

Note e discussioni

Recensione a Le vite di Carlo di Borbone. Napoli, Spagna e America, a cura di R. Cioffi, L. Mascilli Migliorini, A. Musi, A.M. Rao, Napoli, arte'm, 2018; Corte e cerimoniale di Carlo di Borbone a Napoli, a cura di A.M. Rao, Napoli, Federico II University Press, 2020

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These two books raise questions of great importance for historians of the eighteenth century, the century of 'Enlightenment'. How should we study the lives of an eighteenth-century king or queen? What do we now understand as the history of a reign? The tercentenary in 2016 of the birth of Carlo di Borbone (1716-1786), successively King of Naples and Sicily (1734-1759) and King of Spain (1759-1786), stimulated Neapolitan and Spanish historians to explore new many aspects of his life and reigns, first in a series of colloquia held in 2016-2017, then in these two volumes, published respectively in 2018 and 2020. Together the volumes do much to equip us to answer those questions for Carlo di Borbone, and thus provide material for a comparative assessment of his reign alongside those of better-known 'Enlightened absolutists', Frederick II of Prussia, and the Emperor Joseph II.

As Aurelio Musi and Anna Maria Rao explain in their introductions, the choice of title for the first and larger of the two volumes, *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone*, was a deliberate rejection of another which would once have been preferred, «the age of Carlo di Borbone». The objective was to get away from an approach which would treat Carlo di Borbone as representative of trends in the history of Naples, Spain and its empire over his lifetime – and instead to reveal 'multiplicity', to play off the life choices made for and by Carlo against the successive settings in which he acted as king. In the first instance, these 'lives' are taken chronologically, and refer in sequence to Carlo's childhood formation, up to his journey from Spain to Italy in 1731-1732 and accession to the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza; to his 'conquest' of the kingdoms of Naples and Sicily in 1734 and subsequent rule over them; and finally to his succession in 1759 to the crown of Spain and rule over both the Spanish mainland and its territories in South America. But the 'lives' of the volume's title also refer to different facets of Carlo's behaviour as a king: the life of his court, his and his queen's taste in art and architecture and in music, and, more unusually, his enthusiasm for archaeology and its finds, first aroused by the discovery of remains of Herculaneum during construction of his new palace at Portici, and later carried over into support for archaeological endeavours in different parts of southern America.

The importance to Carlo of his court is a feature of his monarchy which emerges clearly from the major volume, and justly receives concentrated attention in the second, *Corte e cerimoniale di Carlo di Borbone a Napoli*, which underlines how many of his interests, his 'lives', were extensions of the ritualised activities of the court, and of the spaces – the buildings and the

territories – which it occupied. Music and archaeology were among these, and so was hunting, an activity to which Carlo di Borbone was introduced as a child by his parents, and which became a life-long obsession. In amplifying the interest and significance of the Caroline court at Naples, the second volume also underlines how much of the earlier volume too is focussed on the first of his reigns, and indeed on his kingship of and in Naples. The contributions devoted to his rule in Sicily and to his reign as Carlos III of Spain are far fewer, and in the case of the latter pay more attention to his empire in central and southern America than to Spain itself. This is an understandable reflection of the location of the colloquia from which the volumes derive, but it does mean that for all the multiplicity of his 'lives', it is Carlo di Borbone's reign as King of Naples that must provide the basis for answers to the larger questions with which this review began.

Crucial to understanding how and why Carlo di Borbone became King of Naples were the dynastic ambitions of his mother Elisabetta Farnese, second wife to Filippo Borbone, Filippo V of Spain. These ambitions are dissected and explained in two sympathetic but hard-headed contributions to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone*, by Giulio Sodano and Giuseppe Caridi. What they show is that Elisabetta's ambitions for her son Carlo di Borbone made perfect sense in a Europe in which dynasties supplied rulers to kingdoms and principates, making competition between them a major and accepted part of 'international' politics. Since Filippo had had sons by his first marriage, Carlo was not in direct line to the Spanish throne; and given the standing of the Farnese as an Italian princely family, it was natural for Elisabetta to look to Italy's patchwork of duchies, principalities and kingdoms to provide appropriate alternatives for her own son, beginning with the Farnese Duchy of Parma. To be sure, Elisabetta Farnese was nothing if not ambitious, manoeuvring to place her son in line for succession to the Empire after Charles VI by marriage to one of the Emperor's daughters – a prospect which raised the possibility, in the not inconceivable event that Carlo did eventually succeed to the Spanish throne as well, of a renewal of the *Monarchia* of the Emperor Charles V. Duly alarmed, and wishing to preserve the interest of his own daughter, Maria Teresia, Charles VI was determined to block this ambition; he was also in a position to demand that Carlo di Borbone recognise Imperial overlordship of the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza.

