

Book Review

José Luis Colomer (ed.), *España y Nápoles. Coleccionismo y Mecenas Virreinales en el Siglo XVII*. Madrid, Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2009. ISBN 978-84-934643-7-0. 530 pp., 287 col. illus., 67 b. & w. illus. €62.50.

While research into the tightly interconnected political, social and cultural relationships between Spain and Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has grown exponentially in the last ten years, one institution above all has formed a vanguard – particularly when it comes to the study of the history of patronage and of collecting. Over the past five years the work of the Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica in Madrid, directed by José Luis Colomer, has transformed the study of the relationship of the Spanish monarchy, principally in artistic terms, with the rest of Europe during the period when Spain's power was at its height. The principal outlet for their research has been an extraordinarily rapidly produced (but high-quality) series of publications, in a number of different areas.

These have studied individual artists, notably Velázquez, and individual monarchs, such as Philip I, but perhaps most notably the cultural relationship between Spain and various centres of the Italian peninsula. The Centro's choice here has been especially informative as it has not fallen upon the most studied cities, such as Florence, but on others of which less notice has been taken but where Spanish influence was strongest; Genoa and Bologna have already come under the microscope. In this volume it is the turn of Naples, the city where, above all, the power of Spain was most evident at this period. While the study of Spanish patronage of and influence on the arts at Naples is not unknown, this text forms by far the most comprehensive study ever compiled covering just one aspect of the Spanish presence – the Viceroys.

At the same time, the general strengths of this volume are the same as earlier volumes published by the Centro – in that it forms a compendium of material not easily available elsewhere. Furthermore, as with all the

publications in this series it is lavishly and unstintingly illustrated, adding an additional layer to its usefulness – especially given the meagre availability of many of these images. Following a roughly chronological approach, and after a more general historical introduction, no fewer than twenty-five authors from Spain and further afield have been assembled for a collection that studies in turn the patronage of virtually every Viceroy of Naples of any significance in the seventeenth century (a full list of these is given at the end of the book).

The first essay, by Colomer himself, is of particular interest as it sets out and cuts through the troubled later historiographical relationship between Naples and Spain – especially the vitriolic position of Benedetto Croce – that has had so much impact on subsequent scholarship. At the end of this general historical introduction, there is also an extremely important *Corpus Documentale*, containing a wealth of documents previously unavailable. In the main body of the essays attention turns not only to the well-known names of seventeenth-century Naples but also to lesser known artists and a wide variety of media; there are contributions that cover – among others – ephemera, silversmiths, drawings, and in one case even opera.

Nor is the focus exclusively on the arts at Naples itself – there is one striking essay on the Viceroys' role in sending works from Naples back to Spain and another on the role of Neapolitan artists on the decoration of the Buen Retiro. Nonetheless, one major topic of the contributions solicited covers those most recognizable names of seventeenth-century Neapolitan art – Caravaggio, Ribera and Giordano – and it is perhaps these chapters above all that are the most significant. The essay by Antonio Ernesto Denunzio, for example, clarifies through unpublished archival evidence the previously-obscure beginnings of Caravaggio's career in Naples. It is not only patronage itself that comes into consideration, however, and there are also a couple of essays that deal with the role as collectors of several of the major patrons among these Viceroys – notably the Count of Monterrey and the Marquess of Carpio.

My one regret is that the volume does not go back in time (as its predecessors did) into the sixteenth century and earlier. There is only one artistic essay dealing with the period before 1599 – that on the ‘sala del Gran Capitán’. This decision is inconsistent, since the *Corpus Documentale* does, however, helpfully go back as far as Cardinal Pompeo Colonna’s brief vice-royalty after 1530. Although the text is already over 500 pages, further essays dealing with this earlier period of Spanish rule would have formed an additional, important, contribution. Also due to constraints of space, and unlike its predecessors, this particular vol-

ume focuses exclusively on the patronage of the Vice-roys themselves, and occasionally that of members of their immediate entourage.

So, while this impressive volume is unlikely to be surpassed in its own field, there do remain to be explored numerous other strands to the artistic impact of the Spanish presence in Naples in the seventeenth century and earlier.

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