Aristocracy and Transformation. The Eighteenth-Century Towns of South-eastern Sicily

Martin Trevor John Nixon

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University of York

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Abstract.

This thesis focuses on the rebuilding of the Val di Noto towns in south-eastern Sicily after the earthquake of 1693. Academic literature usually presents this architecture in terms of ideal cities and putative baroque harmony. I question the link between geometric urbanism and rationalism by analysing how the rebuilding enabled and maintained the power of certain aristocratic families.

I investigate how architecture is implicated in power relations. I argue that rebuilding after the earthquake provided an opportunity for aristocrats to remake their territory through new locations and new forms of urbanism. The new towns and palaces were essential for the work of aristocracy. The straight streets, geometrically regular piazzas and new palaces placed the aristocrat within a putative world of rationality, modernity and refinement.

Four case studies analyse aristocratic patronage and geometry, territorialisation, distinction and ornament. The case studies allow for architectural analysis at different spatial scales, from the scale of an entire town in Avola and Grammichele, to the facades of palaces in Noto and Scicli and the ballroom of the Palazzo Biscari in Catania. These spatial cuts also allow a focus on aristocratic families of different economic and social levels, from the high-ranking Aragona Pignatelli, Carafa Branciforte and Paternò Castello, to the local aristocrats of Noto and Scicli.

The dissertation also investigates palace facades and ornament. Instead of seeing ornament as an addition or a dressing to the building’s putative structure or body, I argue that it is central to the Sicilian facades’ material affect. I read the richness and strangeness of the Sicilian decoration in terms of transformation, subversion and fear.

The new towns involved transformation. Transformation of towns and landscapes through new urbanism, transformation of family fortunes, transformation of bodies through aristocratic refinement and dance. The dissertation investigates urbanism, facades and ornament, architectural and military treatises and dance manuals to investigate how these architectural transformations interact with the maintenance and transformation of aristocratic power.
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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented as an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.
Introduction. Transformation and Material Affect.

In January 1693, one of Italy’s most powerful recorded earthquakes struck the Val di Noto area of south-eastern Sicily (fig.1). There were two shocks, one on January 9 and another on January 11. The earthquake killed approximately 60,000 people, slightly more than one in five of an estimated population of around 260,000. Around 60 towns were affected. Of the most populated centres, Catania and Noto were completely destroyed. The important towns of Ragusa, Syracuse and Modica suffered significant damage. Medium-sized towns such as Avola and Scicli, and many smaller centres, were left in ruins.

Eyewitnesses describe the event’s horror as God’s visitation on the people. Arcangelo Leanti’s *Lo stato presente della Sicilia* (Palermo, 1761), a compendium on Sicily written seventy years after the earthquake, concludes: “l’orribile terremoto del 1693 è stato senza alcun dubbio il maggiore, e sarà sempre il più memorabile negli annali di questa isola: recò nell’universale scossa, e massime nella valle di Noto la rovina di molte città, e terre al numero di 60, e la strage di 70 mila persone.”

An undated map of circa 1700 by the Nuremberg engraver Johann Baptist Homann shows this horror (fig.2). It lists 66 ruined towns. It represents Sicily as a place of unpredictable telluric violence. In the title piece, three figures representing the three vali or traditional divisions of Sicily watch in anguish as the ground opens up below. The arms of the king of Spain, Sicily’s ruler, sink into oblivion. One figure points in alarm at the huge fires coming from Mount Etna. The figure with the mitre looks up to the sky, but no help is forthcoming. The third figure watches a city disappearing into the earth. One putto, the royal sceptre discarded beneath his feet, almost falls into the chasm. Another putto opposite weeps at the loss, while a third tries to escape from the terror.

Rebuilding after earthquakes is part of the history of many Sicilian towns, but the reconstruction of so many centres after 1693 was a major architectural undertaking. The amount of new construction was comparable to such projects as Saint Petersburg, built between 1703 and the 1720s, or the rebuilding of Lisbon after the 1755 earthquake. The Val di Noto reconstruction resulted in hundreds of new buildings and townscapes, and completely new locations for four towns. Its effects continued far into the eighteenth century. Many buildings rebuilt after 1693, such as the Palazzo Biscari in Catania, the Palazzo Impellizzeri in Noto, or the cathedral of Modica, were only completed sixty or more years later.
There is no evidence of collaboration between the towns. Each town was rebuilt separately. The Spanish government’s policy from the mid-sixteenth century to maintain a system of defensive towers and garrisons around Sicily against an Ottoman threat, and later from possible attack by European rivals such as France, provided the only situation where the towns were considered in relation to each other. For example, the new town of Avola was fortified. The new town of nearby Noto was not, because Avola could defend it. Overall, it is more accurate to talk of reconstructions of the Val di Noto. Stefano Piazza calls this rebuilding process a “constellation of micro-stories”. Each town has its own history of coercion, compromise, rivalry and opportunity.

This dissertation engages with some of these micro-stories to investigate architecture’s role in reasserting aristocratic power and privilege after the earthquake. I do not attempt to cover all of the towns. Instead, four case studies use a series of spatial cuts that allow analysis of the architecture at different spatial scales, and discussion of different kinds of towns and aristocratic involvement. Chapter One starts at a large spatial scale to discuss two new towns, Avola and Grammichele, which were rebuilt to hexagonal layouts by Sicily’s highest-ranking aristocrats. Chapter Two moves to the strange facade of the Palazzo Beneventano in Scicli, a small town of feuding local aristocrats, Chapter Three discusses palace facades in Noto, a medium-sized town dominated by several aristocratic families, and Chapter Four investigates the spectacular ballroom of the Palazzo Biscari in Catania.

I focus on the architectural commissions of three of Sicily’s most powerful families; the Aragona Pignatelli, patrons of Avola, the Carafa Branciforte, patrons of Grammichele, and the Paternò Castello of Catania, as well as the commissions of aristocrats who competed for political influence in Noto and Scicli. These commissions include new urbanistic projects and new palaces. The lack of attention given to aristocratic palaces compared to ecclesiastical architecture is a gap in the scholarship. This is partly due to the scholarship’s empirical, document-based approach. Ecclesiastical patrons were more likely to record transactions and store them in church archives. It is usually easier to visit a church than most Sicilian palaces, which are mostly privately owned. In some cases the original family is extinct, or the palace is abandoned or has been divided into separate apartments. This lack of documentation works against a positivist methodology intent on constructing narrative chronologies.

This dissertation resists centre-periphery distinctions and argues that the Val di Noto buildings are not provincial offshoots of a putative mainstream. Scholars outside southern Italy generally ignore the area’s architecture, or reduce it to a postscript. Surveys of
seventeenth and eighteenth-century Italian architecture include the Val di Noto architecture but present it as a ‘late’ or regional variant of a Roman mainstream, albeit one that is distinctive and inventive. The tendency to describe Sicilian architecture as a provincial variant of Rome, where Sicilian architects adapt outside ideas, relates to a broader separation of southern Italy from a European mainstream.

Most of the scholarship on the Val di Noto architecture is by Sicilian art historians who tend to focus on one town or area. The methodology is overwhelmingly empirical. These studies provide data on architects and patrons, supported by references to archival documents. This approach still dominates much of the scholarship. A related tendency is to search for matches between Sicilian buildings and treatises produced outside the island. This valorises Sicilian architecture by connecting it to international networks of architectural ideas, but risks making Sicily a recipient, rather than a generator, of important architectural ideas. In the seventeenth century, Rome is seen as the principal centre for new architecture in Sicily, with French and Central European designs becoming more prominent in the eighteenth century.

There are connections between Sicilian architecture and treatise images. Fulvia Scaduto’s study of architectural treatises held in the Biblioteca Centrale della Regione Siciliana shows works owned by Sicilian architects, aristocrats and religious institutions. Marco Rosario Nobile argues for many instances of similarities between Sicilian buildings and treatise images. Nobile and Alexandra Kraemer investigate connections between Sicily and eighteenth-century French and German treatises. However, once a possible match between treatise images and a Sicilian building is made, there is very little further analysis. The approach risks assuming an ‘original’ that always originates outside Sicily, and tends to limit further investigation of the Sicilian architecture.

Anthony Blunt’s Sicilian Baroque (1968) introduced the architecture to readers in English, but there are only 41 pages of text plus 13 pages of notes to cover all of Sicily over a period of approximately 250 years. Most buildings receive 2 or 3 paragraphs at most, and documentation on the architecture was still at an early stage. The 2007 translation of Maria Giuffrè’s Barocco in Sicilia (2006) is the only survey in English since Anthony Blunt’s Sicilian Baroque. Giuffrè’s survey is principally an introduction to this architecture for a non-specialist reader. It summarises arguments and examples that appear in the work of Giuffrè and other Sicilian scholars since the 1960s. Stephen Tobriner’s The Genesis of Noto (1982) is the only work in English on the Val di Noto. Tobriner uses archival documents to reconstruct the conflicts in the rebuilding, and then gives brief histories and stylistic
descriptions of Noto’s principal buildings. I discuss his approach in more detail in my chapter on Noto.

The monograph *Palazzo Nicolaci di Villadorata a Noto: l'esperienza di un restauro attraverso studi, ricerche e conoscenze* (2009), edited by Giovanna Susan, is the only substantial study of a Val di Noto palace published in recent years. The volume was produced after a ten-year restoration of the palace and most of its chapters deal with technical aspects of the restoration. Michele Luminati’s chapter on the Nicolaci family, the palace’s patrons, is useful for archival documentation on the Nicolaci’s acquisition of plots for the palace and its building phases.

The only other detailed study of Sicilian palaces is Stefano Piazza’s *Architettura e nobiltà. I palazzi del settecento a Palermo* (2005), which discusses eighteenth-century Palermitan palaces. Piazza’s first chapter is principally a political history of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Sicily interwoven with short descriptions of Palermitan palaces. The second chapter is a chronological study of Sicilian architects and their commissions in Palermo. As with the studies of Nobile and Kraemer discussed earlier, Piazza frequently relates these architects’ work to architects and buildings outside Sicily. In the final chapter Piazza starts from the Sicilian architect Giovan Biagio Amico’s prescription that a palace should have four floors to discuss how space on each floor was divided and used in Palermitan palaces. He uses the palaces as exemplars of typologies of usage of space.

My approach investigates more closely the way the Val di Noto architecture operated within the ambitions of its patrons. I discuss architecture and aristocratic patronage as part of social and political transformation, not just a reflection of it. My approach is informed by Helen Hills’ work on architecture as furthering political purpose, and as directly interacting with social change rather than just representing disembodied ideas or a disembodied notion of power. Chandra Mukerji’s work on territorial transformation, where landscape architecture enables the creation of new physical and symbolic environments, and Martha Pollak’s study of connections between town planning and military architecture, are important for my analysis of the urbanism of Avola and Grammichele. I discuss their work in more detail in Chapter One.

Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of social distinction also inspires my approach. I discuss Bourdieu’s work in Chapter Four on the Palazzo Biscari ballroom, but his insights into how political domination is justified and made to appear natural informs much of this dissertation. Michel Foucault’s writing on power also underpins the dissertation.
power as an abstract force which architecture symbolises or represents, Foucault’s work investigates power as manifest in material outcomes. It considers who benefits from material action and, like Bourdieu, how dominant discourses frame and justify the exertion and maintenance of power.

This dissertation also analyses ornament. The Val di Noto palace architecture is full of ornament. The ornament colonises the facades. It is often crowded and luxurious, such as on the facade of the Palazzo Massa di San Demetrio in Catania or the balconies of the Palazzo Nicolaci in Noto (figs. 3 and 4). 34 On the Palazzo Massa, human, animal and plant sculptures open like buds around their frames of multiple pilasters and indeterminate classical orders. Zoomorphic forms struggle to free themselves from other sculpture of twisting scrolls, volutes and less-easily definable elements. The bays and pilasters of the Palazzo Massa partly support and regulate the ornament, but the ornament also partially overcomes them.

The decoration’s strangeness, its deviation from canonical laws and its lack of restraint, led many writers to condemn it. On his visit to Catania in the late 1770s, Henry Swinburne reports of the cathedral: “It has suffered so much by earthquakes, that little of the original structure remains, and the modern parts have hardly anything, except their materials, to recommend them. The other religious edifices of the city are profusely ornamented, but in a bad taste.” 35

Richard Payne Knight, another eighteenth-century English visitor to Catania, describes the sea-facing facade of the Palazzo Biscari: “The Prince’s Palace is a great irregular building, the ancient part of it in the barbarous taste of the Sicilians, charged with monstrous figures, and unnatural ornaments, but the part which he has built himself is simple, regular and elegant.” 36 The sea-facing facade includes androgynous figures and profuse vegetal ornament, whereas the newer part of the palace Payne Knight refers to is in a more classicising style.

For these Grand Tourists arriving in the Val di Noto to view classical antiquities, Sicilian facade decoration often lacked Winckelmann’s “noble simplicity”. 37 On his visit to Catania in the 1780s, Dominic Vivant Denon writes:

È veramente peccato che le forti spesi affrontate dai suoi ricchi abitanti non siano state dirette con maggior gusto: se, invece dei grandi palazzi e delle immense chiese di
un’architettura pomposa e complicata si fosse stato scelto uno stile nobile e semplice, Catania sarebbe stata una delle più splendide città del regno di Napoli. 38

Such assumptions have continued in art history. The putatively coherent art historical era conventionally categorised as ‘late baroque’ or ‘rococo’ suffers from connotations of theatricality, decadence and the grotesque. 39 Ornament carries associations of extravagance and excess. Katie Scott writes: “Eighteenth-century French decorative arts labour under a double indictment: by their place of destination [the fact that the ornament is found on furniture and interiors, the domestic space] and by the structures of hereditary privilege and habits of extravagance that under the ancien régime gave them life.” 40 Eighteenth-century Sicilian palace decoration therefore risks being ignored as decadent and frivolous, rather than as architecture which is no less serious than any other.

Architectural historians also habitually treat ornament as subordinate due to its association with the artisanal. Of the opening of the Musée des arts décoratifs in Paris in 1905, Katie Scott argues:

Decorative arts are arts produced in artisanal, that is to say pre-industrial conditions, and they have been positioned by modern historiography as the antipodes of design […] decorative arts, unlike design, necessarily have strong locational value; they belong to particular places – in these essays, to the workshop and the domestic interior. 41

Although Scott’s differentiation between pre-industrial and industrial doesn’t apply in eighteenth-century Sicily, the idea of a local, craft tradition subordinated to an intellectual and geometric design process pervades the literature on the post-earthquake architecture.