What Sodano and Caridi also show, however, is that the decisive arbiters of these claims were not Spain and the Empire, but the United Kingdom and France, in the persons of their first ministers, Walpole and Cardinal Fleury. It was the British and French navies which now dominated the Mediterranean, and France also had the capability to intervene with an army on Italian soil. The two ministers accepted the political legitimacy of Bourbon-Farnese diplomacy on behalf of Carlo di Borbone – but were equally clear that the Parmesan succession did

not merit a European war. The solution was to allow Carlo to accede to Parma by taking personal possession of the territory in 1732 and side-stepping a declaration of allegiance to the Emperor – while the two powers turned a blind eye to the vulnerability of Habsburg authority in the southern kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, which Imperial armies were no longer capable of defending. Thus was Carlo di Borbone allowed to make the best of his mother's ambitions by marching south from Parma into the kingdom of Naples in May 1734, and having himself crowned King of the Two Sicilies in Palermo a little over a year later. The triumph of Farnese dynastic diplomacy occurred at the discretion of greater powers.

While the diplomacy took its course, Carlo himself was experiencing his first 'life' as a child destined by his parents to be a prince or a king. Their tutelage was pervasive and enduring, and Carlo apparently accepted it without demur, maintaining the habit of reporting to his mother on his daily activities even after he had established himself in Naples. He was taught the etiquette and timetable of a court, and acquired proficiency in its activities, with hunting as its privileged recreation. He followed his parents' preferences in palaces, particularly appreciating the scale, situation and gardens of the summer palace of La Granja de San Ildefonso, outside Segovia, constructed in the early 1720s, and becoming the family's main residence by 1725. As Rosanna Cioffi notes in her chapter on *La cultura europea del giovane Carlo e il suo gusto artistico*, it was to La Granja that the collection of classical statuary formed by Queen Christina of Sweden was brought, introducing Carlo to the taste embodied in the still greater Farnese collection of statues, housed at Parma.

But probably of the greatest significance for Carlo's formation were the journeys he undertook, as an adolescent from Spain to Italy in 1731-1732, and as a young man from Naples to Palermo in 1735. Their potential importance is highlighted in the contributions of Ignacio Gómez de Liaño and Gina Carla and Imma Ascione. The first of these journeys was undertaken when Carlo was just 15, with the purpose of ensuring that he was in the right place to take possession of the Duchy of Parma when the diplomatic moment arrived. The journey took him across Spain from Seville to Barcelona, over the Pyrenees and through southern France by way of Montpellier; from France he took ship to Livorno, before staying for seven months in Firenze as the guest of the ailing Grand Duke of Tuscany, while negotiations were conducted to make Carlo his reversionary heir. Finally, in October 1732, he made his formal entrance to Parma. Along the way he had taken pleasure in the wealth and ease of life he observed in France, and was particularly struck by Montpellier's *Jardin des Plantes*, which he would attempt to copy at Portici. In Parma, he again found the rural setting of the Dukes' summer residence at Colorno preferable to the Palazzo Ducale in the city itself: with La Granja, Colorno would offer inspiration for the residences of Portici and Capodimonte, and for the situation, if not the style, of the great Palazzo di Caserta.

