

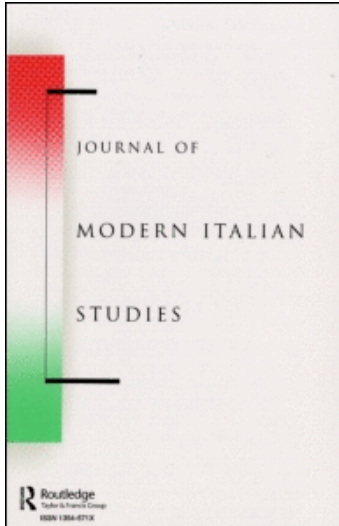
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La Sicilia dei Moncada. Le corti, l'arte e la cultura nei secoli XVI-XVII

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Book reviews

Lina Scalisi (ed.) (2006) *La Sicilia dei Moncada. Le corti, l'arte e la cultura nei secoli XVI–XVII*, Introduction by M. Aymard, Postscript by G. Giarrizzo (Catania: Domenico Sanfilippo), 311 pp., ISBN: 8885127444, ISBN-13: 9788885127449, €96.00

Recent studies have contributed to a new understanding of the social and political dynamics of the court and courtly society in the history of early modern Europe, so that the Spanish monarchy, for example, can now be thought of primarily as a court monarchy, in which the royal court in Madrid formed only part of a wider system that included the Viceregal courts in Mexico, Lima, Lisbon, Barceloa, Vamecia, Cagliari, Brussels, Milan, Naples, Palermo and other cities. In all these cities the Viceroy's palace was a site of political negotiation, the representation of power, of artistic patronage and aristocratic socialibility, but the study of the Viceregal courts has also revealed their close contacts with the courts of the great nobles. Within the Spanish monarchy, courts of the leading noble families were numerous and included not only those of the Spanish grantees but in the Viceregal territories those of the leading families of the Flemish, Lombard and Neapolitan nobility as well. The palaces of the great nobles reflected the splendour of families whose pretensions and life-styles manifested their political and social pre-eminence and drew them into the orbit of the royal and viceregal courts. From the pioneering studies of Ignacio Atienza Hernández on the Crown of Castille we know the officials of the noble courts, their rituals and ceremonies and how the great nobles sought to present themselves as the *pater familias* of their vassals and used patronage both to publicize and legitimize their noble lineages.

The role of the courts of the nobility has also attracted growing interest among historians of Spanish Sicily. Domenico Ligresti, for example, has shown the importance of the small courts of the aristocracy that flourished in Sicily in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Ligresti 1998), and a number of recent studies have begun to resale our understanding of the Sicilian nobility in this period, underlining in particular the diffusion in Spanish Italy of a courtly culture that had a strong classical imprint. In a pioneering study Giuseppe Giarrizzo has also drawn attention to the importance of the courts of the Moncada family in Caltanissetta and of the Branciforte in Militello (Giarrizzo 1999).

Following the path laid by Ligresti and Giarrizzo, a group of researchers directed by Lina Scalisi have undertaken a systematic study of the Moncada family and their courts. Their findings are published in this volume, which opens with an Introduction by Maurice Aymard, who for more than thirty years has studied the Sicilian nobility and is the author of a brilliant study of the Aragona dukes of Terranova. This is a magnificent

volume in which the essays are harmoniously accompanied by a wealth of illustrations that reveal the opulence and glory of the artistic works commissioned by this Sicilian family, whose pictures, buildings, engravings, sculptures and maps constituted a visual display of their princely grandure.

The history of successive generations of the Moncada family followed a parabola that began at the end of the thirteenth century when they left Catalonia to settle in Sicily as warriors after the Vespers, where with some movement backwards and forwards they remained until they returned to Spain in the mid-seventeenth century. Like many other noble Italian families, the Moncada were indistinguishable from the upper Spanish nobility and even though in the early modern period the Catalan Moncada had become 'Sicilianized', in the sixteenth century the family retained its mixed identity and its contacts with the Spanish nobility through its links with the Vega and Luna families. For many generations, however, the court was the principal site for marriage brokering and clientalist strategies for the Moncada family was the Viceregal court.

