



"APPRAISALS" FOR HISTORICAL - GEOGRAPHICAL STUDIES OF SOUTHERN ITALY IN THE MODERN AGE: AN ANALYSIS OF A SAMPLE AREA

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Abstract: *The paper documents the results of a research on archival sources of the Kingdom of Naples in the modern age - "appraisals" - and shows how such sources are necessary for historical and geographical studies. The appraisals established the economic value of a feud. They were a tool routinely used by the Royal Authority in the XV-XVIII centuries. By analyzing the documents of a sample area, some important historical and geographical aspects are emphasized: a) the location where every feud was inserted, b) the socio-demographic data extracted by "appraisals", c) the rural landscape d) the administrative organization. The research highlights how such themes can be considered useful indicators in order to analyze the South of Italy in the modern age and, otherwise, identify elusive and little-known dynamics.*

Key words: *historical-geographical analysis, Italian South, feudal organization, rural landscape*

1. INTRODUCTION

The complex feudal organization of the Kingdom of Naples conducted the sale of estates in the absence of lawful successors or for debts accumulated by the feudal lords. These procedures were accompanied by a special documentation which was similar to our estimates, called "appraisals". Every continental province of the Kingdom was subject to controls and these "appraisals" were commonly used by the Royal Treasury in the modern age (XV-XVIII century), albeit with difficulty, until the introduction of the tax reform promoted by Charles of Bourbon in the second half of the eighteenth century. An extensive archival research has made it possible to reconstruct the substantial body of documents kept primarily in the State Archives of Naples, but



also widespread in the provincial and private archives of Southern Italy¹. The majority of the documents are included in the procedures documented in the Royal Treasury, which was founded by Charles I of Anjou (1266-1285) and, in time, became the institute par excellence for tax collection in the Kingdom of Naples. This body also performed judicial functions for all matters concerning debt payments and was the main organ to which creditors turned to for feudal estimates. Moreover, it was set up by the Anjou (XIV century), when they did not rule Sicily, and neither did they operate in that territory and it was not introduced there subsequently by others (Delle Donne, 2012). The drafters were officials at the service of the Royal Treasury; and were often members of the College of Cadastral Officials who not only had specialized training to fulfill this task (Brancaccio, 1991), but were also expert territorial analysts. Such professionals developed in the first decades of the eighteenth century, and were likened to present-day engineers. In fact, their competences evolved particularly in terms of an urbanistic point of view (Buccaro, De Mattia, 2003).

The appraisals were several pages in length, sometimes even over a hundred, and were prepared with special care, and this wealth of information provides us with an insight into the socio-demographic characteristics and the economic potential of the territories subject to controls. Maps are attached to some documents and the drafter played an important role in illustrating a kind of visual display of the feud. It was only in the eighteenth century that the cartographic language prevailed in relation to the above-mentioned tax reform.

The setting of the documents was well defined: the drafters clarified the reasons for the request of the tax which could range from wide and varied motivations, particularly when it involved a noble person from a distinguished family and the times and methods of implementation of the appraisal were specified, as were any collaborations with local experts to draft a faithful documentation of the feud. At this point, the proofreader described the site and the location of the estate, the boundaries and road connections and the distances from major centers. The features of the dwellings were then outlined in order, the number of people, ie households, and the possible presence of different ethnicities. Special consideration was given to palaces and castles, shrines and monasteries, illustrated in all their wealth. The expert also took into consideration the agricultural landscape, the local productivity and the cattle; if the centers were substantial, he also gave space to crafts, fairs and different forms of contracts.