Little is known about Carlo's second journey, from Parma to Naples in 1734; it is assumed that his mind was on military matters. But a third journey, undertaken a year later, may have been most influential of all. Carlo needed to visit Sicily not only

to take possession of the kingdom, but to be crowned as King of both Sicilies, a coronation in Palermo not needing to wait for a settlement of the historically vexed question of the kingdom of Naples' feudal subordination to the Papacy. Instead of taking ship to Palermo (as he did in the reverse direction after his coronation), Carlo journeyed to Sicily overland, through Campania, Basilicata and Calabria, staying in a succession of noble residences and fortresses between January and March 1735. As the Ascioni point out, he will thus have witnessed at first hand the power and independence of the great feudal nobility, whose castles, often set atop hills, dominated both towns and countryside for miles around. Where James VI of Scotland, travelling south to become James I of England in 1603, had marvelled at the elegant, unfortified country houses of the civilised English gentry, such a contrast with the bare, high-walled castles of the still barbarous Scottish nobility, Carlo di Borbone must have realised that the kingdom he had 'conquered' so easily from the outside would be much harder to rule from within.

What both *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* and *Corte e cerimoniali* bring out, however, is just how resolute were Carlo, his mother, his (and her) advisers and, after his marriage to Maria Amalia of Saxony in 1738, his wife, in establishing a royal presence in Carlo's new kingdom of Naples (Sicily continuing to be ruled by a Viceroy). The heart of this presence was the court itself, as a space in which an inter-connected web of carefully, traditionally defined roles were played by designated officers according to strict rules of precedence and elaborate rituals of behaviour. That the court of Carlo di Borbone receives so much attention in both volumes reflects the rapid growth in interest in 'Court Studies' among historians in the past thirty years, to the point that it now constitutes a historiographical field in its own right, with dedicated journals. But it is not simply for reasons of historiographical fashion that the court looms so large in the 'lives' of Carlo: together the volumes mount a strong case for concluding that the court was the key to his establishing the 'presence' of a new monarchy in Naples. Put simply, it was what Carlo di Borbone was good at.

Attention to detail was all. As Rao points out in her introduction to *Corte e cerimoniali*, one of the first questions to be addressed was Carlo's title. What number should he take as Carlo, king of Naples? The problem, as Pietro Giannone explained for later readers of his autobiography, was that the number must depend on whether French or Imperial predecessors were included in his lineage. If the former, he would be Carlo VII, if the latter, Carlo VI. When the Pope did agree to his investiture, in 1738, it was as Carlo VII. But when in 1742 a commission of ministers, jurists and scholars was assembled specifically to settle the issue, it was quite unable to do so. Celestino Galiani declared for Carlo VIII, but Contegna and Tanucci were flatly opposed, the latter adamant that there must be no recognition of the French interest. Under various other calculations discussed by the commission, it appeared he might be Carlo III, IV or V. In the end, Carlo di Borbone had to make do without a number, and to sign documents simply as «Re delle due Sicilie, di Gerusalemme etc., infante di Spagna, duca di Parma, Piacenza, Castro etc., gran principe ereditario di Toscana etc., generalissimo dell'armi di Sua Maestà Cattolica in Italia».

As Pablo Vazquez-Gestal has shown elsewhere, planning for the establishment of a court for Carlo di Borbone had begun well before he made his entry to Naples in 1734¹. Key appointments had been made by his mother when Carlo set out for Italy in 1731. The designated head of the household, the *mayordomo mayor*, was the Spanish nobleman, the Count of Santiesteban, Carlo's former governor. Under Santiesteban, the head of the bedchamber (*sumiller de corps*) was an Italian nobleman, the Duke of Tursi, of the Genoese Doria family. In 1734 a second Italian nobleman, Prince Bartolomeo Corsini, from a family with Florentine and Roman connections, was appointed *Caballeriza mayor*, responsible for the royal stables. Subsequently appointed Viceroy of Sicily, Corsini had the advantage of being a nephew of Pope Clement XII, which helped in negotiating the king's investiture of 1738. Another member of the Tuscan nobility at the new court was Marcello Venuti of Cortona, whose roles (and later those of his son Domenico) are discussed in a short contribution to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* by Paolo Giulierini.