The essays in this volume offer a global view of the family, from its political role in the administration of the Spanish monarchy (R. Pilo Gallisai) to its economic activities and the administration of its estates and family patrimony (L. Scalisi, R. Loredana Foti, S. Laudani and S. Condorelli). We also get a very clear picture of the role played by Luisa Luna both as administrator of the family estates and as the mind behind the matrimonial and patrimonial strategies that brought the Moncada to the highest ranks of the monarchy's nobility. There are essays on the family's activities on the city of Caltanissetta, with regard to both the development of the city and their roles as patrons of the arts (P. Militello, B. Mancuso, A. Rapisarda, R. Zaffuto Rovello and D. Vullo), on the artists who moved freely between the courts of the Viceroy and those of the Sicilian nobles (G. Mendola and M. R. De Luca), on the material life of the family from clothing to genealogy and heraldry (V. Ugo Vicari and G. Pace Gravina). The family's history is also set in the broader context of the Hispano-Italian nobility (D. Ligresti), while the ways in which the ideals of nobility were formulated in Sicily are also explored in the context of the contrast between the exaltation of virtue as the key to upward social mobility and the critique levelled at an emerging group of merchants and tax-farmers, as well as the rivalry between the noble patricians of Palermo and the noble families of the Eastern Sicilian towns (V. Vigiano). Lina Scalisi devotes an essay to the work by Giovanni Agostino della Lengueglia, *Ritratti della Prosapia et heroi Moncada*, the principal treatise in praise of the family which is full of accounts that glorified the family and shows how the family's identity was carefully constructed through memories of its history. This treatise was published in 1657 in Valencia in the context of a Viceregal court at which the Viceroy Luigi Guglielmo Moncada, Prince of Paternò and Duke of Montalto represented the image of the distant monarchy. The court of the nobles and the court of the Viceroy were hence superimposed in the person of a family that was not prevented by its regional origins from seeking the highest place in the ceremonial of the monarchy at a time convulsed by crisis and provincial revolts when many believed that there were plans to place a Moncada on the throne of Sicily.

La Sicilia dei Moncada is, in short, a study of fundamental importance for understanding the most recent developments in the historical study of the Sicilian aristocracy and its role in the Spanish monarchy. The breadth of these studies and their strongly interdisciplinary approach serve also to reveal, albeit indirectly, many subjects that need closer study, and especially the power, patronage, property and artistic influence of the Sicilian Viceregal court on which these essays throw much light. The

volume also shows the need for more comparative studies that will allow us to set the case of the Moncada in the context of the histories of other leading Sicilian noble families from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, for example the Aragona of Terranova or the Riggio, Princes of Campofiorito.

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Ligresti, D. (1998) 'Le piccole corti aristocratiche nella Sicilia spagnola', *Archivio Storico per la Sicilia Orientale*, 94(fasc. I): 11–35.

Shirley Hazzard and Francis Steegmuller (2008) *Ancient Shore. Dispatches from Naples* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press), 127 pp., ISBN-10: 0226322017; ISBN-13: 9780226322018, US\$18.00, hard cover

This pleasant and very readable book consists of short essays on the Naples of the 1950s based on the experiences of its two authors, Shirley Hazzard and her late husband Francis Steegmuller, interspersed with black and white photographs of Naples of the period by Henri Cartier-Bresson and Herbert List. The book is based mainly on the recollections of Shirley Hazzard and of her time spent in Naples working for the UN. She describes the feelings and the emotions of the foreign traveller, the loneliness of travel and how it brings you face to face with the unfamiliar, which is the precondition for achieving an 'indelible intimacy' with a place, the moment when the travellers' present history intersects with the history of the place, when by discovering the past they regenerate it. The book addresses mostly the 'ancient shore' of the title and very little of the Naples emerging from the rubble of the Second World War. Hazzard is more interested in the beauty of the surroundings (the Sorrento Coast, Capri) which she admires from the balcony of her villa in trendy Posillipo, far from the city 'in shambles', which is not very pleasant to view. This 'extraordinary metropolis' is best observed from a distance because Naples could be a hazard with its traffic, its disorder and its thieves, the 'scippatori' who come out of nowhere on their motorbikes and rip your bag right off your back. A similar 'incidente' is recounted by Francis Steegmuller in 'The incident at Naples' when he lost his bag and suffered some minor contusion in the process. The story tells of the help he received by very caring Neapolitan doctors in his visits to hospitals in Naples and, by contrast, the indifferent and almost inhumane treatment he received from American doctors back home in New York. The point of the story, which goes on for a little too long, is to bear witness to the humanity of the Neapolitans, their 'acts of human fellowship and inexpressible grace', which is supposed to make up somewhat for losing your bag. Hazzard admits that the city is 'undefensible': 'the surroundings are rather lifeless: pleasant shops are few, litter blows, traffic trundles'. And so are the Neapolitans: the Bourbon Kings who ruled Naples for centuries had 'magnificent intentions' to raise the profile of the city, to beautify it and to keep it clean, but it was all for nought: the piazza in front of the Royal Palace is full of traffic, the royal palace needs repair, the arcades of the basilica are neglected: 'In the best laid plans of mice and men, at Naples, the mice tend to win'. Hazzard means that the men are the