

## Reviews of books

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**Melissa Calaresu and Helen Hills (eds.)**, *New Approaches to Naples, c. 1500–1800: The Power of Place*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013. xvii + 260 pp. 45 illustrations. £70.00 hbk.

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Second only to Paris and London in seventeenth-century Europe, Naples was the largest and most densely populated city of the vast Spanish Empire, which stretched from the Philippines in the east to the Americas in the West. Naples was also a popular destination of the European Grand Tour. The spectacular vistas of the Neapolitan Bay facing Mt Vesuvius, the great number of historical landmarks and natural curiosities, the delightful all-year-round mild and pleasant climate and Naples' vibrant city life earned it the enthusiastic praises of foreign travellers. However, owing to its unrestrained process of urbanization, Naples was also one of the most crowded, chaotic, unhealthy and crime-ridden cities in the Spanish world. These dire conditions reflected on the Neapolitan populace, lending it a notorious reputation for disorder and unruliness. This contradiction between a heavenly site and its supposedly wicked people earned Naples its infamous epithet of 'a paradise inhabited by devils'. The purpose of this new and exciting interdisciplinary collection of essays – including studies on culture, politics, art, architecture, cartography and music, most of which are enriched by a lavish range of maps and illustrations – is precisely to debunk some of the numerous stereotypes that have clouded the study of Naples, either offering fresh theoretical and historiographical perspectives to known topics, or exploring new case-studies.

The book opens with a useful introduction by the editors, Melissa Calaresu and Helen Hills, which aptly sets the scene for the following nine essays, as it clearly illustrates the relatively scholarly neglect of Naples, when compared to the more privileged counterparts at the north of the Italian peninsula, mainly Florence and Venice. Furthermore, it presents the collections' contributions as representative of the new kind of research that the southern capital is starting to attract, finally leaving behind the sketchy interpretations spiced with exaggerated overtones, which have been awarded to it in the past. The first section, titled 'disaster and decline', opens with John Marino's critical survey of the more influential interpretations of the Mezzogiorno's economic and political crises, and the related succession of dynastic changes affecting Naples from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. Next, Helen Hills offers a novel look at the Treasury Chapel of San Gennaro in Naples Cathedral, emphasizing the complex interrelations between holiness, architecture and materiality in one of the city's most iconic locations. Finally, Rose Marie San Juan explores the multiple uses and meanings

of printed religious images produced in the wake of the devastating wave of plague that tore Naples apart in 1656. The second section, 'topographies', begins with Harald Hendrix's essay on the connection between Naples' cartographic representations and the city's cultural identity. Dinko Fabris' following essay maps the dissemination of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Neapolitan music collections around the European continent. Helena Hammond concludes the section with an investigation of the political meaning of landscape painting portraying the Bourbons' royal sites. The closing section, 'exceptionality', aptly begins with Paola Bertucci's analysis of the idiosyncratic space provided by the eighteenth-century Library and Museum of the prince of Tarsia, which functioned, not without tensions, as a site both for projecting the prince's cultural vision and as a place for knowledge production via the efforts of the Accademia Spinella. Next, Melissa Calaresu offers a unique take on Neapolitan cultural identities of simple folk by examining the production and consumption of visual representations of street life in paintings, travel accounts, porcelain sets and nativity figures. Anna Maria Rao's concluding essay of this collection critically examines that particular kind of historiography of southern Italy which has chosen to portray the history of the Kingdom of Naples as one of 'missed opportunities', particularly from a point of view of progress and modernization when compared not only to other European examples but also to other territories in northern and central Italy.

It will be hard to find a more qualitative and broad-ranging set of new studies on Naples, in which the contributors not only display a lucid understanding of the existing scholarly lacunae in the field, but also make a serious attempt to fill those by offering original, interdisciplinary and balanced accounts. The book will be of obvious interest to scholars of Naples, the Italian peninsula, early modern Europe and the Spanish Empire, but it will also be of relevance to anyone wishing to keep abreast of cutting-edge research in urban, cultural and art history.

#### **Gabriel Guarino**

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**Andrew Saint** (ed.), *Survey of London*, vol. XLIX: *Battersea Part 1: Public, Commercial and Cultural*. London: Yale University Press, 2013. xix + 480pp. 468 plates. £75.00 hbk.

**Colin Thom** (ed.), *Survey of London*, vol. L: *Battersea Part 2: Houses and Housing*. London: Yale University Press, 2013. xviii + 500pp. 445 plates. £75.00 hbk.  
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As London and indeed national landmarks go, Battersea Power Station ranks amongst the best known. Sitting beside the Thames, the silhouette of its four chimneys is as instantly recognizable as the Houses of Parliament or the Tower of London. Yet, Battersea is far more than just Sir Giles Gilbert Scott's (and Pearce and Halliday's) masterpiece, and the two latest volumes of the *Survey of London* address this with gusto, bringing to light the rich history and architectural wealth of the area.

Spread over two volumes and 900 pages, the *Survey* takes both a thematic and topographical approach to Battersea, leaving no stone unturned. Focused on public,