Closely monitored by Elisabetta Farnese, but equipped for his part with the necessary appetite for detail and close control, Santiesteban ensured that the court's structure and practice followed the Spanish model. At the same time, he adapted to local tradition. As Elena Papagna and Ilaria Telesca show in their contributions to *Corte e cerimoniali*, he developed the practice of *baciamano*, previously utilised by the Austrian viceregal court, and incorporated the most important Neapolitan religious ceremonies into the court calendar. Crucially, Santiesteban also began to open court offices to members of the Neapolitan nobility, a process essential to the long-term effectiveness of the court as an institution of Neapolitan monarchy. One key figure who remained at the king's (and later the queen's) side throughout was his confessor, José Calzano de Bolaños, a Spanish Franciscan. But as Elisa Novi Chavarria shows in another important contribution to the same volume, Bolaños was discreet and retiring in manner, and made no attempt to impose himself at court, other than by seeking preferment for relatives. While enjoying the confidence of king and queen (with whom he returned to Spain in 1759), he was no threat to other courtiers. (If anyone's religious preferences were likely to disturb the local hierarchy, it was those of the queen, who, Pasquale Palmieri shows in the next contribution, had a weakness for female conventual visionaries).

Santiesteban's authority over the court lasted until 1738, when Carlo di Borbone married Princess Maria Amalia of Saxony. By that time Carlo himself was 22, and the new queen required a household of her own. Santiesteban's rivals circled, and Elisabetta Farnese withdrew her support; he returned to Spain. Although many of Santiesteban's political functions were taken over by the Secretary of State, the Marchese di Montealegre, also a Spaniard, the court was now Carlo's own. The integration of Neapolitan nobility gathered pace, not least through the king's determination to build up an army. When he made the arrangements to meet his bride-to-be at the frontier and conduct her to the capital, Giulio Sodano argues in his contribution to *Corte e cerimoniale*, it was the scale of the military escort which accompanied them which was most striking.

Yet if Carlo di Borbone was henceforth master of his own court, the court was also master of him. Capturing the extent and character of the constraints it imposed is a letter written by Carlo to his mother on 9 June 1739, quoted *in extenso* by Rao from the edition of his letters by Imma Ascione. In the letter, written in French, Carlo gave his mother an exact account of his working day. Rising at 8, he dressed and said his prayers between 8 and 9; for the next two hours he attended council, and between 11 and 12 he heard Mass. Dinner was at 12.15 or 12.30, after which he was available to see secretaries who wanted to speak to him. He then took a siesta, followed by a little time with his wife, until the hour to go out (at that time of year, 5 pm). The excursion, either to Capodimonte or to Portici, required an hour's drive through the city; but since on arrival he was taken directly to where he was to hunt, he needed to walk very little. Unfortunate rabbits would then be routed out of their warrens by ferrets, for the king to shoot or beat to death; after which he would return to the Palace to hear *Ave Maria*. Following an interval in which he might read a little, he had supper at 9 or later, after which he would say his prayers and go to bed. The letter ends with an assurance to his mother that he would continue in this regimen, and in moderation. 'Moderation' in the behaviour of a new king may well have been reassuring; but it was a timetable which left little room for Carlo to take initiatives of his own.

On this account, the king's enthusiasm for hunting did not require him to show any great skill, but at other venues, out in the countryside, he must have hunted on horseback. Given the importance of the activity to him, it is a pity that no contribution to either volume under review tackles the subject directly. Perhaps court historians are too fastidious, or too anxious to demonstrate that Carlo di Borbone should not be defined by the activity for which he is notorious. But there are many aspects of his interest in hunting about which it would be interesting to know more: his horses and horsemanship, the animals who were kept for his sport, the management of the lands reserved for hunting, and the costs. As it is, readers of *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* can catch a glimpse of some of these in the interesting essay by Elvira Chiosi and Aniello D'Iorio on the royal stud at Carditello, a feudal estate north of Naples which the crown repossessed and converted to pasture, slowly equipping it with the necessary infrastructure to support a project to restore equine breeding stock in southern Italy (although even for Carlo the primary intended beneficiary was not royal hunting but the army, which was short of cavalry).

By contrast with hunting, the royal tastes in painting and sculpture, in music, in books and in archaeology all receive attention in these volumes. Several contributors to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* attribute Carlo's artistic tastes to his parents, in particular to their acquisition of the collection of ancient statues formed by the abdicated Queen Christina of Sweden, which was shipped over to La Granja de Ildefonso. In qualification, Riccardo Lattuada points to the recourse to a Neapolitan tradition of scenography, developed by Giacomo del Po and Francesco Solimena, in the re-decoration of the royal apartments in the Palazzo Reale and at Portici following Carlo's marriage

to Maria Amalia. With jewellery, subject of a study by Maria Concetta di Natale, the standard of taste was French: the crown made for Carlo's coronation in Palermo in 1735 was the workmanship of Claude Imbert, an Avignon goldsmith.