All these elements, such as the presence of mills or taverns, were detailed with appropriate tables showing the incomes of the feud. In this way, the expert could define the overall estimate (Bulgarelli Lukacs, 1993). The reconstruction was completed with an outline of the administrative organization and the relationships between the local overlord and the University, i.e. the population. It is clear, therefore, that the documents can reveal much to those who wish to preserve a historical and environmental reconstruction, as it reliably reflects the characteristics of geographic areas, their socio-economic conditions and provides accurate information on housing facilities. Owing to the fact that the experts were officials of the Royal Treasury Service the accuracy of qualitative and quantitative information in the survey is generally guaranteed. Furthermore, the information can still be confirmed by taking into consideration other

¹ In the State Archives of Naples, there are about three hundred and fifty appraisals drafted in the late sixteenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth for feuds of the continental provinces of the Kingdom.

contemporary sources or track impressions on the ground. It is obvious that these appraisals were government owned and never questioned the old regime, but the observation process put in place, in some cases, with the support of local witnesses, was made in a timely and straightforward way. These documents expressed the economic value of a territorial unit, often summarized with the use of tables, but essentially it presented the feud studied in its complexity with the aim of stimulating, in the case of sale, the interest of potential buyers. In short, taking into consideration the legal and formal orientation of these sources, they are fundamental to understand the provinces of the Kingdom of Naples in the modern age, hence, through the analysis of several surveys of a sample area, this paper will illustrate which aspects of Southern Italy in the modern age can be investigated.

2. THE AREA SAMPLE AND THE DOCUMENTS

Molise, one of the provinces of the Kingdom of Naples, is therefore an area of particular importance as a sample for analysis in progress, because through the fourteen appraisals², it is possible to appreciate the socio-economic and settlement organization, starting with the most important center, Campobasso. Other surveys allow an easy reading of the various areas of this province, ranging from Upper to Lower Molise³. The Molise nobility was always in debt and often absent as they were inclined to participate in the pleasures of the capital; they were descendants of unimportant families, who did not consider the feuds the representative place of their own existence, as in other provinces. In addition, documents show that there were multiple and continual sales of Morrone del Sannio, between 1593 and 1614. The number and the systematic nature of the documents allow us to consider Molise as an interesting test site showing what valuable features can be drawn by querying these sources. In particular, some important aspects in terms of geo-historical perspectives will be considered: the territorial frame in which every feud was inserted, socio-demographic data that can be inferred, the agricultural landscape and the administrative organization. This paper will demonstrate how such themes can be considered true indicators, useful to analyze the Italian Southern territories in the modern age.

3. TERRITORIAL RELATIONS AND VILLAGES

Each document provides, in the first pages, the precise topographical and exhaustive description of the examined feud, tracing, through an accurate description, the perimeter and the extension measurement. Neighboring counties and the relative distances from centers are identified, which were important economically, politically and administratively. Campobasso is a perfect example, as seen in the appraisal of 1688,

² They are documents of several pages and are not attached maps.

³ The appraisals of Molise feuds, which I have examined, are: Bojano (1707), Campobasso (1688) and (1732), Capracotta (1671), Cercepicola (1677), Colletorto (1704), Ferrazzano (1676), Fossaceca (1681), Gambatesa (1692), Jelsi (1688) Jelsi (1688), Macchiagodena (1740), Matrice (1705), Morrone (1595), Palata (1646), Petrella (1666), Pizzone (1663), Salcito (1652). In parenthesis it's date of appraisals.

drawn up by the Nauclerio board: "Such borders, which surround all of the above territory of Campobasso whose circumference measures about fifteen miles, also includes lands that are appropriate for seeding, pastures, vineyards, orchards, forests and other under-bushes⁴".

Given the estimates provided by the drafter of the document, we can reliably assume that the settlement and its agricultural space measured an area of about fifteen² miles, the center of which is Monte Bello with its easily identifiable surrounding areas: "Campobasso is located in the Province of Molise and, more specifically, in the groundwater of a living stone mountain, at the top of which there is the castle, the mother church and other churches situated behind it. It is surrounded by walls and towers of mediocre distance, between one and the other, around which there are five gates."⁵ The town is illustrated with short but effective brushstrokes, the holy places and the walls are evidence of its surface. The expert accurately identifies distances with neighboring municipalities, like Riccia, Civitacampomarano, San Marco in Catola, but also those further away like Foggia, Lucera, Termoli, Benevento and Naples. An extensive network of roads and the distances shown in miles are easily identifiable. "From the city of Benevento it is twenty-four miles (..); from the city of Lucera thirty miles; from the town of Termoli where the naval base is situated it is thirty miles; forty miles from the city of Foggia, where there is a fair in May and the city of Naples, about sixty miles."⁶