The literature on the Val di Noto often relegates ornament to a place outside architecture, where it is the caprice of local artisans. 42 Carlo Cresti and Oscar Spadola published the only book-length studies of the Val di Noto mensole (carved balcony corbels) and mascheroni (mask-like decoration). 43 Cresti’s 2003 work mainly comprises photographs of the balconies, with only 37 pages of text. Much of this text consists of citations from Sicilian scholars, and novelists and poets including Giovanni Verga, Leonardo Sciascia and Gesualdo Bufalino. The citations create a poetic mood, but there is no analysis.

Oscar Spadola’s 1982 study of palace balconies in Ragusa has greater depth than Cresti’s more general survey. Spadola includes profiles on many of the palaces, with some visual description and information on patrons and dates. There is a similarity with Cresti’s study in
the frequent citation of Sicilian architectural historians such as Salvatore Boscarino, Giuseppe Bellafiore and Giuseppe Salonia. There are also many quotations from the Sicilian dialect poet Domenico Tempio, whose work often dealt with the sensual. The quotations from Tempio, adjacent to photographs and drawings of the Ragusa mensole, promote a reading of the balconies as concerned with sensual pleasures.

The hybrid facade decoration poses problems for these conventional forms of scholarship. The decoration can distort the canonical orders beyond recognition and create new, ambiguous forms. Connections scholars make between Sicilian architecture and treatise images focus more on canonical and definable architectural features such as capitals, windows or internal doorframes. Much of the palace decoration cannot be accounted for in this way.

I analyse the ornament more closely in terms of how it questions distinctions of architectural member, sculpture and ornament, and distinctions of human, animal, plant and architectural member. The ornament involves hybrid transition. The facades have a flowering, breathing life. Their decoration asserts its bodyliness over classical facades that attempt to reduce or subsume beings and emotions into templates and geometry. Classical orders jostle with hybrid human, animal and plant forms. The decoration becomes both architectural member and representation of strange life forms. Capitals, modillions and other canonical facade elements metamorphosise into hybrid creatures that shift between categories.

The dissertation engages in different ways with architecture and the body. My aim is not to attempt a complete analysis of relationships between bodies and architecture, but to explore certain relationships between the body and Val di Noto architecture. In the first chapter, I discuss how the apparently rational and disinterested planning of Avola and Grammichele subsumes or masks the human body into geometric grids. I argue that the planning of these towns, and the subsequent scholarship, ignores the bodies and life functions of the inhabitants. It also disembodies the person of the aristocratic rulers and hides their assertion of power behind seemingly neutral and harmonious geometric layouts.

In the second chapter, I relate the threatening bodies of the Palazzo Beneventano mensole to Antonino Mongitore’s writing on wondrous and magical bodies. In the chapter on Noto, I discuss Mark Wigley’s argument that Alberti’s analogy of the building as a body and its surface as jewellery contributes to the relegation of ornament in architectural history. I also analyse the Palazzo Nicolaci façade in terms of aporetic hybrid creatures that question taxonomies of human, animal and plant. The last chapter on the Palazzo Biscari ballroom
connects the ballroom to the training of desirable and disciplined aristocratic bodies through dance.

Relationships between architecture and the bodies can be related to ideas of how architecture acts on health regimes and well being. Many treatise writers, including Vitruvius, Alberti, Palladio and the Sicilian Giovan Biagio Amico, stressed the importance of architecture and health, particularly in siting a new building or town. Vitruvius and Amico include medicine as a necessary part of an architect’s knowledge. In the chapter in Noto, I show how the healthiness of a site was an important argument in where to rebuild the town.

These considerations were more important in choosing the site than the geometric layouts celebrated by later scholars. Physical self-control is also related to health regimes. In Book 3 of De Familia, Alberti emphasises prosperity and health through exercise, an orderly life and self-control. In Sicily, issues of aristocratic self-control are implicated in the arguments in favour of dance training, and in investigations of restrained palace facades, as I will discuss.

In the structure of my dissertation I adopt different areas of scale or ‘distances’ from the towns to analyse different facets of the architecture. In Chapter One I work from a larger scale to consider urbanism in the creation of two entirely new towns, whereas in Chapter Two I analyse the Palazzo Beneventano facade closely in order to relate the facade to urban rivalries and implications of violence. My claim is not that these diverse viewpoints create an all-encompassing argument. I use the case studies to question assumptions of geometry, rationality, and surface versus structure in the scholarship on the Val di Noto.

In Chapter One, I focus on the unusual hexagonal layouts of Avola and Grammichele, the only hexagonal towns in Italy. The literature mainly discusses these towns in terms of ideal, treatise-derived planned cities. I acknowledge the importance of treatises on fortified geometric towns, but dispute the recourse to a putative neutral and ideal geometry as generator of architecture. Instead, I investigate how, after the earthquake, the patrons of Avola and Grammichele implicated geometry in a forceful and radical material and symbolic transformation of territory and their feudal subjects’ environment.

Chandra Mukerji’s work on territoriality at a national level in seventeenth-century France informs my study of a smaller area. In Avola and Grammichele, aristocratic landowners were not recasting nations as in the France of Louis XIV that Mukerji analyses, but they were recasting their territory. They rebuilt Avola and Grammichele with layouts that emanated a new, putatively rational order. They recast their political dominance and superiority through appeals to rationalism and geometry.
Chapter Two discusses the disconcerting facade sculpture of the Palazzo Beneventano in Scicli in order to investigate how this facade challenges expectations that decoration should beautify. On the Palazzo Beneventano, monstrous faces snarl from below the balconies. Lower down, there are heads of Turks or ‘Moors’. Canonical architectural decoration transforms into imagery of violence and fear. The absence of documentation on this palace creates further challenges, but also opens opportunities for other ways to read the facade. I do not promote a single reading for the decoration, but I relate it to violence and fear of the Other.

Chapter Three discusses the facade of the Palazzo Nicolaci in Noto. During the eighteenth century the merchant Nicolaci family acquired both noble status and land for a large palace rivalling those of more established families. Their palace facade is different from others in Noto (figs. 3 and 42). It includes elaborate zoomorphic mensole or balcony corbel decoration. This sculpture is rare in Noto but common in most other parts of south-eastern Sicily. The Palazzo Nicolaci facade’s strangeness defies conventional architectural vocabulary. I analyse parts of the facade and compare it with the other important Noto palaces in order to investigate aristocratic competition and assumptions around ornament, luxury and restraint, as well as ideas of the marginal and liminal.

Chapter Four moves to the interior of a palace to focus on the ballroom of the Palazzo Biscari in Catania, residence of the city’s most powerful family. In the palaces that include them, the ballroom is the largest and most lavishly decorated room. I discuss the Palazzo Biscari ballroom in terms of lightness and noble distinction. The ballroom’s liquid and reflecting decoration, its materials of gold, glass and stucco, are refined and delicate. I then investigate how ballrooms, dance, and the training of aristocratic bodies maintained distinction through lightness and refinement. Rather than discussing the ballroom as an empty shell, I attempt to repopulate it by investigating the entertainments and dances it enabled.

Terminology.

Some conventional art-historical terms are problematic. I use ‘Baroque’ only when quoting others. ‘Baroque’ is often associated with religious dogma and the Counter Reformation. Eighteenth-century Italy is chronologically far from the Council of Trent. In sum, ‘Baroque’ assigns predetermined generic attributes to architecture of this chronological period. ‘Early Modern’ also presents problems. It implies that the period between approximately 1500 and 1800 is an embryonic, preparatory version of a modernity beginning somewhere in the
nineteenth century. Although 'later-eighteenth-century Sicilian architecture' is more cumbersome than 'Early Modern' or 'Sicilian Rococo', it avoids slipping architecture into a form of shorthand where the interpretation of the architecture is already largely determined by the label that describes it.

Finally, there is the problem of 'Italy' and 'Italian' in discussing a period when Italy did not exist as a nation. In contrast to the discussion above on 'Baroque' and 'Early Modern', I have chosen to use 'Italy' and 'Italian' to avoid circumlocutions such as 'the other Italian-speaking areas' or 'Sicily and the Italian peninsular'. There are cases where these circumlocutions become particularly wordy when paraphrasing adjectives or adverbs in order to avoid the word 'Italian'.


Illustrations for the Introduction.

Fig. 1. Map showing the locations of the Val di Noto towns. (Image from Tobriner 1982: 26).
Fig. 2. Title piece from the map *Infelicis regni Siciliae tabuli in tres valles divisa*. Engraving by Johann Baptist Homann. Published by David Funcke, Nuremberg. c. 1700. (Image from Giuffrè, 2007:12).
Fig. 3. Detail of the façade of the Palazzo Massa di San Demetrio, Catania. Alonso de Benedetto. Begun 1694.
Fig. 4. Balcony of the Palazzo Nicolaci, Noto. 1737. Architect Unknown. (Image from Muti ed. 2008: 25).
Chapter One. The Rebuilding of Avola and Grammichele. Territoriality and Regimes of Power.

Introduction. Ideal Cities and Naturalising Geometry.

Two images in the Sicilian architect Giovanni Biagio Amico’s treatise L’architetto pratico (Palermo, 1726 and 1750) show very different assumptions about building (figs. 5 and 6). One image presents architecture as emanating from laws of geometry (fig.5). A curtain-like hanging carries geometrical diagrams. Putti use measuring rods and compasses to copy the geometric figures to the ground. One child points at the curtain. Another follows a diagram. The children’s’ drawings are marks on the ground, but the templates precede them. The geometric axioms exist first as perfect diagrams, as independent, Platonic forms to be replicated on earth.

In this conception of building, architecture is an instantiation of ideal forms. The children access purportedly pure, higher geometric forms. They first read the perfect circles and arcs in the plan, then set about copying them. Individual buildings are exemplars of prior, independently existing geometric templates. The assumption is that the architect’s primary work is to conceive the building in terms of geometric relationships. Once the plan is created, constructing the town becomes routine. The work of building becomes simply an enactment of its ideal, geometric plan. Construction is separated from architecture. This confines architecture to the conceptual and ideal. The physical nature of building, and what is at stake politically, economically and materially in architecture, disappears.

A second illustration contrasts sharply with the idealist image in fig.5. It shows the physicality of construction (fig.6). In the text relating to the image, Amico describes the use of vaulting or wooden piles for building on soft ground. Deep trenches are dug down to more solid ground. The external surface of the wooden piles is partially burnt to prevent it rotting when driven into the ground. On the right of the image, a man using a huge round weight hammers the piles into the earth. Like the first image, this illustration shows marking and shaping of the ground, but here the earth is not just a flat surface for geometrical figures. It has solidity and depth. It takes effort to work it. Workers dig into the land, test its physical properties and build foundations. People, oxen and donkeys do not just trace lines. They move heavy materials. They deploy wood and stone to support buildings. They excavate and transform the landscape.
A further illustration shows the construction of a facade (fig. 7). It accompanies a part of Amico’s text on building walls with stone and brick. 49 This image, like figure 6, is far from the world of putti and ideal geometric forms. Constructing the building involves effort, and has a physical effect upon the landscape. Workers use pulleys to lift stone blocks to where a mason fixes the facade with mortar. Other workers dig trenches for foundations around the facade. Two men carry a block towards the pulleys. The stones have a weight and need to be lifted with the aid of mechanical devices.

The dichotomy between these two conceptions of architecture is central to this chapter. I discuss the towns of Avola and Grammichele, the only hexagonal towns in Italy (figs 8-9). 50 Scholarship on the towns since the 1960s mainly reads these towns as exemplars of ideal cities derived from treatises, rather than in terms of territoriality and maintenance of landed power. 51 Instead of an idealist approach, I take a material approach more in line with figures 6 and 7. I discuss Avola and Grammichele in terms of political practice and territorial transformation. Both towns were rebuilt on new sites according to a conspicuously predetermined geometric layout. They are self-evidently artificial. Their hexagonal layouts suppose the application of ideal geometry seen in figure 5 in order to create towns that are stamps on the landscape.

Avola and Grammichele are more than symbolic assertions of power. They refigure and transform their territory. Constructing new towns is a physical intervention on a significant scale. In Avola and Grammichele it involved expenditure of work and resources, derived mainly from the towns’ inhabitants, and financed by profits from the same inhabitants’ agricultural labour. Land was levelled. Fortifications, buildings and streets were constructed. Money, materials and labour were concentrated in order to create a major change to the landscape.

This chapter draws on Chandra Mukerji’s work on territoriality, which I discuss later in this chapter, and Michel Foucault’s argument for local studies on how power is enabled. Rather than pursuing a fruitless attempt to excavate what was in the patrons’ minds, or to find a purported ‘source’ for the design of the towns, the material operations of power are what can be studied. Foucault argues:

A second methodological precaution urged that the analysis should not concern itself with power at the level of unconscious intention or decision; that it should not attempt to consider power from its internal point of view and that it should refrain from posing the labyrinthine and unanswerable question: ‘Who then has power and what has he in his
mind? What is the aim of someone who possesses power?’ Instead, it is a case of studying power at the point where its intention, if it has one, is completely invested in its real and effective practices. What is needed is a study of power in its external visage, where it is in direct and immediate relationship with that which we can provisionally call its object, its target, its field of application, there – that is to say - where it installs itself and produces its real effects. 52

This chapter investigates the ways in which Avola and Grammichele’s aristocratic owners gained an advantage through possessing territory. Land was both the source of the barons’ noble status and of their income. To produce this wealth, labourers in Avola and Grammichele worked the barons’ land to transform it into expanses of wheat-growing areas, interspersed with orchards and vineyards. 53 This work regulated their lives, both daily and by such cycles as planting and harvesting. Owning a fief defined noble status, and working on the land defined the agricultural labourers’ status. Planting crops itself territorialises the landscape. The fields implicitly imprint the political order onto the land. This chapter will show how geometry and the building of the hexagonal towns are implicated in this territorialisation.

Geometry as driver of architecture.