If his artistic patronage does him credit, the king's taste in music has been regarded as a weakness, on account of an overheard criticism of Metastasio's *La clemenza di Tito* that it was too long. But Francesco Cotticelli and Paolo Giovanni Maione defend him, arguing that the urgency with which he ordered the construction of the Teatro San Carlo, the reform of the administration of the city's theatres, and the appointment of the Marchese di Liveri as Director of the Court theatre were all indications of the value he attached to the art. That Liveri himself felt both undervalued and inhibited by the dependence of the San Carlo on the court should not, Cotticelli argues in a separate contribution to *Corte e cerimoniale*, deprive Carlo di Borbone of credit for an attempt to engage with Neapolitan musical and theatrical traditions.

Although no contributor to either volume suggests that Carlo di Borbone was an avid reader of books, he did support the creation of a royal library. The library's initial holdings included the original Farnese collection, books Carlo had brought from Spain and others confiscated from the Austrophile nobleman, Tiberio Carafa. Subsequently an order of 1739 would require that the royal library, like the Brancacciana, should receive a copy of every book published in the kingdom. The fits and starts by which the library gradually took shape, the slow progress of its cataloguing, begun by Matteo Egizio, and its moves from the Palazzo Reale to Capodimonte and back down again to the Palazzo degli Studi, where it finally opened in 1804, are chronicled in the contribution to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* by Maria Gabriella Mansi. A complementary contribution by M. Victoria López-Cordón Cortezo suggests that the Neapolitan library's Spanish counterpart, the Real Biblioteca Pública in Madrid, was rather more professionally and purposefully organised.

But it is Carlo di Borbone's support for the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompei which has attracted the most favourable historical commentary. Still in this encomiastic vein is Ignacio Gómez de Liaño's essay on Carlo's 'three great journeys', of which these excavations are treated as his second 'journey', and those of the Maya ruins at Palenque, begun in 1773 after he had become King of Spain, as his third. For Gómez de Liaño, Carlo di Borbone is indeed «il Rey de las Luces, il Rey Arqueólogo». Later in *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone*, however, Mario Capasso applies the brakes to this assessment, by focussing in particular on the king's interest in the recovery and unrolling of the carbonized papyri unearthed at Herculaneum. Capasso acknowledges that Carlo's interest in the papyri, as in the excavations as a whole, was genuine, but argues that it was framed within a strategy of curating and exhibiting the discoveries for the benefit of the monarchy's image, while scholarly transcription and interpretation of the papyri proceeded at a much slower pace.

What these volumes suggest, however, is that the most effective of all assertions of the new royal presence was physical, through the appropriation, re-modelling and extension of

royal 'spaces'. Particularly relevant here are the contributions to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* by Paolo Mascilli Migliorini on the royal palaces and residences, Cesare de Seta on the design and construction of the great new palace at Caserta, and Paolo Giordano on royal building in the city of Naples. First to be transformed was the Palazzo Reale itself, Santiesteban immediately insisting that there be a visible difference between the apartments of a king and those which had been sufficient for a viceroy. These changes were complemented by the design and, in remarkably short order, construction of the Teatro San Carlo adjoining the Palazzo Reale. Planning for this, the largest opera house in Europe, began within two years of Carlo's arrival, and it was ready for performances before the end of 1739. Plans for new residences at Capodimonte and at Portici, where Carlo went hunting, soon followed. While Capodimonte was to house the royal collections of books and pictures, Portici was to be Carlo and Maria Amalia's La Granja, or Colorno, a summer residence away from the bustle and the dirt of the city, complete with a porcelain room, a botanical garden, a zoo – and the excavations fortuitously initiated by preparatory works for the residence. As Giordano notes, however, it was the realisation that the Palazzo Reale was not only inconvenient, but defenceless against bombardment by sea (as threatened by a British naval squadron in 1742), that stimulated the proposal for an entirely new main palace, north and inland from the city at Caserta. Financial constraints meant that design and construction of the new palace did not begin until the 1750s, and Carlo and his queen had left for Spain in 1759 before the palace was habitable. But as de Seta makes clear, both engaged directly with their chosen architect, Vanvitelli, during construction, over-riding him in particular on the design of the courtyards, which Carlo insisted must be identical and symmetrical. In the classical severity of the building and the scale and order of its grounds, Caserta was unmatched in Europe as a physical statement of a new royal presence. (And for those very reasons, as Gloria Camarero Gómez shows in a richly diverting contribution to *Le vite*, it has provided a perfect set for films both historical and fantastical).