If we examine the appraisal of Colletorto, a village in Lower Molise, sites are always identified with the centralized settlement that are surrounded by walls, the neighboring estates, geographic location compared to the Forcore/Fortore river. Then the surveyor expands and provides further information pointing towards the Adriatic Sea and Puglia. "This land is located flat above a mountain and is surrounded, in part, by walls and towers and other parts by the houses of the citizens that can only be accessed using three gates. (...) from the ground you have the view of the many bordering lands of Mount Angel sea, and part of Lake Lesina; borders on the territory of this land with the Casalnuovo territories, Celenza, Sant'Elia and the abbey of St. Helena. It is surrounded by about twenty-four miles of land. The area encloses the surrounding borders and mountainous areas and produces all sorts of provisions and fruit which are sufficient for the needs of its citizens⁷". The altitude of the site allows you to see up to the Gargano promontory, and the view can range from Lake Lesina, but the expert insists on nearby estates, because Colletorto has a particularly fertile terrain that produces so abundantly that it is possible to market the crops. The abbey of St. Helena indirectly identifies the present-day territory of the municipality of San Giuliano di Puglia with its religious and social ties: "Spiritual aspects are identified with the bishop of Larino, who is twelve miles away, for Judicial Hearings there is the city of Lucera, which is twenty-four miles away, it is a similar distance from Serra Capriola which is twelve miles and from Campobasso it is eighteen miles."⁸ The territorial documents of Colletorto are clear. However, there are no references to Naples because despite the capital of the Kingdom being well connected to the Cadastral Offices and the Port Authorities, it is too far away and perhaps not easily accessible from other villages.

⁴ See Nauclerio, *Appraisal of Campobasso*, 1688, p.12.

⁵ See *ibid.*, p.2-3.

⁶ See *ibid.*, pp.15-16.

⁷ See Galluccio, *Appraisal of Colletorto*, 1704, p. 10

⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 12.

In any way, each fiefdom was not an isolated reality, but part of a dense network of relationships and connections. The location and localization were clear because the potential buyer needed to know citizen movements during trade fair periods, under which hierarchies they were expected to refer and with whom they could have beneficial relationships. In coherence to this assumption, even the critical aspects of a feud were highlighted, as in the case of Morrone del Sannio: "The Land of Morrone is located in the province of Molise and is sixty miles from the city of Naples, twelve miles from Campobasso, thirty miles from Benevento, eight miles from the town of Larino, twelve miles from Coglionisi [Guglionesi] and about sixteen miles from the sea. (...) There are about sixty-five vacuous and deserted houses, of which twenty-seven are totally ruined and uninhabited. In fact, the citizens had abandoned their homes and moved to other counties following quarrels with the lord Baron and the Reverend Bishop of Larino about tithes."⁹The expert, always clearly marking distances from major centers, immediately points out the peculiarity of Morrone, marked by the abandonment of its inhabitants due to quarrels.

The fact that they had even refused to pay tithes, was indicative of their poverty and, in this regard, the appraisal of Jelsi is significant: "An almost circular territory with an oblique road running through the center, from which short streets and alleys branch off, most of which are cramped and narrow with uneven paths, and with houses that are mostly with low rooms and are covered with roofs."¹⁰ The town's structure is a measure of the social status of this community. The drafter cites only territorial relations, because it is a little fiefdom which is projected outwards and the neighboring villages are specified to merely elucidate the geographical position (Sarno, 2008b). The appraisal presents a common approach from the early stages, which is curved according to the place examined. The cadastral officials, while using a recurring form, showed that their main objective was to provide an initial snapshot of the examined area and its structural condition. The various indications which, in many cases are regularly cited, have a double value: they indicate the physical distance from centers of political, religious and economic power, but also exemplify the network in which everyone participates. Thus, the fiefdoms do not appear as numerous isolated monads, but an integral part of economic, political and religious hierarchies, which, through the appraisal, can be re-imposed.

4. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Demographic studies of modern South refer to *numbers* performed by the Royal Treasury periodically and the *states of the souls* of the parish archives, but the appraisals are just as useful to retrieve information. Indeed, comparisons between the different sources appear scientifically valid in order to acquire a clear demographic picture, if one takes into account that the sources of the appraisals simultaneously provide identical and different elements compared to those of the *numbers* of Royal Treasury. In fact, there is a common formal logic: in both cases the reported data was only relative to the people, or to the families present who were tax payers. However, the appraisals more often than not went beyond the mere data, as the experts were able to present a real social description. For example, in the case of Campobasso, it was possible to determine

⁹ See Di Gennaro, *Appraisal of Morrone*, 1593, p. 4.

¹⁰ See Nauclerio, *Appraisal of Jelsi*, 1688b, p.1.

the social classes represented: nobles, shopkeepers and workers. "Among the people of this territory there are two barons (..), twelve wealthy people living on their own income, twelve lawyers, four medical physicists, two painters, a foot battalion captain and a lieutenant on horseback, three chemists (..) two notaries and four judges on contract."¹¹

According to the social characteristics of the Kingdom of Naples, there are many experienced lawyers who play a role of mediation between the powers, particularly between the bickering barons and uprising peasants (Colapietra, 2008). The craftsmen and merchants represent an intermediate class, who aimed to enrich and form a wealthy position. Not surprisingly, the expert lists in detail over 160 existing shops. The following lists contain the most significant information: "Sixteen merchant shops selling sugar, pepper, waxes and other items, as well as various cloths, buttons, silk and similar articles; five street shacks selling different types of haberdashery; seven tailors making new clothes and four barber shops."¹² The fact that the documents specify the tailoring shops, haberdashery, footwear and headgear, shows their importance. In fact, since the basis of the textile sector is represented, it highlights that it is the backbone of the proto-industrial activities (Mocarelli, 2009).

These elements are interesting in that they reconstruct the socio-economic fabric of the South, giving sap to the figures of the citizens. In addition, they allow us to have an insight into the living conditions of the populations from a qualitative point of view. There appears to be, for example, a strong discrepancy between the most important centers such as Campobasso and villages in which laborers and exploited workers got by, as shown in the Morrone appraisal: "The citizens are mostly poor, living from hand to mouth, living with others in Puglia watching animals, working the fields where there are only a few head of cattle, not even twenty, about sixty cows, one thousand, five hundred sheep and fifty pigs owned by the citizens."¹³ However, it is important to point out that we should not consider the villages of the South as a harmonious whole, but rather multifaceted, the drafters were able to detect the roots of the artisan classes in the village of Colletorto." The people of that territory were simple, poor, and busied themselves with the cultivation of fields, whereas the women spun and wove wool to make clothes for their personal use, (...), there were three barbers, three master makers, four masters of weapons, three tailors, and a midwife."¹⁴ They were poor but hard workers and there was also a handful of craftsmen for internal needs. Most of the men worked in the fields, but there were blacksmiths and bricklayers, while women were engaged in weaving. It was a true social context, in which there was the presence of a midwife (the *bambana*), to help women with childbirth, and even a doctor, who used to take 40 ducats a year. The drafters also specified the presence of minorities, such as the Schiavoni, ie groups of Croatians, in Palata and the appraisal of this feud of 1646 is a document valuable to understand the settlement of the Slavs who, after the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453, did not want to submit themselves to the obligation of repudiating the Catholic faith, so they began to move from the Dalmatian coast to Italy. The earthquake of 1456 and the plague of 1495 had impoverished the territories along the Italian coast, potentially leaving space not only for the presence of Albanians, but also Slavs. Therefore, a large group moved, in the direction of provinces of the

¹¹ See Nauclerio, *Appraisal of Campobasso*, 1688a, p.4-5.

¹² See *ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹³ See Di Gennaro, *Appraisal of Morrone*, 1593, p. 6.

¹⁴ See Galluccio, *Appraisal of Colletorto*, 1704, p. 15.

Kingdom of Naples. Groups of Croations stopped in Molise and settled in the feuds of Collecroce Acquaviva, Montemitro, Palata, Ripalta, known today as Mafalda, San Biase, San Felice del Molise, known as San Felice Slavo until 1929, and in the surrounding hamlets (Sarno, 2011).