The scholarly equation of geometrically planned towns including Avola and Grammichele with the putatively rational accords with Descartes’ analogy of architecture and philosophical method in A Discourse on the Method (Leiden, 1637). Descartes uses the analogy of city planning to argue that, in philosophy, a concept or artefact created by a single mind is more perfect than one built on the foundations of others because it demonstrates the application of reason:

This is also the case with those ancient cities, that in the beginning were no more than villages and have become, through the passage of time, great conurbations; when compared to orderly towns that an engineer designs without constraints on an empty plain, they are usually so badly laid out that, even though their buildings viewed separately often display as much if not more artistic merit as those of orderly towns, yet if one takes into consideration the way they are disposed, a tall one here, a low one there, and the way they cause the streets to wind and change level, they look more like the product of chance than of the will of men applying their reason. 54

Descartes argues that the best city is one designed on a level area by a single engineer. He does not expand on why a flat plain is better, but the empty plain suggests the blank sheet of
paper on which an architect draws the plan. Without the encumbrance of existing buildings or natural features such as hills or rivers, the architect is free to design. Geometric lines and angles are more easily drawn. The evidence of a plan emanating unhindered from a single designer’s mind purportedly proves the operation of reason rather than chance or lack of reason.

Just as Descartes promotes "orderly towns" over those that “look more like the product of chance”, the scholarship often approaches the geometrical plans of Avola and Grammichele as embodying a purported rationalism. An unexamined idea of the rational underpins Salvatore Boscarino’s discussion of Grammichele in his 1981 survey of Sicilian Baroque architecture. Boscarino asserts that Grammichele’s patron Prince Carlo Maria Carafa and his assistants “wanted to impose pure reason”:

Il Carafa e i suoi collaboratori, tramite la forma geometrica, volevano imporre la ragione pura, la quale alla fine determinava l’astrattezza dell’idea alle necessità planimetriche e alla percezione del paesaggio e finiva col darci tutto un sistema urbanistico razionalizzato tramite lo strumento geometrico, che era l’unico conosciuto e apprezzato dai tempi. 55

In his discussion of Avola, Boscarino emphasises the town’s military role as a fortified city, but still underpins its rebuilding with ideal geometry. 56 He presents abstract reason as the explanation for the geometrical layout. In this argument, reason is an undefined entity that can be applied to any architecture. Geometry becomes a neutral instrument that creates the apparently rational town plan. Boscarino’s argument ignores what happens after the plan is made, and what is implicated politically. More recent scholarship continues these idealist assumptions. Aurelio Cantone’s 1998 study of Grammichele refers to how, after the eighteenth century, the original geometric street plan was no longer followed. Cantone describes this as a turning away from the ideal city of the patron, Carlo Maria Carafa, back to what Cantone posits as a less modern type of layout. 57

A second approach in the scholarship relates Avola and Grammichele to designs for fortified cities found in treatises from the fifteenth century onwards. This approach foregrounds geometry employed for warfare, thereby moving some way from reading the towns as simply exercises in symmetrical town planning. In her 1997 study of Avola, Francesca Gringeri Pantano presents the town as both ideal city and fortress town:

Nel disegnare Avola l’architetto-ingegnere volle sintetizzare, perché esigenze estetiche e pratiche coincidenti, gli schemi planimetrici della “città ideale” con le necessità espresse
dalla committenza e dettate dal momento storico e dall’emergenza sismica. Il progetto di Avola, pensato alla fine del Seicento, non può essere pertanto considerato, in base anche alla formazione culturale e alla professionalità che il frate gesuita doveva possedere per i prestigiosi incarichi assolti, solo una riproposta passive della concezione urbanistica rinascimentale. Lo evidenzia la realizzazione delle mura di fortificazione che, come mostrano i documenti, furono fabbricate ed utilizzate a difesa della città.  

Such readings of Avola as deriving from a fortress design in a treatise have prompted a search for actual templates, or ‘sources’ for the towns, in the pages of architectural treatises such as Pietro Cataneo’s *I quattro primi libri di architettura* (Venice, 1567), Francesco De’ Marchi’s *Della architettura militare* (Brescia, 1599), and Vincenzo Scamozzi’s *Dell’Idea dell’architettura Universale* (Venice, 1615). To support the claim that treatises were sources for the designs of Sicilian towns, scholars have catalogued treatises that were held in the libraries of Sicilian aristocrats and religious organisations.

Francesca Gringeri Pantano’s monograph on Avola pursues this focus on treatises. She considers a range of sources for Avola’s plan, including Cataneo’s designs for fortified towns in *I quattro primi libri di architettura*, a fortified city in Juan Caramuel de Lobkowitz’s *Architectura Civil y Recta* (Vigevano, 1678), and the town of Karlovac in Croatia designed in 1579. In a study of Grammichele, Giuseppe Pagnano relates the town’s layout to designs including the octagonal Palmanova (1593) and Coevorden in Holland (1597), and treatise images by Pietro Sardi (1617), Giambattista Belucci (1598) and Francesco de Marchi (1599).

Reading the towns as exponents of treatise designs flattens them into an idea of a generic architectural lineage. It limits discussions of the towns to matching their layouts with treatise images. Once a match is found, the town is then ‘explained’. Further analysis is closed off. Stephen Tobriner even writes that the aim of his study of Avola is “to solve the riddle of the genesis of the form of the city of Avola”. In Tobriner’s argument, “solving the riddle” of Avola means reiterating its role as a fortress town based on designs from Cataneo.

Lilian Dufour and Henri Raymond note the limitations of this tendency in the scholarship to ‘explain’ the towns through military architecture and the continuous comparison with treatise images and ideas of rational Enlightenment planning. They question the link Boscarino and Giuffrè make between Avola and Grammichele, and ideas of utopianism and ideal cities. They argue instead that the need to rehouse the population as quickly as possible so that the agricultural workers could resume production of wealth drove the rebuilding:
Occorre rispondere a queste ipotesi che non vi è certamente alcuno spirito illuminista né alcuna proposta sociale particolare nella pianta di Avola, né tantomeno in quella di Grammichele, e che l’unico proposito riscontrabile nel progetto è quello dovuto alla necessità di alloggiare rapidamente la popolazione e di accontentare feudatari e notabili che vedono nello spostamento un’occasione di profitto. 66

Dufour and Raymond therefore see Avola’s rebuilding as motivated principally by economic and financial considerations rather than by ideas of rational Enlightenment planning. While Dufour and Raymond’s reading recognises that the town produced wealth for the patron and housed living people, the focus on a single main explanation, in this case economics, risks being as reductive as the emphasis on ideal cities.

Additionally, the unusual hexagonal designs of the towns counter Dufour and Raymond’s arguments for the need for fast rehousing and realisation of profit. A hexagonal plan is not the fastest and least expensive layout for a new town. The hexagons of Avola and Grammichele involve issues of measurement, symmetry and novelty that go beyond the need for the fastest way to rebuild. A comparison with Sicilian licentiae populandi agrarian new towns such as Bolognetta (founded 1610), Altavilla Milicia (1621), Alimiusa (1635) and Palma di Montechiaro (1637) is useful here. 67 The licentiae populandi was a document from the Viceroy’s government giving permission to build a new agrarian town on unused land. Large numbers of these towns were built in Sicily during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for economic motives where the barons aimed to convert areas of unused land to farming. 68

The licentiae populandi towns were usually simple grids, built as quickly as possible to house the workers. 69 The plans of Avola and Grammichele are much more elaborate. Their layouts are completely novel; they are unlike any previous towns in Sicily. Laying out their streets involves more complex angles than a grid plan. The licentiae populandi towns do not partake of the same attention to novelty, or to the purportedly higher values of geometry. In Avola and Grammichele, more was at stake than just economic recovery.

**Naturalising Geometry and Geometrising Nature.**

The scholarship discussed above reads geometry as transparent and self-evident. However, I argue that the geometry of planned towns is not an unproblematic given. Geometrically regular layouts are not inherently rational or natural, even though they are presented as such.
Many sixteenth and seventeenth-century treatise authors present geometrical drawing as fundamental to the architect’s initial training. These treatises often begin with chapters on drawing shapes and angles. In Book 7 of *De re aedificatoria* (Florence, 1486), Leon Battista Alberti presents geometric forms as immanent in nature. On the hexagon, he writes:

> It is obvious from all that is fashioned, produced, or created under her influence, that nature delights primarily in the circle. Need I mention the earth, the stars, the animals, their nests and so on, all of which she has made circular? We notice that nature also delights in the hexagon. For bees, hornets, and insects of every kind have learned to build the cells of their hives entirely out of hexagons.

Alberti’s argument naturalises geometry. He implies that divine geometric laws underpin such things as the shapes of planets and the hexagonal cells that insects create. In fact, the hexagon is relatively rare in visible nature. It is also comparatively rare in architecture. If the hexagon is so natural and self-evident for Alberti, then this begs the question of why many more hexagonal towns were not built.

Geometry’s claims to timelessness and universality mask relations of dominance and persuasion. It is a discourse, a Foucauldian ‘regime of truth’. Foucault writes:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

Geometry’s apparent naturalness can mask how it is implicated in power relations. The operation of such discourses as geometry enforces and justifies regimes of power. These discourses carry with them assumptions that are presented as disinterested and outside contestation. On the apparent neutrality of science, Michel de Certeau observes: “military or scientific strategies have always been inaugurated through the constitution of their ‘own’ areas (autonomous cities, ‘neutral’ or ‘independent’ institutions, laboratories pursuing ‘disinterested’ research, etc.).” As in de Certeau’s argument, the geometry of Avola and Grammichele purportedly occupies its own neutral, autonomous non-space.

On the concept of what she calls “geometric/technical space”, Catherine Ingraham argues that a purportedly disinterested, scientific space masks relations of power and politics. These
relations are implicated in such areas as social and sexual difference: “in general, architectural culture has kept the sexuality of space repressed, kept space sterilized as a technical economy under the control of the mythological design architect. As is evident then, I want to move my discussion away from functionalist accounts and histories of architectural practice into that.” 75 The geometric/technical conceptualisation of space to which Ingraham refers, and its control by supposedly disinterested architects, elides coercion and politics. It also denies or masks the body. The emphasis on mathematics and geometry means that the human body, its politics and its labour, is made to disappear.

Henri Lefebvre discusses the use of geometry to mark out areas of land and space for occupation by different social groups. He argues that although an architectural plan includes measurements and proportions, in the built environment the geometric lines demark distinctions such as public and private areas, and desirable and less desirable locations. 76 These social separations operated in Avola and Grammichele. Looking at ground plans in terms of geometric proportions only will not show this.

Viewed as a geometric street plan, Avola appears a uniform entity, but from the beginning of the rebuilding distinctions of wealth and social status operated. An undated report entitled Relazione di quanto si è operato nella nuova città di Avola dal giorno del terremoto 11 gennaio 1693 a questa parte reports that temporary wooden cabins were provided for the population, but the money spent on them varied. 77 These cabins cost 50, 30, 20 or, for the poorest citizens, 5 onze.

Clear economic distinctions continued in Avola into the eighteenth century. A record from 1737 giving guidelines for payments to workers on the town’s sugar plantations also reveals income differences. 78 The workers are divided into operai giornalieri, hired on a daily basis, and salariati, who generally receive their salary annually. The pay could vary for day workers who did the same job. For example, the daily pay for piantinari (planters) was between 8 and 15 tari depending on age and the amount they planted. This contrasts with acqualori, who received the equivalent of 50 tari, or asinari, who received 48 tari. 79

There are comparable demarcations of status in Grammichele. An eighteenth-century plan of the town includes a parallelogram marked for the prince’s palace at the top (fig.9). 80 The land within this parallelogram, in front of the palace, is the town’s largest open area, larger than the central piazza. Buildings wall it off and mark it as the prince’s private space. Behind the palace there is a parterre. This too is a private area, a place for the prince’s family and guests to view or to walk in.
Prince Carlo Maria Carafa controlled all of the land in Grammichele, but one section of the town was marked in a different way. Although, like Avola, the town appears homogeneous when treated as a ground plan, the area for the palace, with its courtyard and garden, takes on a different legal, political and social identity to other parts of the town such as the public spaces of the piazza or the streets.

The palace’s location at the top of the diagram in figure 9 shows space divided hierarchically, but the engraving still masks the differences Lefebvre discusses. The image places the town on a neutral background, purportedly autonomous in its separation from its surroundings. The palace occupies a literally and symbolically superior position at the top of the picture, flanked by the coat of arms and the inscription carried by putti. With the exception of the palace rectangle and the Chiesa Madre, almost hidden within the street layout, the rest of the town appears a homogeneous entity. The buildings and streets endlessly mirror each other. Like a beehive, the inhabitants come and go from their uniform cells, their labour ordered by the rule of the sovereign.

Grammichele’s hierarchical social divisions operated in the allocation of rebuilding plots. The religious organisations chose their plots first, then the aristocrats, and finally the rest of the population. There were also economic differences. In their analysis of the rivelo or tax assessment of 1714, Dufour, Huet and Raymond emphasise social homogeneity: “En résumé Grammichèle se présente comme une ville de population socialement très homogène, où n’émergent que quelques riches qui cumulent richesse économique, culturelle et pouvoir.” (In summary, Grammichele presents itself as a town with a very homogenous population, where there appear only a few rich people who accumulate economic and cultural wealth, and power).

However, their analysis of the rivelo also reveals differences. Although Dufour et.al. define 80% of the population as smallholders with most owning a house and land measuring less than 1.5 tumuli, they also report that 3% of the inhabitants are richer citizens owning property worth 100 onze or more, 5% are artisans possessing a shop and tools necessary for their work, and 10% of the people possess neither a house nor land.

Of the richer group, 100 onze is a large sum considering that most houses were valued between 4 onze 1 tari and 8 onze 2 tari. The members of this small richer group are accountants, doctors or gabelloti, people who bought the rights to income from certain taxes or land. The 1714 rivelo also shows that the houses in the two adjacent sestieri of L’Angelo
Custode and San Rocco are larger, and the population density is lower. The wealthier citizens lived in these two areas. 84

Investigating the towns only as ground plans therefore means ignoring economic and social differences. It reads the towns only as unchanging geometric diagrams. The planning of these geometric layouts conceives the city as more like a clockwork machine than an organism. In its regularity and consistency, the grid plan implies that the layout will not be adapted or changed over time. Instability and variation is denied through the symmetrical and seemingly permanent forms of the geometric grid.