Contemporary with the construction of Caserta were other royal building projects, designed to open up the city of Naples itself, transforming it from a walled capital into a territorial metropolis. To the north were a new Albergo de' Poveri and a municipal cemetery; to the East a vast new Granary, while to the west of the Palazzo Reale the crown encouraged the development of Chiaia. This last, Domenico Cecere argues in a contribution to *Corte e cerimoniale*, was a development positively encouraged by the relocation of festivals, both religious and secular, away from the old city, and in particular from the Piazza Mercato and the church of the Carmine. Meanwhile the crown had shifted another strategic emphasis by its choice of S. Chiara as the church in which to bury members of the royal family (in the first place two of Carlo and Maria Amalia's daughters who died in childhood in the 1740s). As Diego Carnevale points out in the same volume, the choice, instead of the Duomo and S. Domenico Maggiore, was a statement of royal intent not to accept subordination to the Neapolitan ec-

clesiastical hierarchy. Similar statements at the expense of the feudal nobility were implicit in the recovery and redevelopment of the estate of Carditello, and of the Masseria de Tresanti in Puglia; it is perhaps regrettable that there is only the contribution by Chiosi and D'Iorio to cover this manifestation of the crown's enhanced physical presence. In compensation, there is a contribution to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* by Simonetta Conti on developments in cartography in the kingdom under Carlo; this is complemented by another essay, by Mariano Cuesta Domingo, on the exploits of cartographers in Spanish America later in the century.

Covering all these topics, the two volumes under review provide many of the materials needed for a new biography of Carlo di Borbone. Together, they yield a far richer picture than we have had until now of how personal monarchy was re-established in the kingdom of Naples after 1734. Yet even so, the approaches they adopt, respectively to Carlo's 'lives' in their multiplicity and to his Neapolitan court and its ceremonial in particular, do not amount to a new history of his reign as King of the Two Sicilies – still less, as I have underlined, of his later reign as King of Spain and its American territories. Concentrating simply on Carlo di Borbone as King of the Sicilies, there are two settings in which his monarchy has to be considered in order to write a full history of his reign. These settings are external and internal. It is not that the volume editors and their contributors give no consideration at all to these settings: on the contrary, as we shall see. But since they do not provide the volumes with their organising principles, there is an important sense in which the volumes remain preparatory to any re-assessment of Carlo's monarchy. The volumes' merit is to re-open the question of how the history of his reign should be written, and to provide materials for a new answer; they do not themselves provide that answer.

The external setting for Carlo di Borbone's new monarchy is sketched by Aurelio Musi, both in his editor's introduction to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* and in a separate contribution. The key to Carlo's (and his mother's) success in winning and holding an independent kingdom, Musi argues, was the shift from the unipolar Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, dominated successively by the Spanish and the French monarchies, to the multipolar Europe established by and in the aftermath of the Peace of Utrecht in 1713. Not simply was there to be a balance between Bourbon and Habsburg, Spain and Austria, placing Italy between them, but the greater northern powers of France and Great Britain would determine just how far any issues involving Italy would be allowed to develop, and how they should be resolved. Elisabetta Farnese might overplay her hand when she tried to insert her son into the Imperial succession; but she would be permitted to enable him to take up his inheritance of Parma without recognising Imperial suzerainty. And if Carlo was also able to muster sufficient land forces to take control of the kingdoms of the Sicilies, and then to defend them against subsequent Austrian counter-attack, the powers would not treat that as a *causis belli* among themselves. The problem, of course, was that the 'independence' granted to Carlo di Borbone as King of the Two Sicilies was *dependent*

on the good will of France, the power whose armies were best placed to control Italy by land, and of Great Britain, whose navy was becoming ever more predominant in the Mediterranean. The appearance of Admiral Matthews' squadron in the Bay of Naples in 1742 to force Neapolitan withdrawal from the anti-Austrian coalition was but a timely reminder of this harsh truth. If anything, the achievement of Carlo di Borbone in such a setting was to make the most of his weakness, and to avoid provoking the powers on which his tenure of his thrones depended; in this perspective, the disasters of 1799, at the hands first of the French, then of the British, highlight how successful were Carlo, his son Ferdinando, and their ministers in maintaining their kingdoms' dependent independence for so long. But it is fair to say the volumes provide no new insights into how that success was achieved.