This is how it is possible, through the appraisal, to clearly identify the qualitative characteristics of the population, the distribution of immigrants and even the relationships, sometimes conflicting, between the immigrants and the local population. On the other hand, the analysis of social classes allows you to locate the local economic activism and the administrative organization of the feuds, often making out the existence of a middle class that was productive, of which little has been written about.

5. THE AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPE

The appraisals allow us to reconstruct and recognize landscapes of the past and to understand what the land was used for (Romano, 2004). Again, the experts manage to provide extensive details, for example, the accurate visualization of agricultural aspects of Morrone is interesting: "Located outside the territory about a quarter of a mile away, there are two fountains (...) At the bottom about two miles away there is the river called Biferno, a big river which produces eels and fish (...), where the Lord Baron has his mills and boats and there are other replenishing waters for the territory (...). Further along, towards Campobasso, about half a mile away, there are some vineyards containing a few feet of olive trees, fruit trees, and delicious wines that are sufficient for their personal needs, (...). Then about two miles further there is a oak forest (...) about a mile and a half of which belonging to the Baron (...), there is another wood (...). The remaining territory (...) is a fertile terrain which is stony and chalky, that produces abundant and good grains, (...) including barley which they sell, as well as legumes and linen."¹⁵ The description virtually reconstructs for us the rural areas of Molise, the water wealth, the wide wooded presence and poly-culture. It emphasizes the robust scope of the Biferno River, which feeds the mills and allows the navigation of boats called "Barchere" but there are also short torrential watercourses. In short, the drafters are testimonials of potential of mismanaged villages, because a new feudal lord could exploit and make the most of their resources. Moreover, by using such an outline, we are able to detect the use of the soil and any abandoned crops, with techniques used in the past. For example, thanks to the appraisal of Colletorto, we are aware of the use of a "treppetto", an antique oil pressing machine, used for pressing olives: "the baronal court had a room where the treppetto would grind the olives."¹⁶

The lands of Colletorto produce juicy olives from which oil is obtained, but the feudatories are not only enriched with the trade of olives and olive oil, but also by providing the inhabitants of Colletorto and the neighbouring estates a "treppetto" to grind olives. We are also informed that, along with olives, there are also vineyards in the neighboring territories that are also "full of fruit."¹⁷ This village took complete advantage of the good fertility of its territory and the residents selected the two most proficient, intensive cultivations which were the olive groves and vineyards. Colletorto's economic dynamism is further clarified by the income made through the

¹⁵ See Di Gennaro, *Appraisal of Morrone*, 1593, p. 8.

¹⁶ See Galluccio, *Appraisal of Colletorto*, 1704, p. 18.

¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 10.

orchards and gardens, belonging to the Baronal Court but leased out to the residents. It is further testament to the formation of an intermediate class that rented land that was aimed at intensive cultivation and marketing. The two examples - Morrone and Colletorto - are a reflection of landscape setting appraisals: the drafters used a comprehensive means of describing the agricultural fiefdoms - wooded areas, areas for grazing, crops, traditions - and their utilization. Their goal was to establish the economic value and it is now possible to understand how the southern agricultural landscape was divided, which were the most productive areas and for what different reasons: investments made by the chiefs, competences of the farmers and interests of the middle class. Even where the conditions were not favorable, the governing body was shown to grant the estate and its inhabitants a second chance.