The straight lines and regular, predictable streets imply an order close to the formations of military regiments. Like armies marching or soldiers on parade ground drills, the new towns’ isolati are massed in uniform alignments along the same axis. They are subordinated to the geometric order, regardless of the manifold life functions that take place in the different parts of the town. This fixity of the town’s outline and street plan means that any small change upsets the prince’s order. To modify the outlines of these isolati is to disregard or subvert the geometric order, and the political order, and orders, of the ruler. It means going against not only the apparently natural and logical laws of geometry, but also the hierarchy of social relations.

Order and Abundance. Eighteenth-century representations of the towns.

In contrast to modern scholarship on Avola and Grammichele, most eighteenth-century descriptions by Italian and foreign travellers do not view the towns in terms of ground plans and geometry. 85 The words ‘hexagon’ or ‘hexagonal’ rarely appear. The writers sometimes refer to the street layouts as beautiful or harmonious, but they do not describe the towns as if seen from above. Instead, their descriptions are eulogies to the barons’ good governance. They stress the orderliness of the towns and the prosperity of their surrounding land.

When the French traveller Jean Houel visited Sicily at the end of the 1770s, he made no reference to the hexagonal plans of Avola and Grammichele. Unusually for visitors to Sicily, he visited Grammichele and Occhiolà, the ruined site of the pre-earthquake town that was relocated and renamed Grammichele. Most of his description focuses on the antiquities he found at Occhiolà, but he mentions the beauty of Grammichele’s location, the industriousness of its workers, and the scarcity of beggars. 86 He describes the town as well sited, prosperous and orderly. All of the population spends the time working. The implication is that their orderliness and disciplined labour bring them economic benefits.
In a description of his visit to Avola in 1767, the Prussian diplomat and antiquities collector Joseph Hermann Von Riedesel praises the regularity of the town’s layout. Avola is “singularly made”, “on a high altitude but very gracious, the town’s streets have the same regularity in a smaller way as those of Turin in the larger.” 87 Von Riedesel may have confused the old and new sites of Avola in his reference to town’s altitude, but he likens the layout of Avola to a smaller Turin.

Turin underwent a major transformation in the seventeenth century. The city was rebuilt on a regular grid plan, with a new citadel and with elaborate fortifications. 88 In her study of Turin, Martha Pollak quotes the praise of the eighteenth-century travellers Charles de Brosses, Thomas Nugent, Charles-Nicholas Cochin and Joseph Jérôme de La Lande for Turin’s straight streets and symmetrical layouts. 89 By comparing Avola to Turin, Von Riedesel makes Avola a provincial emanation of the larger and earlier Turin. The implication is that both towns partake of a similar modernity and putative rational planning.

These eighteenth-century accounts present the new towns’ well-chosen sites as evidence of the patrons’ enlightened planning. In his description of Avola, Jean Houel relates how the citizens rebuilt Avola closer to the sea, where they created a well-sited and regularly-built town: “les habitants se sont transportés dans une plaine au pied de cette montagne à un mille de la mer, où ils ont un climat beaucoup plus tempère et une ville bien située e bâtie très régulièrement.” 90 For Houel, the town’s new lower site is an improvement on the old.

In addition to traveller’s accounts, an undated report from the office of the Spanish king to Sicilian viceroy entitled Relatione di quanto si è operato nella nuova città di Avola dal giorno del terremoto 11 gennaio 1693 a questa parte, probably written in 1693 or 1694, mentions the beauty of Avola’s new site and refers to reports of visitors from nearby towns coming to see the new city taking shape:

E perché il sito di detta città è nel mezzo della via nominata del Contado di Modica, passaggio continuo di buona parte delle città di Val di Noto. Vostra Eccellenza non può immaginarsi l’ammirazione che porta il bel sito a tutta la gente che passa e vi sono concorsi molti cavalieri delle città vicine per godere della bella vista che fa di meraviglia a tutti ed invidia alle convincine terre e città. 91

The writer does not elaborate on why Avola is the envy of the surrounding towns. The reference to the site’s beauty, however, suggests that the location is beautiful, not the street plan. The new city is on a “bellissima amena e molto larga pianura” (very beautiful, pleasant
and wide plain) that can be traversed 30 to 40 miglie in a carriage. In addition, the report mentions the defensive walls and ditches built around the new site and the rocky beach that makes it difficult for “corsali” (pirates) to disembark. As with most other accounts, there is no mention of the hexagon. The report promotes Avola as a success. Avola incites the admiration of neighbouring nobles.

Along with orderliness, visitors’ accounts frequently focus on the towns’ agricultural products and the commercial benefits this brings. Sicilian authors often present the island as a place of agricultural abundance, with lands rich in wheat, fruit, wine and other produce. Vito Amico cites many classical writers to support his presentation of the island as the abode of Ceres. Antonino Mongitore celebrates the island’s agricultural produce, and the connection with Ceres, in La Sicilia ricercata nelle cose più memorabili (Palermo, 1742):

Il suo fertilissimo seno, colle naturali dovizie, che produce, non solo nudre abbondevolmente i propri abitatori; ma somministra ad altre province straniere molte cose ogn’anno, come grano, olio, seta, vino, mele, manna, frutti di mandra, ed altre in gran copia; al numero di sessanta e più diversa spezie, come ho dalla relazione del Tribunale del Commerzio. Dissero gli antichi poeti, in riguardo alla sua fecondità, che in essa nacque Cerere, a cui s’attribuisce l’invenzione del frumento, e l’uso di fare pane.

Dominique Vivant Denon visited Avola in 1778. He gives a brief description that notes the town’s commercial potential:

This city, which stood formerly on a hill, boasted of being the Hybla Major, so celebrated for its honey; but so many towns lay claim to the ancient title of Hybla, or there were really so many cities of that name, that it is impossible to decide anything on the subject. I have myself met with three; this we are speaking of, Hybla Megara near Melilli, and Paternò in the vicinity of Aetna. Avola having been destroyed by the earthquake of 1693, the inhabitants rebuilt it more commodiously in the plain, in a fruitful territory, luxuriant in corn and fruits, and principally in almonds, a considerable article of commerce. The houses still prove, by being extremely low, the dread entertained of earthquakes; the streets are wide and regular.

Vivant Denon’s description has a focus on agricultural abundance similar to that found in other writings on the town. Eighteenth-century writers therefore did not see the towns principally in terms of geometric ground plans, but instead they emphasised the well-chosen
sites which produced order and prosperity. The towns are interpreted as guided by good governance.

Vito Amico’s compendium on Sicilian towns *Lexicon Topographicum Siculum* (Catania, 1757), differs from other accounts by describing Avola and Grammichele’s street layouts in geometrical terms. In the section on Avola, he includes Giuseppe Guttadauro’s ground plan (fig. 10). Avola is the only small town whose plan is included in the book, implying Amico’s interest in its geometrical layout. He reports that Avola:

\[\text{mostra una figura esagona, con grandissima piazza quadrata nel centro ed altre quattro minori nel centro dei fianchi australe e settentrionale e degli angoli orientale e occidentale, donde le quattro più grandi vie mettono capo nel largo maggiore. Due vie altresì procedono dai singoli lati e rendono elegantissimo il sito della città, e molto comodo agli abitanti, poiché essendo rivolte ai solstizi, vengono riparate coll’ombra delle fabbriche dal calore, e meno soggiacciono al freddo ed ai venti. Agli angoli ed ai lati dell’esagono sono dei forti, ma ancora imperfetti, ai quali sono appoggiate quattro porte primarie, che corrispondono ai quattro punti cardinali.}\] 96

Guttadauro’s engraving shows Avola’s street layout from directly above, but renders the buildings in bird’s-eye view (fig. 10). On the left of the image, the town’s coat of arms, and a scroll giving the engraving’s author and date, appear fixed to the surface of the image. To the right, there is a numbered key to the religious buildings and main piazze. Fields surround the town. There is cultivation in the furrowed area in the bottom left. In the top right there are the orchards of the Capuchin monastery (no. 20 on the map) and a building for sugar production (no. 21).

Guttadauro’s image supports an idea of geometrical axioms enacted in the physical world. It also emphasises completeness. Amico reports in 1757 that the fortifications of the town were still incomplete, but Guttadauro’s illustration shows them finished, with their bastions at each point of the hexagonal perimeter. 97 The image emphasises the perimeter. The edge of the fortifications clearly separates the town from the surrounding countryside. Like the transfer of geometric forms to the earth shown in Giovan Biagio Amico’s *L’architetto pratico* in figure 5 and the engraving of Grammichele in figure 10 discussed earlier, the town appears almost to have landed in the countryside. Defiant of the surrounding topography, it is an architectural design overtly imposed on the landscape. As on an architect’s plan, the space the town occupies can be measured with the scale at the bottom left of the image.
Amico’s entry on Grammichele includes a similar description in geometric terms. He refers to the town as a “novello, elegantissimo paese” (a novel and very elegant town). He describes how the patron Carlo Maria Carafa ordered the town’s layout:

Ordinò si formasse una piazza esagona, dai di cui singoli lati stendendosi delle vie cacciano in sei piazze minori costituite ad angoli retti. Corrispondono ad esagono gli edifizii e le quattro vie intermedie che dividono in giro il paese, ma dove apronsi le piazze minori le vie e le case rappresentano dei parallelogrammi.  

Amico presents Grammichele in the language of geometry. There are hexagons, parallelograms and right angles. From the hexagon of the central piazza, streets extend out to finish in six rectangular piazze. The buildings and the streets “correspond to the hexagon”. The hexagons and the streets fix, order and divide up the town. In Grammichele, Carlo Maria “ordered the formation of a hexagonal piazza”. In this statement, geometrical order and political order operate together. From the orders of the ruler, an ordered and orderly town is apparently created.

Aristocratic Privilege and Financial Opportunity in Avola and Grammichele.

This section analyses how the aristocratic owners of Avola and Grammichele enjoyed the shield of a feudal system that legally separated them from non-nobles, and at the same time allowed them to act in a market economy where nobles sublet their estates and speculated in the estates’ produce, for example by stockpiling grain and selling it at a time of higher prices. Although based on land, the operations of the eighteenth-century Sicilian nobility complicate distinctions between feudalism and capitalism. Land ownership was the principal source of their income, but it was more than this. To be an aristocrat meant possessing a landed title. A title conferred high social position, as well as economic and legal privilege.

Aristocratic families had financial privileges including immunity from many of the taxes imposed on the rest of the population. Noble status allowed the aristocracy income from certain commercial activities in their fiefs. They received revenue from fines and confiscations, and from monopolies on mills or other services that their vassals had to use. Maurice Aymard’s research on the Pignatelli of Avola’s sources of income in the sixteenth century includes income from taxes on notaries and other officials, and taxes on products sold in their domains such as cheese, oil, wine and bread.
In terms of legal power in their fiefs, the *mero et mixtum imperium* was an important right that nobles could hold. This law allowed nobles legal jurisdiction over their vassals, including the rights to fine and imprison, and in some cases to carry out capital punishment. Aristocrats could buy this right. Giovanni d’Aragona bought the *mero et mixtum imperium* title for Avola in 1455. In 1507 his descendant Carlo d’Aragona paid the Crown 3,000 *ducati* to make this right hereditary, but there was a clause that the Crown could still buy it back. In 1511, Carlo paid a further 2,000 *ducati* to remove this clause, thereby making the law the permanent right of the Pignatelli. 100

Although Avola and Grammichele were relatively small towns, the nobles who owned them were from two of southern Italy’s most powerful families. Avola was a fief of Nicolò Pignatelli Aragona Cortés, Duke of Monteleone and Terranova (1648-1730). Grammichele was owned by Carlo Maria Carafa Branciforte (1651-1695). 101 The Pignatelli and Carafa Branciforte’s power was based on connections to the royal court in Madrid, and on the resources of their agricultural fiefs. At the time of the Val di Noto earthquake the Pignatelli’s power also extended to Rome. Antonio Pignatelli (Innocent XII) was Pope from 1691 to 1700.

Avola was only one of many fiefs that Nicolò Pignatelli owned in Spain and southern Italy. 102 Through his marriage to Giovanna Aragona Cortés, he gained a connection to the Aragona Cortés, a family with fiefs in Spain, Mexico and Sicily. 103 He was resident in Madrid when the earthquake occurred. His status as a *Grande de España*, nobles who were generally entrusted with the most important offices, put him into the highest-ranking category of the Spanish aristocracy.

Carlo Maria Carafa Branciforte, patron of Grammichele, held the title of Prince of Butera, the foremost noble title in Sicily. The Carafa Branciforte family owned over forty landed titles in southern Italy. Their kinship links included the main branch of the Carafa in Naples, and the Colonna family in Rome. From the fifteenth century onwards, members of the Carafa Branciforte held high ranks in the Spanish aristocracy and the Sicilian government, obtaining titles including *grande de España*, *stratigò* of Messina and *capitano di giustizia* of Palermo. 104

Carlo Maria Carafa was recognised by the Spanish crown as a loyal supporter during the 1674 revolt of Messina. When the citizens of Messina revolted against Spain with the support of the French, Carlo Maria Carafa provided soldiers at his own expense to prevent the French capturing the town of Melilli. In 1683 he represented the Spanish king at the *omaggio della chinea* in Rome, an annual tribute paid by the rulers of Sicily to the Pope since the time
of the Normans. Although this was a protocol, it shows that Madrid and the viceroy included Carlo Maria among a group of Sicilian aristocrats whose loyalty to Spain was important and was publicly rewarded.

Like many Sicilian nobles, Carlo Maria Carafa and Nicolò Pignatelli employed agents to run their estates. Their fiefs financed their political operations. On the economic importance of the baron’s land, and their control of those who worked it, Denis Mack Smith emphasises agriculture’s centrality to the Sicilian economy:

Everything in Sicily in the last resort refers back to agriculture. Agriculture provided the raw material for whatever commerce and industry existed. It provided most of the taxes and far the greater proportion of all personal incomes. It was a factor in foreign policy, as well as providing the basic cause of every political revolt for centuries. Every Viceroy found questions of land tenure, wheat exports, domestic food supplies and possible harvest failures to be inescapable matters of daily preoccupation.

Wheat was the main Sicilian export up to the nineteenth century. At the time of the 1693 earthquake it was an important source of tax for the Spanish occupiers. Maurice Aymard calculates grain revenue from the 1593-94 tax census at 1-1.2 million salme. 84 noble families retained 300,000 salme of this sum, but the Spanish exchequer received the remainder as part of the donativo, the tribute Sicily paid to Spain. Around two thirds of the total income therefore went to Spain.