The internal setting of Carlo Di Borbone's Neapolitan monarchy is the province pre-eminently of Anna Maria Rao, and in her editor's introduction and her own contribution to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* she seeks to lower expectations of the new king's scope for 'reform'. As she points out, the meanings, both moral-political and administrative-practical, which historians now give to the term were only just coming into use in the second half of the eighteenth century: it is anachronistic, therefore, to hold Carlo di Borbone to the ideal of 'reform' proposed by Carlantonio Pilati in 1767. What was on the agenda in the 1730s and 1740s was push-back against ecclesiastical jurisdiction, along with attempts to prevent further weakening of the crown's powers over feudal landholdings and jurisdictions, both of which inhibited its ability to govern, its revenue, and its scope to draw the nobility and educated professionals into royal service. The new king was clearly willing to allow his ministers to tackle these issues, giving considerable rein first to Montealegre, the Secretary of State, then to Tanucci. And if Carlo himself is not recorded as taking an interest in the new literature of commerce, he did not discourage ministers from seeking advice from those who did, including Celestino Galiani and another Tuscan incomer, Bartolomeo Intieri. By the 1750s both Celestino's nephew Ferdinando Galiani and Antonio Genovesi were left free to publish on the subjects of money and commerce, and to invoke a wider 'public' to help persuade government to act on their recommendations.

Examples of what the new monarchy attempted in its internal government are provided by two contributions to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone*, by Giuseppe Cirillo and David García Hernán, devoted to the attempts, first in Naples then in Spain, to establish up-to-date definitions of noble status, and hence to align the Neapolitan and Spanish nobilities more closely with royal service. That the strategies in both cases were conservative, emphasising lineage rather than expertise and merit, was not necessarily inconsistent with reform: arguably the most successful 'enlightened absolutists', like Frederick II of Prussia, predicated reform on respect for existing, hereditary nobility. Elsewhere in the same volume, Vittoria Ferandino broaches the crucial question of the crown's recourse to the Neapolitan banks for advances on extraordinary taxes known as 'donatives' – but halts the investigation before it

yields any indication whether the crown was able to update and enhance its supply of credit. It does not help that Ferrandino's co-author, Amedeo Lepore, has been heedless of Rao's attempts to dampen expectations of the new king, and opens their contribution with a meaningless reference to «la sua vasta opera di riforma». Much harder-headed is Rossella Cancila in her study of the initiatives taken by the king's ministers in Sicily, where the failure of Montealegre to impose the jurisdiction of the Naples-based Supremo Magistrato di Commercio in the early 1740s stands in contrast with the more successful attempts after 1747 of the Viceroy Eustachio Lavieufuille to induce reform of Sicily's courts from below, simplifying jurisdictions and improving the selection of officials. Evidently it was no easier for Carlo to rule Sicily as a viceroyalty from Naples than it had been for the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs to rule the viceroyalty of Naples over the preceding two hundred years. But contributions as various as these are an insufficient basis for a thorough-going reassessment of Carlo di Borbone's reign within his kingdoms. Most of all, what is missing from *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* is any sense of the way he as king interacted with his ministers, whether he read and annotated the memoranda they prepared for him, and how he behaved when he made time, in the morning and again after dinner, to speak to them. In short, how did the Neapolitan monarchy of Carlo di Borbone actually work?

