria delle rivoluzioni di Napoli dell'anno 1647 [...]*, Napoli (Società Napoletana di Storia Patria, SNSP XXVII C 11); G. Mayorica, *I tumulti e revolutioni della città e regno di Napoli [...]*, SNSP XXVII A 13; Anonymous, without the first page, in Casanatense Library (Rome), manuscript n. 4258.

3 This paper aims to stem how some men – very well known in the Naples of the time – became rich: they built few palaces but filled their residences with many goods. See G. Labrot's essay: *Baroni in città: residenze e comportamenti dell'aristocrazia napoletana, 1530-1734*, prefazione di G. Galasso, Napoli, Guida, 1979.