In the decade before the earthquake, Carlo Maria Carafa himself stresses the centrality of abundant food supply and agricultural labour in his Istruttione cristiana per i principi e regnanti cavata dalla scrittura sacra (Mazzarino, 1687), a work advising princes on good governance:

L’abbondanza poi si mantiene, procurando, che i terreni si lavorino, e se vi sarà mancanza di gente, si faccia venire da fuori, concedendo loro esenzioni, e franchigie; tenendo sempre pieni i magazzini, e non riposandosi su le buone ricolte, non imponendo molti tassi sopra le cose commestibili.

Carlo Maria Carafa describes how a prince should ensure cultivation of as much land as possible, and the availability of people to work it. Scarcity of workers was a possible problem. Agricultural workers had little political power, but they did have freedom of movement. If taxes on food and other products were too high, some people might move elsewhere.
Fear that the population might move away was one motive for retaining the sugar plantations of Avola in the 1680s after they ceased to be profitable. At the time of the earthquake, Avola was Sicily’s last remaining sugar production territory. Between 1540 and 1640, Avola’s sugar revenue increased fivefold. By the 1680s however, all of the other Sicilian plantations had closed. However, Maurice Aymard calculates in Avola that there was still an area of 25 *salmi*, or over 430 square kilometres, of intensive cultivation in 1688.

The Pignatelli kept the Avola sugar fields in operation. The plantations kept the population within the order that benefitted the Pignatelli, working and paying taxes. An undated report on the plantations written to Nicolò Pignatelli’s agents between 1690 and 1692 relates a fear that without the plantations the population will leave. The writer argues that the sugar workers are trained in this work, and know no other. They will become destitute or move away if the plantations close. There is a danger that Avola will become deserted.

The report also notes that maintaining the system of sugar cultivation prevents crime and social disorder. The writer warns that without the plantations thieves might populate the territory. The destitute workers will no longer be Christians. They will become criminals. As well as financial loss, the Pignatelli risk contravening God’s law if the closure of the plantations leads to a territory populated by criminals.

Chandra Mukerji has effectively argued that the connection between productive land and moral legitimacy was important for seventeenth-century rulers. She argues that improving land through cultivation and land management restores a purportedly fruitful Eden. It justifies political control of the land:

Land and its proper management for the restoration of Eden (in Christian humanist terms for both Protestants and Catholics) provided a conceptual rationale for creating a more perfect built environment, and stimulated the search for techniques of land management and improvement that served as the practical bases for the mission. The result was cultural justification for engineering the environment and using natural resources more systematically for social and political effect. Doing this well was considered a mark of good leadership, and so territorial management became both a tool and measure of political legitimacy for the modern state.

Improving the land, or maintaining its productivity as in the case of the Pignatelli sugar plantations, legitimises its rulers. Territorial management was also necessary if the land’s productivity changed. In the period leading up to the 1693 earthquake, soil desiccation
became a problem around Avola, and after the earthquake the river Miranda, an important source of water, disappeared. During the eighteenth century, the Pignatelli diversified cultivation away from sugar. They increasingly divided the sugar territory into small areas to be sublet in emphyteusis, a system that leased the land in return for an annual payment and a pledge to improve the terrain.

The post-earthquake history of feudal centres such as Avola is therefore more complex than a rebuilding of the town according to designs from treatises. Avola and Grammichele were rebuilt against a background of noble privilege where the land proved noble status and produced income. Landowners such as the Pignatelli and the Carafa Branciforte used a combination of feudal rights and economic speculation to amass wealth, but this power was always unstable. It had to be continually negotiated with political connections, the changing productivity of the land, and the availability of workers. In addition, as Mukerji argues, making the land productive was both a tool to justify the landowners’ dominance, and a measure or proof of their purported beneficence and superior knowledge.

Instability, geometry and reasserting control.

Although powerful, the nobility were still subject to forces outside their control. Descriptions by many eighteenth-century writers emphasise Sicily’s fertile abundance, but there was great unpredictability and uncertainty. The earthquake was one indicator of the literal instability under which the people of Sicily, including the barons, lived. The land beneath the feet of all of the inhabitants could move or disappear in seismic catastrophe.

The possibility of social unrest was one source of disquiet for the rulers. Avola and Grammichele’s geometric layouts suggest harmony and control, but in the days following the tremors there was a breakdown of feudal order. Survival took precedence, and the people were no longer afraid to take the landowners’ property. In Avola, some attacked the cane fields, eating the cane or using the straw for shelter. The soldiers sent to guard the warehouses and sugar plantations could not control the populace. A report of 13 January 1693 by the soldiers’ leader relates that the population, maddened by hunger, broke into the warehouses to steal the sugar loaves:

li quali [the populace] arrabbiati per la fame, si disbarricavano li zuccari, meli et frumento et havendo essi declaranti fattasi assentire con dirci or figlioli che faciti usciti per i fatti vostri chi nui simu vinuti qui seri a guardare questa robbia di li patruni […] sapino di piu e declarano essi declaranti di non haversi possuto rimediare alli Cannameli erano alli campi,
li quali tutto questo pubblico se li disfa parte per sucarseli per la fame e parte deli medesimi se han fatto e fanno li pagliara per habitarc dentro senza che se li havesse possuto riparare né alla furia di un popolo né alla necessità che occorre per li presenti miserie. [...] 118

These disorders spread beyond Avola. A later part of the report relates: “forestieri delle parti convicini di questo stato”, strangers from the neighbouring areas, arrived to eat the cane or to use it for temporary buildings.

The Pignatelli later denied the lawlessness that operated at the time of the earthquake. They present the inhabitants as loyal and obedient. A document of 9 September 1693 from the Spanish king to the Viceroy argues for Avola’s new site based on what Nicolò Pignatelli related to the king. It describes Avola’s inhabitants as “attentive and obedient vassals” who carried out the rebuilding according to the wishes of their superiors. The loss of baronial control is made to disappear:

Por las consecuencias que pudieran seguirse de hacer apartar aquel pueblo al número de seis mil almas de tan buena disposición que ha hecho con el permiso y aprobación de los superiores y con tan buena fe y ley de atentos y obedientes vasallos, señalándose entre todos los demás que padecieron en grado, que cuantos han visto la nueva población han alabado al mayor grado la atención y desvelo de los vecinos. 119

Resistance to the Pignatelli’s orders continued however. There was deviation from the prescribed geometrical town plan. By April 1694, one year after the beginning of the new town, reports reached the Pignatelli’s agents that people were not rebuilding according to the street plan. Some people were starting to “fabbricare a capriccio” (build at whim). 120 The return in June of the architect Angelo Italia’s assistant Antonio Vella shows the Pignatelli’s need to reassert the geometric layout. 121

There was analogous disorder and resistance to the grid plan in Grammichele. In Occhiolà, the hill town that was rebuilt on a new site as Grammichele, the Veridica relatione, an anonymous eyewitness account of the earthquake, refers to the absence of obedience and the disintegration of harmonious social relations. In the town: “Si vidde in quell'hora da molt'altiri persa l’ubbidienza, sbandita la pietà e regnante l’ingratitudine … persa all’intutto l’amicitia.” (One saw in that time that obedience was lost for many, pity had been banished and ingratitude reigned…friendship was completely lost). 122
Order was restored, and Carlo Maria Carafa returned to Grammichele in April 1693 for the new town’s foundation ceremony.²³ As a reassertion of power in Grammichele, he marked the landscape not only with the new hexagonal town, but also literally with his body. The foundation ceremony included laying a stone inscribed with the time and date of the beginning of the work, and placing the first bricks, which were silver-plated.²⁴ He then ceremonially walked around the hexagonal perimeter, the presence and movement of his body another form of assertion of control over the territory.²⁵

Not everything remained orderly as Grammichele developed however. Some of the inhabitants later took more land than allocated, but then did not build on it or left houses unfinished. As the population grew, this prevented others from building. In April 1756, the new Prince of Butera issued a series of orders to regulate these problems. This included a ruling that everyone with a license to construct needed to complete within 3 years.²⁶

Although there was some non-compliance from the inhabitants, Carlo Maria Carafa succeeded in making the people of the hill town of Occhiolà build, and live in, a town that was completely new, and whose design he determined. He even changed the name of the town to Grammichele, as he had a personal attachment to Saint Michael. In Occhiolà, the patron saints were Saint Catherine of Alexandria and Saint Nicholas of Bari. In Grammichele, Saint Michael replaced Saint Nicholas. The new town’s inhabitants also found themselves living in one of six sestieri or an adjoining rectangular borgo (fig. 11), each named after a particular saint.²⁷

The new towns of Avola and Grammichele were an opportunity to remake the town. The lower sites had an economic benefit, as they improved access to roads, but they also allowed the barons to break with the memory of the old town. The towns created an apparently seamless, geometrically regular townscape of repeated units. The scholarship portrays these layouts in terms of Enlightenment rationalism, but they can equally be read as commercially productive and politically regulated hives, barracks or factories.

**Reversing the ideal city. Geometry in the service of warfare and absolutism.**

This section investigates Avola’s rebuilding as a citadel town. I link Avola to a process where, from the sixteenth century, geometrically planned towns appear concurrently with changes in warfare. I argue that the ‘ideal city’ enables territorial possession. In its application to military technology, geometry does not serve a putatively harmonious city. Geometry’s association
with harmony is reversed. Geometry serves warfare. Geometry and mathematics are tools that contribute to the outcome of a siege or the extension of a ruler’s territorial control.

I draw on Martha Pollak’s study of the transformation of seventeenth-century Turin by the dukes of Savoy. Pollak’s study analyses the interplay of architecture, technology and power. She argues that Turin became both a fortress city and a new capital endowed with monuments and vistas that assisted and reinforced the rulers’ political, economic and symbolic ambitions. In Turin, political and military needs intermesh with mastery of technologies such as engineering, town planning, and surveying and dividing land.

In Pollak’s reading, absolutism and military culture are the drivers, but she shows how this allows a reading of Turin on different, interrelating levels. This multi-layered approach to geometrical towns is relevant for the Sicilian towns. It goes beyond simply connecting town plans to architectural treatises. Pollak discusses military treatises, but she links this to the dynastic ambitions of the dukes of Savoy, their political ideas and methods, and to areas including the feste and parades held in Turin, and how contemporary images represented the city.

A distinction between Avola and Grammichele is that after the 1693 earthquake, the new Avola was to remain within the Sicily-wide system of fortifications. For Avola’s rebuilding the viceroy’s government chose the architect Angelo Italia, but he was accompanied by Carlos de Grunembergh, Royal Engineer to the King of Spain. The Spanish government entrusted Grunembergh with Sicily’s defensive architecture. In 1681 he designed the new citadel intended to control Messina after the city’s rebellion in 1674. Avola was to defend its section of the Sicilian coast, including the new town of Noto, built nearby but without defences. Avola’s hexagon therefore takes on a military significance and operates within an island-wide defensive plan.

For this military purpose Avola needed the most modern defences. Changes in warfare, particularly the increased use of gunpowder and the development of more powerful cannons from the late-fifteenth century, required a response in a town’s fortifications. Polygonal perimeters that minimise the length of walls in proportion to the area they enclose became important. These new defences employed large earthworks and systems of concentric walls and ditches to deflect or absorb cannon fire.

Pollak notes the link between the city conceived as a single form, and the concurrent appearance of treatise designs for citadels and fortified cities. Although her description of a
citadel as a “physical realization” of politics follows an idealist assumption of architecture, it is important that plans for ideal towns, and designs for fortifications, develop concurrently. Architecture’s militarisation through the new technology of gunpowder and fortifications made architects, engineers and geometers important in warfare. She writes: “since many civil architects practiced as military architects until the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a continual exchange of influence between military and civic design. This manifested itself through the adoption of the hallmarks of military design - regularity, uniformity, austerity - for the planning of parts of cities, or even of entire cities”. The ideal cities in designs by architects such as Filarete (c. 1465), Cataneo (1554), and Scamozzi (1615) are often fortified, replete with bastions and inclines calculated according to new knowledge about ballistics and angles of fire.

Geometrical knowledge for drawing shapes and calculating angles, information included in many architectural treatises, is implicated in the technology of warfare as well as in urbanism and designs of ideal cities. There was a proliferation from the seventeenth century onwards of treatises dedicated to sieges and fortifications. Many of these treatises circulated in Sicily. Federica Scibilia lists treatises held in Sicilian libraries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including those by Niccolò Tartaglia (Venice, 1562), Galasso Alghisi, (Venice, 1570), Bonaiuto Lorini (Venice, 1597), Pietro Sardi (Venice, 1618) and Nicolaus Goldmann, (Leiden, 1643).

Architects and engineers made diagrams of how to arrange walls and bastions to concentrate angles of fire towards any section of the defences where an attacking army might be massed. They studied the slopes of earthworks to determine the best inclinations to resist or deflect cannon fire. In a siege, the defenders’ technology, with its calculations of angles of embankments, is pitted against the besiegers’ technology, who observe the defences with telescopes, and use instruments to measure distances and angles for firing artillery.

An engraving in Juan Caramuel Lobkowitz’s *Architectura Civil* (Vigevano, 1678) shows warfare enabled by architecture and geometry (fig.11). Geometry, calculation of distances, angles of fortifications, ballistics, and gunpowder combine. In the foreground, military engineers use instruments to measure firing angles. Two triangulation instruments determine the distance to the tower marked ‘c’ across the river. The city under attack is fortified with bastions angled to minimise the effect of canons. Geometric diagrams float above the scene of the siege, like the diagrams in the image from Amico’s *L’architetto pratico* discussed at the beginning of this chapter (fig.5).
Like Amico’s diagrams, Lobkowitz’s illustration shows purportedly ideal geometric forms as templates for what is enacted on earth. Geometry is employed in the service of political power. In Avola, the connection with warfare reverses the town’s putative role as an ideal city. Instead of a utopia where all citizens enjoy benevolent rule, fortified geometric towns such as Avola are militarised. They become machines for power and warfare.