That the two volumes under review do not answer this question is not to detract from what they do achieve. Together, they greatly enhance our understanding of how Carlo di Borbone established his 'presence' in Naples, re-founding the kingdom through the creation of a properly royal court, the adjustment of its ceremonial to local traditions, and, above all, the renewal and building of his palaces, places of entertainment (both internal and open air), and the sites which served them, such as the stud at Carditello. The objective of exploring the 'lives' of Carlo di Borbone in their multiplicity has paid many dividends. If it is an irony of the approach that Carlo di Borbone himself remains elusive, suggesting that a biography treating his 'life' in any depth remains very difficult to write, it is nonetheless the case that these volumes put historians in a much better position to write the history of his 'reign' as King of the Two Sicilies. Since it will not be the author of this review who writes such a history, any conclusions I draw are purely provisional. But it seems reasonable to conclude with the following reflections.

Carlo di Borbone, it is clear, was much more than an obsessive hunter of animals for sport. He was an effective leader of a royal court, who succeeded in rallying a hitherto turbulent nobility to his monarchy. At the same time, he was a king who recognised the importance of government, and if he did not himself use the language of 'reform', even in its older sense of 're-foundation', he permitted, perhaps encouraged, his ministers to pursue what historians recognise as reform in practice, enlarging royal authority at the expense of ecclesiastical and feudal jurisdiction, building up revenue and an army, and acknowledging that commerce had become an affair of state, even if the government's room for economic manoeuvre,

internal and external, was quite severely limited. That he received little credit for these achievements, at least as King of the Two Sicilies, seems unlikely to have irked him; if anything, he is more likely to have been puzzled by what Girolamo Imbruglia shows was the relatively favourable judgement passed on him as Carlos III of Spain by Raynal and Diderot in their *Histoire des deux Indes*.

Of course, comparison with his contemporaries among European rulers also makes it clear what Carlo di Borbone was not. He was not a soldier, a campaigner with the stamina and capacity for military leadership of Frederick II. He was not an administrator, having nothing like the will to govern of Joseph II. And he was not a mind, like Frederick, or Catherine the Great. He wrote letters, not memoranda, and certainly not treatises. If historians still wish to think of this as an era of enlightened absolutists, as Musi and Rao both do, Carlo di Borbone barely qualifies to be among them. It may be said, as Giuseppe Galasso puts it in his magisterial opening contribution to *Le vite di Carlo di Borbone* (of which he is the dedicatee), that the initiatives undertaken in Carlo's name were in accord with the progressive tendencies of his lifetime, but that only reinforces the impression that he himself lacked agency.

Yet Carlo di Borbone was as successful as Frederick, and more successful than either Catherine or the hyperactive Joseph II, in the most essential task of monarchy: ruling without provoking serious revolt. It was an achievement all the more creditable in a new monarchy, as his was in Naples. Perhaps the best explanation for this success lies in what these volumes show he understood and was good at: the establishment and conduct of a royal court. The key lies, after all, in that letter of 1739 dutifully reporting his day to his mother, Elisabetta Farnese. Carlo di Borbone's dedication to the regime of his court simply did not give him time to engage with the detail of government, or to read and write his way into the role of an 'enlightened' ruler². Even the time he could devote to his favourite diversion of hunting was limited. But here may have lain his greatest quality: Carlo di Borbone played to his strengths, and understood the limits of his abilities and of his power as king.

¹ P. VÁZQUEZ-GESTAL, "The system of this court": Elizabeth Farnese, the Count of Santiesteban and the Monarchy of the Two Sicilies 1734-1738, in «The Court Historian», XIV, 2009, 1, pp. 23-47. Vázquez-Gestal participated in the colloquium which formed the basis for the volume *Corte e cerimoniale*, but is not himself a contributor to either volume under review. See also his contributions: *Los espacios de una nueva majestad. Carlos de Borbón y los Sitios Reales de la monarquía de la Dos Sicilias (1734-1759)*, in *Una Corte para el Rey. Carlos III y los Reales Sitios*, exhibition cat., Madrid, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid 2016, pp. 52-62; *La fondazione del Sistema rituale della monarchia delle Due Sicilie (1734-1738). Storia ed epistemologia*, in *Cerimoniale dei Borbone di Napoli 1734-1801*, edited by A. Antonelli, Napoli 2017, pp. 69-70.

² Frederick II, by contrast, made time to write by dispensing with a court and living alone in Potsdam in the miniature Palace of Sans-Souci, while his wife, whom he disdained and saw very rarely, kept a court in his absence in Berlin.