6. THE ACTIVISM OF THE ARTISANS AND THEIR AGRO-TOWN

If in the countryside there is a kind of economic mobility, it becomes more evident in the major centers, like Campobasso which does not only affect the agricultural sector. The appraisal of 1742 points out the actions of the working-class who are able, as a consequence of their artistic skills, to open shops and thereby generate an income sufficient to afford the rent, enriching themselves with their merchandise. The dynamism is particularly evident from the fact that they have exploited the needs of the feudal lord to repay debts by renting out his shops, farms and stallions (Sarno, 2008a). In the last part of the appraisal the drafter precisely lists each shop with its physical characteristics, indicating the tenant and the established amount, starting with the most important shops, located around the Ducal Palace. He has the ability to bring to life, before our eyes, the mercantile landscape that unfolds in the main square with its shops one after the other: all with mezzanines used for storage and the most important with windows. The difference in value depends both on the size of the shop and on the artisan features. For instance, the apothecary who deals with herbs which are likely to have beneficial and health functions requires a bigger space and, at the same time, attracts more customers, especially foreigners. Such a landscape is not only peculiar to the center, but is repeated in the districts, in the different zones identified according to the reference entrance to the city; indeed, the drafter not only signals the current tenant but, in some cases, even the last one. The building position and the reference catchment certainly have a weight in the distribution and articulation of the artisan class. What emerges is a mobile framework, which is testament to the mercantile development in inland areas of modern South, where a feud managed to establish itself as an agricultural town or as a rural city such as (Chittolini, 1990) which assumed urban functions. Indeed, "the South did not develop an urban system, but urban hierarchies are created according to some types and functions related to the settlements, economic, religious, political and administrative services" (Musi, 2000, p. 9). Some centers had a predominantly commercial or administrative role and put in place a sort of compromise between the feudal political setting, of the old regime, and innovation processes which the intermediate class painstakingly tried to build (Sarno, 2012). Campobasso is a case in point.

7. THE SOCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION

A series of figures held administrative functions and mediation between the feudal lord and the population. The most important position was that of Master Juror, the head of the city government whose main function concerned the collection of taxes, principally during market times. The Elect, as advisers, helped the Master Juror in his economic administration of the city, while the Mayors, or the Population Revenue Administrators, made the operational decisions. There were also other minor positions such as the Registrar or the administrative Judge. The number and the presence of all the figures depended on the size of the feud, for which for example the elect were six in Campobasso and four in Jelsi.

Despite these elements, it is interesting to clarify how appointments were made. In Campobasso, the appraisal (1732) highlights the great weight of two fraternities who annually named representatives for local offices. In turn, each year they chose three representatives for each position and it was ultimately the Duke to select one person out of these three representatives. This complex administrative machinery was then prepared by the brotherhoods, but had to please the Duke, therefore the city government was midway between the power of the feudal lord and the wills of wealthy families, who had the power to attend through such religious bodies.

It is concretized as a kind of compromise that allowed the emerging classes to participate in the management of the town, containing the abuses of the feudal lord. The latter chose only directly who should hold the position of Governor who was in charge of legal issues of some importance? Therefore, without questioning the old regime and privileges of landowners of the Spanish period (Galasso, 2006), forms of socio-religious corporatism try to play a mediating role, representing another aspect of particular value that the appraisal highlighted.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The appraisals represent an irreplaceable series of documentation for spatial analysis of the modern South. A precious casket is revealed through an analysis of the documentation, made of the different population trends. Furthermore, you can thoroughly investigate the characteristics of the agricultural landscape, the even unwritten rules, of the social organization, economic processes, ways of life, in short, the peculiarities of the provinces of the Kingdom of Naples. Moreover, not only do these documentations enable through a timely and thorough reading at municipal level, to rebuild the urban evolution and socio-economic of small and medium centers, but also identify which of them, even in a feudal context, have carried out urban functions. Taking into consideration all these factors, we are able to widely interpret socio-economic processes and to investigate the socio-economic developments in the modern age. The experts, in fact, not only ascertained the assets of the noble families, but also those of artisans and merchants, offering a vivid picture of life in inland areas, which was unknown so far, scanning the social structure of the feuds and territorial relations with the surrounding ones. On the other hand, the precise description of the agricultural landscape provides information on the presence of crops and areas of intensive agriculture. As for the sampling area, the appraisals are particularly important to analyze

Molise in order to study its socio-economic conditions. In addition, they offer safe grounds for regarding the territorial network of relationships that this territory had with other provinces and the capital of the Kingdom. In the case of Campobasso, the crisis of feudal standards and the formation of an intermediate class was also recorded and duly illustrated. The appraisals have, therefore, to be considered a basic source for the geo-historical studies of modern South.

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