In his treatise on governance, Carlo Maria Carafa, emphasises the relationship between rulers, military power, and mathematics:

La matematica finalmente è scienza propria del Principe, essendovi in lei il modo di fortificare, difendere ed espugnare le fortezze. I numeri, e gli spazi, ne quali, e con i quali ordinar possa gli eserciti, il conoscimento della natura ed inclinazione de’ popoli, il tempo atto ad eseguire o tralasciare l’imprese, le distanze, altezze, e circito de’ regni, e de’ luoghi, e il vero metodo di rendere ben istruito il Regnante nelle cose attenenti alla guerra.

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In Carlo Maria Carafa’s argument, geometry is proper to the prince because it makes a ruler “well-instructed in those things pertaining to warfare”. Measurement allows princes to quantify and delineate the territory that they control, to know the kingdom’s size and to mark its borders. Princes can fortify, defend and destroy fortresses. Mathematics and geometry let the ruler “know the inclinations of the people”. Carlo Maria Carafa does not make clear how this happens, but geometry is not neutral, it produces outcomes that enhance the ruler’s power.

Territorial transformation. “The figured world of power.”

Chandra Mukerji’s studies of large-scale construction projects in France including the gardens of Versailles and the Canal du Midi analyse how territory is reconfigured and given new meaning. 137 Mukerji argues that the projects of territorialisation carried out in France under Louis XIV, such as the palace of Versailles and the Canal du Midi, physically stamped the social structures of the regime into the landscape:

In seventeenth-century France, government transformations of the French landscape—with the construction of fortresses, factories, garrisons, canals, roads, and port cities—imprinted the political order onto the earth, making it seem almost an extension of the natural order. Political power in this moment was not just invested in the bureaucracy and Colbert’s supposed rationalisation of taxes, laws and the military, but was also embedded
in reconstituted social relations to “nature” that we in the West work from (and against) today.  

Although the rebuilding of Avola and Grammichele did not involve centralisation around a monarch, as in France, the towns’ construction was still a territorialisation, or reterritorialisation. Like Louis XIV’s building programmes, the new towns of Avola and Grammichele enable the landowners’ power on many levels; symbolically, economically, and in the way that they create a new ‘nature’, a new physical fact in the territory.

In Mukerji’s argument, architecture is not the realisation of an idea. She refutes approaches to architecture where the physical becomes lost in preference to the ideal. Instead, architecture and the transformation of the landscape affect power relations and behaviours. 

Mukerji analyses how measuring, surveying and moving of land transforms and subsumes the environment into a political system. Structures such as towns, roads and fortresses support the state’s economic, political and symbolic power.

Mukerji argues that canals, fortresses and other large scale projects carried out in seventeenth-century France “gave new material form to the state, and set it on the earth, where the lines between the natural world and the social order could be blurred.” Through such building projects, the landscape becomes material that the state transforms for symbolic, political and economic advantage. In Avola and Grammichele, the wealth and coercive power needed for the sites’ construction is elided. Only the viceroy’s government, through the legal powers of the state, and the aristocratic owners of the fiefs of Avola and Grammichele, had the power to create new towns. In the towns’ construction, the barons’ power appeared natural.

On the putative naturalness and impersonality of concepts such as geometrical order in architecture, Mukerji writes:

Without words, the built environment often seems to lie outside of political dispute, and thus can seem as inevitable as the natural order. And without people enforcing order, a system of impersonal rule provides little opportunity for resistance. So the outcome of exercising logistical power is an inarticulate but deeply effective material regime inflected with cultural ideas and conveying a reality that seems inevitable, natural, or true: a figured world of power.
Mukerji’s figured world of power is important in this discussion of architecture and power. She shows that technology and construction work together to transform territory and to consolidate and extend power. Designs in treatises are subservient to the people who employ them. This is more in line with the images from Amico in figures 6 and 7 discussed at the beginning of this chapter. This physical and technological aspect of construction is a central part of many architectural treatises, as they assist the landowner and the engineer in territorialisation. The treatises are practical manuals as well as sources of architectural ideas and diagrams. They aid in dividing up the landscape and converting it into parcels of property that will have different functions and commercial values.

There is an important difference between the France of Louis XIV and the rebuilding of the Val di Noto towns however. Mukerji argues that a new conception of the state as a natural and rational entity, embodied in the king, and in a deferred sense his representatives and ministers, devolved power away from the aristocrats. This abstract state develops into an entity that is more distant from the populace than a local landowner. It is more powerful, and can employ greater resources to undertake huge projects beyond the means of a single aristocrat.

In the rebuilding of Avola and Grammichele, the shift of power away from the aristocracy did not take place according to Mukerji’s reading of the situation in France. In Sicily, architecture maintained and reasserted aristocratic power, rather than centralising it around the monarch. In Avola and Grammichele it was the nobility who carried out the reterritorialisation.

**Grammichele. Geometry and Political Order.**

Whereas Avola’s unusual hexagonal layout can be read in terms of military architecture, the layout of Grammichele seems particularly arbitrary. The fact that it was not a fortified town makes its hexagonal outline ostensibly more purposeless and puzzling. Its strangeness and arbitrariness attests to Carlo Maria Carafa’s ability to make this territorial transformation. He made his subjects live in a new site, where the town is subject to geometry but without the militarisation of Avola. The overt artificiality in the hexagonal forms of the two towns is therefore stronger in Grammichele. It was a new layout created at the desire of the landowner. The layout had no purpose that could benefit its inhabitants. Its transformation of the landscape calls to mind Chandra Mukerji’s description of the garden at Vaux-le-Vicomte as a “territorial garden, a dramatic display of spatial order”.

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This section argues that Grammichele’s design is strongly linked to ideas of cosmic and political order found in Carlo Maria Carafa’s religious and political writing. Mario Centorbi’s 1694 eyewitness account of the building of Grammichele supports Carlo Maria Carafa as the town’s designer as well as patron. Carlo Maria Carafa chose Da Ferla, a little known architect and priest of the *Minori Osservanti*, to carry out his design.\(^{146}\) Centorbi records Carlo Maria Carafa drawing the street plan of the new town on the ground. The architect Michele da Ferla then laid out the lines of the plan onto the site.\(^{147}\)

Carlo Maria Carafa was a prolific author. He is known to have written at least nine books, all published on his printing press at Mazzarino.\(^{148}\) His works give instruction in religion, politics, meridians and planetary movement. *L’Idiota volgarizzato* (Mazzarino, 1688), *Hebdomada mariana sive meditatio*nes (Mazzarino, 1688) and *Il camino sicuro del cielo* (Mazzarino, 1689) are concerned most directly with prayer and leading a religious life.\(^{149}\) *Istruttione cristiana per i principi e regnanti cavata dalla scrittura Sacra* (Mazzarino, 1687), *L’ambasciatore politico cristiano* (Mazzarino, 1690) and *Scruttinio politico contro la falsa ragione di Stato di N. Machiavelli* (Mazzarino, 1692) deal with politics and statecraft. *Il sistema spherae solaris* (Mazzarino, 1688) and *Exemplar horologium solarium civilium* (Mazzarino, 1689) deal with sundials and planetary astronomy.

The current state of scholarship presents Carlo Maria Carafa as a ruler pursuing disinterested scientific knowledge. None of these readings examine his political philosophy. They conflate the hexagonal layout of Grammichele and Carlo Maria Carafa’s interest in such areas as meridians into a vision of a patron following putatively disinterested scientific research.\(^{150}\) Although *Il sistema spherae solaris* and *Exemplar horologium solarium civilium* describe planets and meridians, the centrality of God in Carlo Maria Carafa’s writing, and the framing of the relationship between the prince and his subjects, undermine assumptions of secularism and disinterested knowledge.

In *Istruttione cristiana* Carlo Maria Carafa argues that theology is the most important area of instruction for any prince. Any study of science will always be less important:

> La teologia ha la maggioranza sopra tutte le scienze, per haver in oggetto il sommo Dio, di essa deve il Principe esserne istruito, per conoscere il datore d’ogni bene, ammirare, et imitare con la lettura delle sacre lettere le grandissime infinite virtù, opera, professioni, e regole, che si richiedono, per ottimamente, e cristianamente, governare.\(^{151}\)
On almost every page of the first volume of *Istruttione cristiana* there are long quotations from Old Testament prophets and kings such as Samuel, Saul, David, Ezekiel and Solomon. Religious conviction and submission to scripture come first. There is no ‘Enlightenment’ forming of conclusions based on scientific demonstration.

Carlo Maria writes of the importance for the prince to always keep death in mind. His arguments do not show a spirit of secularization, or some kind of emergence from fear of God into an age ruled by mathematics and science:

Il sepolcro sia il vostro gabinetto, o Principi, e teschio il vostro specchio, perché in essi apprenderete la vera scienza, di regger voi, di regger i popoli, la politica di conservare I Stati, e il modo di amministrar la giustizia, il ricordo, di come havrete da essere, et il pensiero, di come havrete da vivere. Adamo, il primo Principe del Mondo, perdette la monarchia dell’universo, perché si fe persuadere il *nequaquam moriemini*, che non hava a morire, et il sepolcro, suggerendovi, che siete mortali, vi assicurerà su le vostre spalle la porpora.

Carlo Maria Carafa’s works promote an ordered universe that does not admit variance from divine laws, and where Biblical stories of rulers are a guide for princes of his own time. The ruler is superior to his subjects, but the subjects will not obey a ruler who does not obey God.

He argues that it is against nature if the people command. For the prince to obey the people is as monstrous and unnatural as if the foot carried out the function of the head, and the head the function of the foot:

Deve egli [Prince] con l’autorità a lui commessa da Dio far, che il popolo operi conforme al suo volere, e non egli operare giusta i voleri del popolo, pervertendo l’ordine de’ governi, e distruggendo quelle regole di buona politica, che al governo de’ Stati è necessaria. Anzi, come nel corpo fisico dell’huomo sarebbe mostruosità non sopportabile, se il piede volesse far l’ufficio del capo, ed il capo le funzioni del piede, così mostruosità piggiore sarebbe, se nel corpo misticco delle Repubbliche il popolo minuto comandasse, e l’Re eseguisse; dalle cui mostruosità non potrebbono nascere, salvo che inconvenienti dannosi al pubblico, e rovine inevitabili agli Stati; essendo pur troppo vero, che sia cosa propria del popolaccio inclinare sempre al pessimo.

In this assertion of hierarchy and the divine right of princes, the people, referred to as ‘popolaccio’, a word with a pejorative connotation, are always inclined to the worst. They are
cast as unruly children. They are less sophisticated than the prince. Their tendency to evil means they need the prince’s guidance and rule in order to prevent ‘monstrosities’.

Carlo Maria Carafa’s interest in the science of meridians and sundials is also driven by his ideas about the primacy of hierarchical order. In his writing, the sun symbolises rulers: “Egli [God] a voi propone un vostro simbolo, e in riguardo del vostro merito co’ razzi del Sole a caratteri di luce ve lo dipinge.” (He proposes to you your symbol, and according to your merit he delineates you with the rays of the sun in the form of light.) The subjects revolve around the sun-like ruler. He illuminates them with his light. The sun moves in predetermined lines across the sky. The prince must follow lines as the divine does. The curse of a disordered people is God’s revenge when a prince does not follow the divine regulations symbolised in the sundial’s regularity:

Per segno che ben vive un Principe, gli dimostra un oriouolo; né dovevasi con segno meno espressivo figurarsi de’ Principe la vita, che con un oriouolo a Sole; perocché, se quello regolato dal moto del Sole regola le azioni de ‘mortali, questi, se non si informano alla prima, e somma regola del ben operare, ch’è Dio, non potranno giammai, e ben reggere, e governare le operazioni de sudditi.\(^{156}\)

On the design of Grammichele, Salvatore Scacciante posits a connection between the town’s ground plan, and solar movements and clocks. He reads the town as a metaphorical clock or sundial. The main streets radiate from the central piazza like the rays of the sun. The raised sword of the statue of Saint Michael that once occupied the square functioned as a sundial.\(^{158}\) The rectangle for the prince’s palace is in the southwest, more or less in the position of the sun at midday.

In this hypothesis, Grammichele’s outline and the sestieri resemble a clock. The town plan that Michele da Ferla copied onto the slate from Carlo Carafa’s drawing, and now in the Palazzo Comunale in Grammichele, is oriented with the palace at the top of the clock, at midday (fig. 12). The palace is the first and last rectangle in a clockwise rotation around the hexagons. The areas where each section of the inner hexagon has an angle, or is bisected by a gate, can be read like the twelve hours of a clock.

Multiples of 6, particularly the numbers 12 and 60 occur frequently when counting Grammichele’s streets andisolati.\(^{159}\) It is not just the hexagonal perimeter that causes this, as the perimeter does not necessarily determine the number of streets orisolatiwithin the town. There are 12 separate areas in Grammichele; the 6 sestieri within the central hexagon,
and the 6 outer rectangles. Each of the central sestieri has 10 isolati, making a total of 60 isolati for the entire central hexagon. Each of the 5 outer rectangles, discounting the one for the palace, contains 12 isolati. This makes a total of 60 isolati for the outer rectangles. In the entire plan there are 120 isolati, plus the rectangle for the prince’s palace.

Scacciante does not investigate geometry and mathematics further. However, like the descriptions of the sun in Carlo Maria’s writings on meridians, the reading of Grammichele as a giant sundial relates to the operation of divine law through geometry. It is noteworthy however, that God works directly through these mathematical laws rather than through Church liturgy. For all of Carlo Maria Carafa’s emphasis on religion, Grammichele’s chiesa madre is displaced to one of the sides of the hexagonal central piazza (fig.9). It is not in the symbolic centre of Grammichele. Neither is the prince’s palace, which is outside the hexagon, far from the centre. Ecclesiastic and aristocratic power seem to defer to the open space of the hexagonal central piazza, although the palace may also be outside the centre to make it more difficult to surround in the event of a popular uprising.

The central piazzes of both Avola and Grammichele are very large spaces. They are excessively big in relation to the surrounding streets, or to any other spaces in the town. In place of the smaller, less regular areas of the pre-earthquake street layouts, the inhabitants of Avola and Grammichele encountered these new, clearly delineated spaces at the centre of their town. The piazzes are monuments to geometry. In both sites, the square becomes part of the purportedly ‘empty space’ that, in some assumptions, architecture is believed to shape and order. In Grammichele, the large hexagonal centre mirrors the hexagonal outline. Centre and periphery follow the same order, the same geometrical shape. Grammichele’s overt artificiality manifests Carlo Maria Carafa’s concern for technical power and control of geometry. The environment is reformed in line with his ideas on geometry as the essential tool for princes to control the population.

**Representing territory and the continuation of landed power.**

In the entrance hall of the Palazzo Butera, the Carafa Branciforte’s Palermitan residence, portraits and painted maps create an exposition of the family’s landed power (figs.13-14). The hall, also known as the Galleria dei feudi, is the first room a visitor to the piano nobile enters. From the palace courtyard, where aristocrats arrived in their coaches, a staircase ascends to the rectangular hall. The entrance is from the south end of the rectangle, making the room appear like a corridor. Portraits of the princes of Butera line the walls, extending away from the viewer and emphasizing their number, asserting the long genealogy of the
dynasty. On the hall’s western side, windows look out onto the street in front of the palace. On the eastern side, doors lead to two salons and then onto a sea-facing terrace.

The doors and windows share the same wooden decoration. Each door has a dark frame, with carved wooden frames above with paintings of the family’s fiefs (figs. 8, 15, 16). These sopraporte show 10 Sicilian fiefs (Militello, Raccuia, Butera, Grammichele, Barrafranca, Niscemi, Pietrapersia, Santa Lucia, Mazzarino, and Scordia). There are 11 portraits between the doors and sopraporte. These include the names, aristocratic titles, births and deaths of the Branciforte ancestors. There are also portrait busts of two ancestors, and a ceiling fresco that includes the family arms and decorative arms and armour.

This long hall, with its labelled ancestor portraits, paintings of family fiefs, ceiling fresco of decorative armour, and doorways which lead to salons and then to more private parts of the palace, presents the long-standing political and economic status of the Branciforte to the visitor. Within the hall, different representational systems operate. The Branciforte’s aristocratic lineage, power and possessions are presented through systems including the genealogical, the cartographic, measurement of land, repetition, mirroring, the heraldic, the banner rolls with writing, the numbered keys to the maps, the portraits, the paintings of towns and the arms and armour of the ceiling fresco.

The paintings lay out two important elements of an aristocratic family’s status; noble ancestors and landed titles. The ancestor portraits are full length and are raised above the viewer’s eye level. They occupy perspectival space, but look down over the hall. The paintings of the fiefs are smaller, located above each door within an ornate frame. They are seen from above. Their position above the doors makes it difficult to see the details of the towns, but each painting includes a numbered key listing the town’s churches and principal squares. These keys create the effect of an inventory. The family’s property is labelled and enumerated as well as depicted.

The map-portraits of the Butera fiefs should not be treated simply as sources of neutral data. They highlight certain features of the town, but mask or ignore others. Like the towns themselves, the paintings are constructions. Scholars have challenged assumptions that maps are neutral recordings of geography. Helen Hills argues:

The most traditional and most persistent tendency among historians and art historians has been to view maps as ‘reflections’ of the landscapes they depict. In recent years there has been a reaction against such assumptions. New research has opened up cartography to
historical enquiry, demonstrating how maps and plans, rather than being objective representations of real space, are as carefully considered, constructed and as problematic as any other visual representation. In his study of cartography, Denis Wood argues that maps can persuade, limit, or censor. Like language, maps are propositions that perform functions. Wood argues: “in effect, maps are systems of propositions, where a proposition is nothing more than a statement that affirms (or denies) the existence of something”. Maps crystallise and legitimate the current political situation. He continues: “From their inception it has been essential that states appear as facts of nature, as real enduring things, things like mountains; and at all costs to obscure their recent origins in violence and their tenuous holds on tomorrow.”

Maps therefore present control of territory as immutable. On a map, features such as territorial borders are marked and fixed. Borders and the location of important cities emphasise the state’s presence on the land, but the map may omit other information. J. Brian Harley discusses the constructed nature of maps in terms of maintaining power. He argues that what a map does not include can be read as a silence, a potential editing out, rather than just a ‘blank space’. On this insight, he writes:

This helps us gain an historical understanding of cartographic silence. It involves seeing cartography as a form of knowledge and that knowledge as a discourse. In this light, maps are interpreted as socially constructed perspectives on the world, rather than as the ‘neutral’ or ‘value free’ representations that, some historians insist, define the rise of state cartography in early modern Europe.

A map’s silences or omissions are significant. Harley continues: “the absence of something must be seen to be as worthy of historical investigation as its presence. So it is with cartography”. What a map doesn’t show may be due to lack of knowledge, for example in a map including unexplored territories. Frequently however, the silences are not lacunae but the result of choice. Harley calls these silences “political silences” and “active performances.”

The maps in the Galleria dei Feudi present positions through emphasis and omission. They emphasise aristocratic ownership. They depict the towns as if the viewer is looking down upon them. This is how they are seen by God, and by the eye of the planner. The viewer is able to see the entire town in a single image. The viewpoint allows the viewer to
metaphorically possess the entire town, to see all of its streets and buildings, but it keeps the viewer far from the details of life in the town.

The aerial view is the viewpoint of someone who uses maps. It derives from the eye of the planner who delineates and orders the landscape. As well as the numbered key, each painting has a scale of distances in canne at the bottom. The juxtaposition of the street plan, with its symmetry and marked out areas of land, and the scale of canne below the town, emphasizes measurement. The land is divided into plots, and dimensions and distances are calculated. The exact amount of land that the baron owned can be measured and known.

The towns’ territory is depicted as separate from the surrounding fields. For example, the fief of Mazzarino did not have a simple geometric outline, but its rounded, contour-like edges in the painting show a clear division between town and countryside (fig. 15). Similarly, in Butera the layout of the buildings is not easily reducible to lines and angles, but the town’s position on the dramatized hill keeps its boundary clearly marked (fig.16). Grammichele is shown as more integrated with its surroundings (fig. 8). Roads lead out of the town and into the countryside like veins. They are not part of the machine-like repetition of the hexagonal layout, but flow between the town and other places around it. They grow out like roots from a tree, or arteries from a heart. Once inside the town’s boundaries however, the rigidity of the grid of streets takes over.

There are few people depicted in the streets, allowing the viewer to see the town’s layout with less distraction. The people that are visible are well dressed; they look like aristocrats with leisure time, rather than people working. There is in fact little sign of work, even though the surrounding fields are green and fertile. Only the aristocrats walk around and enjoy the town.

Harley makes an important argument regarding how maps, like many other forms of representation, make the nobility and the Church prominent, while the remaining population disappears:

Instead [of depictions of the majority of the population] what we see singled out on these maps are people privileged by right to wear a crown or a mitre or to bear a coat of arms or a crozier. The peasantry, the landless labourers or the urban poor had no place in the social hierarchy and, equally, as a cartographically disenfranchised group, they had no right to representation on the map.
The vision of the fiefs in the Palazzo Butera *sopraporte* also matches the fertile and prosperous landscape described by Vito Amico and other eighteenth century visitors. There is the same insistence on harmony. The images show the towns as orderly and peaceful amongst their fertile fields. In the image of Grammichele, the buildings are uniform with their white walls and terracotta roofs (fig. 8). There is subordination and marshalling in the aligned buildings that conform to an easily legible, overall street pattern. Ordered towns and productive fields give a strong sense of good governance.

Like the eighteenth-century travellers’ accounts, the paintings in the Palazzo Butera present Sicily as a place of agricultural abundance, suggesting the island of Ceres described in the quotation from Mongitore earlier in this chapter. This denies issues such as desiccation and the poverty of most of the agricultural workers. The excessive tax burden on the population was one of the main reasons why most people lived in poverty. If the harvest failed there could be food riots and starvation, even though grain was stored for export. The cultivation of the land in Sicily was to maintain the baron’s wealth and power, rather than to provide a reliable food source for the population. The representations of the fiefs and the eighteenth-century accounts mask this with images of order and harmony.

**Conclusion.**

Scholarship on Avola and Grammichele has been dominated by idealist assumptions that read the towns as principally exercises in putatively rational and ‘Enlightenment’ planning. These readings present geometry as a disinterested, universal set of axioms rather than as instrument for, and justification of, the maintenance of aristocratic power. This chapter has argued that the geometrically planned towns were mechanisms of control. They reasserted the landowner’s control of the territory after the earthquake. The overtly artificial character of their street layouts and hexagonal perimeters are like stamps or brands on the landscape.

As Mukerji argues, territorial transformation is a tool and a measure of the landowners’ putative superiority. The hexagonal towns allowed Nicolò Pignatelli and Carlo Maria Carafa to use ideal geometry to justify dominance through putative superior knowledge emanating from higher laws. The rebuilding refigures the landscape using the apparently rational laws of geometry. The towns then become read in the literature as exemplars of supposedly harmonious, rational planning.

The treatise of Vito Amico, and the political writing of Carlo Maria Carafa, present geometric laws as natural and divine. Rather than following an idealist reading of these towns,
analysing the towns and their patrons in terms of power relations and territoriality shows how geometry and architecture are not disembodied. Their rules do not exist on an ideal, disembodied scroll like the image by Giovanni Biagio Amico discussed at the beginning of this chapter (fig.5). In Avola and Grammichele the seemingly ideal or disinterested geometrical forms operated within a system of absolutism and coercion.
Illustrations for Chapter One.

Fig. 5. Giovan Biagio Amico. *L'architetto pratico*, Vol. 1, 1726. Cap. IV, fig. 4.
Fig.6. Constructing foundations on soft soil. Giovanni Biagio Amico, *L’architetto pratico*, Vol. 1, 1726, Chapter 15, Figure 10.
Fig. 7. Constructing a Facade. Giovanni Biagio Amico, *L’architetto pratico*, Vol. 1, 1726, Chapter 18, Figure 11.
Fig. 9. Plan of Grammichele. Unknown author. Eighteenth century. (Image from Muti, ed, 2008: 40). Also reproduced in Dufour and Raymond, 1994). The map is oriented with the south-western sextile, containing the palace, at the top.
Fig. 10. Map of Avola by Giuseppe Guttadauro in Vito Amico’s *Lexicon Topographicum Siculum* of 1756. (Image from Tobriner, 1982: 41). Town layout designed by Angelo Italia, 1693.
Fig.11. Juan Caramuel Lobkowitz, *Architectura Civil*, 1678. Detail of Volume III, plate 4.
Fig. 12. Plan of Grammichele on a slate now in the Palazzo Comunale, Grammichele. Attributed to the architect Michele da Ferla, 1693. (Image from Gringeri Pantano, 1996:106).
Fig. 13. The upper entrance hall or *Galleria dei Feudi*, Palazzo Butera, Palermo. (Image from www.palazzobutera.com).
Fig. 15. Painting of Mazzarino. Entrance hall of the Palazzo Butera, Palermo. (Image from Zalapi, 2004: 129).
Fig. 16. Painting of Butera. Entrance hall of the Palazzo Butera, Palermo. (Image from palazzobutera.co).
Chapter Two. The Palazzo Beneventano in Scicli. Trauma and Violence.

Introduction. Violent Decoration.

In their entry for the 1754 *Encyclopédie*, Diderot and D’Alembert give two important principles which decoration must follow:

De ces quatre gens de décoration celle des façades est sans contredit celle qui exige le plus les préceptes de l’art. L’architecture et la sculpture concordent également à leur embellissement; mais cette dernière doit être absolument subordonnée à la première.  

Diderot and D’Alembert argue firstly that decoration should *embellish*. In their definition, facade decoration makes a palace noble, beautiful, and redolent of luxury. Secondly, decoration arises from the cooperation of sculpture and architecture. They see sculpture and architecture as distinct, but sculpture must remain subservient to architecture.

The Palazzo Beneventano in Scicli, believed to date from the 1760s, confounds these assumptions. On the palace’s east facade there is sculpture of unsettling, hybrid forms. The decoration emanates an insistent sense of trauma and sadism. On the mensole of the upper windows monstrous, fanged faces snap and snarl at the viewer (figs. 17, 19, 20). Above the lower portals of the same facade there are grimacing heads of ‘Turks’ or ‘Moors’. They are not as overtly threatening as the mensole carvings of the balcony, but there is disquiet and aggression in their caricature-like quality (fig. 21). They appear unaware of the viewer. Imprisoned in the lower part of the building, they look up towards the owner’s rooms in anticipation, captivity or fear.

Below the coat of arms on the corner of the building facing towards the main piazza, there are more images of a non-Christian Other. Two heads presumably representing Africans, with chains and slave collars, shout for help or moan in pain (fig. 22). These sculpted heads, lacking bodies and with their chains and collars, evoke sadism and violence. Like the head of the Turkish or North African man, they also diminish and ridicule their subject through caricatured features and an expression of fear, to make it less threatening.

Further startling images of sadistic violence appear on the two outer mensole of the upper windows on the east facade (figs. 23 and 24). Although heavily eroded by rainwater, the mensola in figure 23 includes a mascherone of a male face with an iron bracket hammered into its mouth. It is likely that the mascherone in figure 24, although even more eroded,
included a similar face with open mouth and iron bar. The iron bar emerges belt-like from the sides of the *mensola*. It goes across the cheeks and into the mouth of the grimacing face. There is a sadistic attention to detail in sculptural transformation of the stone into a cast-iron strap that retains the bends and buckles from hammer blows into the mouth.

The east facade of the Palazzo Beneventano challenges the assumptions of Diderot and D'Alembert, and others, that decoration should be subservient and beautiful. ‘Violent decoration’ seems an unlikely term, but it is apt for the Palazzo Beneventano. Some of the ornament on this palace is not predictable or pleasing. Neither is it subordinate to, or an addition to, something else called ‘architecture’. The facade sculpture is as much part of the building as any other element.

The facade evokes violence, and makes us confront evocations of the Other. The Other is conceived as something part human and part bestial in the upper *mensole* of the palace facade, or as diminished and enslaved in the heads of the Africans and Moors. The howling, tortured sculpture conveys a trauma not found in architectural treatises. It confronts us with difficult and troubling questions of order and control, fear and pain. The facade creatures' tormented existence challenges the order that is often read into the eighteenth-century Sicilian towns. There is ambiguity and chaos. There seems little of the Enlightenment here. Instead there is pessimism and nightmare.

This chapter focuses on facade decoration in terms of what is included, and also what is implied. In her study of convent architecture in Naples, Helen Hills refers to this resonance between architecture and the desires and fears of architects and patrons: “[Invisible City] investigates the relationship between the architecture of female aristocratic convents in early modern Naples and the bodies they were built to house, seeking to link architectural discourse not simply to that of social hierarchy and exclusivity, but to the anxieties and unspoken fears circulating in the shadows of these discourses.” My analysis in this chapter reads the Palazzo Beneventano facade as evoking certain desires and fears.

As with many other Val di Noto palaces, very little is known about the Palazzo Beneventano. No documents on its patrons, architects, or construction have been found. The absence of records makes the palace exist in a form of silence. Although there are serious limitations to ‘explaining’ architecture through documents, the total lack of documents for the Palazzo Beneventano creates problems in studying this palace. Factors such as a family’s wealth and status, professional and personal connections between architects and patrons, and their other commissions, give a potentially rich field for architectural historians to draw on.
On the other hand, the lack of documentation is a challenge to find new interpretative strategies for these enigmatic and ignored facades. This chapter reads the Palazzo Beneventano firstly in terms of how it problematises expectations of ornament. The strange transformations and snarling figures of the Palazzo Beneventano are challenging and unpredictable, not ornamental or reassuring. Their transformations question boundaries between nightmare and waking, fear and control. The creatures of the upper balconies bring to mind Christopher Heuer’s words on monstrous ornament: “the forms [criticised by Vitruvius] were all the more threatening for what they presumed about mankind’s bestial side, humanity’s interconnectedness to all levels of beings”. 176 This connection between ornament and the savage and repressed, informs my approach in this chapter.

The Palazzo Beneventano and Aporia.

The Palazzo Beneventano’s east facade is unusual in the Val di Noto in the extent of its ferocity. Its violence is far from the balance and harmony usually associated with facades that also deploy classical cornice and pilasters, such as the Palazzo Landolina and Palazzo Impellizzeri in Noto discussed in the previous chapter. Attempts to reduce the Palazzo Beneventano’s decoration to adaptations of ideas from treatises do not go far. At first sight, there seem to be parallels with the grotesque heads and strap-like ornament in Sebastiano Serlio’s Libro Estraordinario (Lyon, 1551) or in treatises including Hans Vredeman de Vries’ Den Eersten Boeck (Antwerp, 1565) and Scenographie (Antwerp, 1560), and Wendel Dietterlin’s Architectura (Nuremberg, 1598). However, this chapter will argue that the degree of violence in some of the Palazzo Beneventano decoration makes it very different. 177

Serlio’s illustrations for the Libro Estraordinario emphasise the weight and roughness of stone. In many of the plates, straps or belts emerge from the stonework to bind columns to the rest of the building (figs. 25 and 26). In Plate XV, broad horizontal straps constrain Ionic columns. The rustication of the stone crosses into the straps, creating ambiguity between solid stone and something buckling and flexible. In Plate XX, telemones whose headdress suggests that they are Moors are first imprisoned within a basket structure and then bound down by straps growing from the masonry. These telemones do not support the building. They are the building’s prisoners.

Some of Serlio’s plates produce disquiet and some brutality, but the straps holding down the Palazzo Beneventano mascheroni are of a different level of violence. The bands that bind the mascherone in figure 23 to the facade may show a form of cynical quotation from Serlio or other treatises, but the aggression of the iron rammed into the figure’s mouth is of a different
order altogether. In Serlio’s Plate XX (fig. 26) the telemones are imprisoned within the basket and the masonry straps, but there is no violence assault on their bodies analogous to the hammered bar in the mouth of the *mascherone* of figure 23.

The Palazzo Beneventano sculpture cannot be reduced to adaptations of treatise images. Neither can it be relegated to a generic architectural category of ‘grotesques’. Studies on decoration often present grotesques in terms of *capriccio*, play and marginalia. In her analysis of eighteenth-century French designs by Androuet de Cerceau, Jean Marriette and others, Katie Scott writes:

> Monkeys and men [and other creatures in the decoration] are not so much framed by strapwork and scrolls as actively engaged with them. They are shown in the process of transforming the imperial acanthus and the majestic pedestal into material proper to their sport, and in so doing they seem, almost literally, to work at the destruction of their ornamental universe.  

In Scott’s analysis there is destructive playfulness as the creatures in the decoration make sport with the boundaries of ornament. The Palazzo Beneventano *mensole* do not have this sense of playfulness. They do not work at the destruction of their ornamental universe. Instead, they are imprisoned in the building. They loom out of the building, but they cannot be free of it. They cannot become fully formed creatures (figs. 19-22). The designs in Serlio’s *Libro Estraordinario*, and the later grotesques Katie Scott describes, are also associated with gardens and rural retreats. The *mensole* of the Palazzo Beneventano and other Val di Noto palaces are in the towns. They are not Serlio’s rustic gateways. Treatises and a classical tradition of *grotteschi* do not somehow ‘cause’ the Palazzo Beneventano decoration.

There are some similarities with decoration in nearby towns in the Iblean plateau, but aggressive demonic imagery beyond the Palazzo Beneventano and one or two other facades are few. The capitals on the portal of the Palazzo Napolino Tomasi Rossi in Modica, one of the Iblean towns, include snarling, dragon-like creatures (fig. 27). Their mouths both swallow and generate the swags of the portal decoration. They appear to be spewing out the decoration. Near the mouth, the decoration that comes out can be read as cloth, liquid, or the monster’s tongue. As it moves down the column it becomes more clearly hanging drapery.

On a portal on the north side of the Convento dei Carmelitani in Scicli a *mascherone* transforms from swags and volutes and snarls from the keystone. Two other *mascheroni*
grimace on the capitals (fig. 28). This portal is quite heavily eroded, but the aggressive mascheroni have a similar malevolence and torment to the Palazzo Beneventano. Mascheroni are also uncommon on religious buildings. The convent’s east facade is the main one, facing onto Piazza Busacca. Its decoration does not include mascheroni. 181

Imagery of Turks and Moors is equally uncommon in the eighteenth-century Val di Noto buildings. It appears on the facades of the Palazzo Floridia and the Palazzo Bertini in Ragusa Alta, both of unknown date and architect. Over each of the three second-storey windows of the Palazzo Bertini there is the head of a man wearing a turban (fig.29). The facade on one side of the portal is no longer extant, suggesting there may originally have been six windows. This decoration does not have the menace of the Palazzo Beneventano, but similarities in the two facades, such as the turbaned heads and carved portal frame and window above the sculpted heads, are striking (fig. 21).

Many of the Val di Noto mascheroni induce a sense of disquiet, but it is rarely as overtly threatening as the sculpture of the Palazzo Beneventano. Whilst there is no such thing as the ‘typical’ Val di Noto facade, many mascheroni imply a weak sense of threat. The Palazzo Napolino Tomasi Rossi in Modica deploys the aggressive creatures of figure 79, but the mascheroni on the portal’s keystone are more indicative of the usually weakened aggression of most Val di Noto mascheroni (fig. 30). The two faces are partially but not completely human. Their lolling tongues and frowning, heavily ridged eyes are threatening and bestial, but this is limited. There is a canine quality. Unlike in the Palazzo Beneventano, there is more sense of a guard dog that could be won over and brought under control. The mascheroni are also tied together and hang from the keystone, emphasising that they are only masks.

**Two faces of the Palazzo Beneventano.**

The Palazzo Beneventano occupies a central location on the lower part of a slope close to Scicli’s main square. The palace’s spatial relationship to the surrounding urbanism has changed since the eighteenth century. Although mainly surrounded by narrow side streets, the palace’s entrance was once on the main thoroughfare known as the Maestranza Vecchia (fig. 31). 182 The lowering of the road in the nineteenth century also changed the proportions of the facade, making it appear higher than at the time of building. The narrow street that passes the aggressive sculpture of the east facade originally consisted of steps, slowing the pace of passers-by who might look at the facade decoration. 183
This section investigates the striking contrast between the monstrous east facade, and the other two extant facades (figs. 18, 32, 33). Paolo Nifosì hypothesises that the facades date from between 1760 and 1780. This is convincing, as architectural features such as the main portal and the decoration of the window cornices are similar to other Sicilian buildings dated to this period. Nifosì suggests that the stonemasons Pietro Cultraro, Mario Mormina and Girolamo Iacinto were the sculptors of the mensole. This group of stonemasons frequently worked together. There is evidence that they worked on other buildings in Scicli at this time, but no evidence of their involvement with the Palazzo Beneventano.

The original building probably covered all or most of its isolato but one half of the building was demolished to construct the adjacent buildings. The east and west facades now come to an abrupt end, and the eighteenth-century north facade no longer exists. On the west facade, the main portal is no longer in the centre of the facade (fig. 33). The size of this portal suggests that this was once the main facade. The abrupt termination of the upper-storey cornice makes it look as if the facade has been sawn in half. The opposite east facade is also incomplete (fig. 34). The south facade is the only one that is complete.

Some parts of these facades are heavily eroded, such as the south facade’s three upper balconies. What remains of the facades shows the east facade as consistently demonic. By contrast, the west facade combines the benign and the aggressive. This facade’s contrasting decoration is particularly marked in the upper-storey windows. The cornices of the south facade include angelic young male heads (fig. 35). Their faces are contented and serene. Gently moving scrolls and foliage surround them. At the top of the cornice, opening leaves suggest growth and prosperity. In contrast, the creatures of the eroded mensole snarl and grimace. One has a lolling, animal tongue (fig. 36).

On the more malevolent east facade, the counterpart of the serene male heads above the south facade’s windows consists of a scallop shell and volutes that metamorphosise into a monstrous face (figs. 35 and 37). The creature’s buckled and squashed mouth and nose operate both as facial features and as scrolls that press together. In one sense the mouth disappears, but it also looks like it could swallow a smaller creature. The mouth is closed as if the reptile-like animal is breathing through its nose, or does not want to make a sound. It watches with wary, deep-set eyes. Partly submerged within the building, its head protrudes outside the window frame moulding. Its narrowed eyes and suspicious, hostile expression transform the conventional scallop-shell decoration into a living presence that seems able to move into or out of the building.
At the corner where the south and east facades meet, combinations of decoration further juxtapose benevolence and cruelty. This southeast corner projects towards the main piazza. For a person coming along the narrow street from Scicli’s main piazza, this is the first part of the palace they see. Two heavily ornamented giant order composite pilasters meet at the juncture of the two facades (fig. 38). The pilasters’ rustication suggests shields, reptilian scales or the plates of an armoured animal. The armoured decoration, like the threatening guardian-like figures on other parts of the facades, conveys resistance to intruders and outsiders. On the upper part of the southeast corner, scroll-like foliage decoration surrounds the Beneventano coat of arms. Below, disquiet and violence resumes. The two screaming or shouting African-caricature heads appear chained to a classical volute and scallop shell (fig. 22).

A statue of Saint Joseph with the infant Jesus stands on a modillion where the two pilasters meet (fig. 39). The statue contrasts with the Africans, Moors, and demonic mensole. Saint Joseph is one of Scicli’s patron saints. At the Cavalcata di San Giuseppe held every March, decorated horses and riders traverse the town to commemorate the holy family’s flight into Egypt. On the statue’s base there are two small angelic faces. They are mascheroni, but of a delicacy and small scale not found elsewhere on the building. Before the nineteenth-century lowering of the road, the statue was lower. Its base started just above the height of a door. Saint Joseph was closer and more visible to passers by. The statue is not housed in an edicola, but its location at a meeting of streets, and visibility to people coming from the main piazza, gives it a benign presence watching over a junction. Two of the saint’s right hand fingers are missing, but this hand blesses people walking past.

Saint Joseph and Jesus are the only complete, and completely human, figures on the Palazzo Beneventano facade. Joseph is the only standing figure. He is depicted as subject to conventional forces of the physical world such as gravity, balance and movement of air. His left arm, leg and hip support the baby Jesus’ weight. He looks down at the people that his right arm blesses. Wind blows around his robes. In contrast, all the other creatures on the facade operate outside these physical constraints. They are partially imprisoned in the building, with incomplete bodies. Their lack of wholeness makes them disturbing and uncanny. They are not representations of any real or mythical creatures. The laws or processes that metaphorically bind them are less predictable.

The statue of Saint Joseph and Jesus evokes tenderness and redemption. It is a respite from the violence of the east facade, but its gentleness and recognizable iconography is incongruous with much of the other decoration. The angelic figures on parts of the palace,
and the monsters and non-Christians on others, are difficult to place within conventional iconography. They could be read in terms of Heaven and Hell. This is not to limit the decoration by suggesting one reading as purported key or answer. However, the howling demons, Moors and chained Africans are in torment. They may already be in hell, or are aware of their punishment, or can see it arriving. In contrast, the angelic heads are serene, in heaven or looking to heaven. The facade ornament goes beyond the more common definitions of decoration. It juxtaposes violent torment with peace and repose.

**Strange Bodies. Prodigies and Portents.**

The strange, transforming beings in the facade sculpture of palaces such as the Palazzo Beneventano have resonances with Antonino Mongitore’s *Della Sicilia Ricercata* (Palermo, 1742). Mongitore was a Jesuit priest and canon of Palermo cathedral who published a wide range of works on Sicilian history and geography. In *Della Sicilia Ricercata*, he describes the island’s natural wonders. Mongitore’s Sicily is a world of marvels as well as disquiet. His prodigies and transformations exist in the world but are outside the limits of the everyday. They are exceptions that question rules of reason and of science. They are generated by what Mongitore describes as ‘forces of nature’. In Mongitore’s text, these forces are present in the island of Sicily itself. The strange and marvellous is bound to happen there.  

Mongitore describes Sicily as a cornucopia rich in fruit, animals, minerals, gems, fish and other gifts of nature.  

The chapters of the first volume group these marvels into prodigious living beings, starting with humans and then moving to animals. Mongitore describes biological wonders that occurred in Sicily. He usually gives a date and a place for these strange occurrences, although sometimes he cites ancient authors. There are descriptions of strange bodies such as conjoined twins and triplets, both human and animal. There is a baby with three heads, another with three hands, another with three heads, three chests, six arms and six legs.  

These conjoined twins and triplets are mixed with accounts of human and animal hybrids such as a baby born with the head of a horse, or a girl with hands and feet like a duck. There are women who give birth to a rabbits, toads or octopuses, a baby born in the form of a cat, although with human hands, a baby with the genitals of a mule, a half-man half-lion, a half-woman-half monkey, a calf with a human face but with a single eye.  

Mongitore presents the events as monstrous but also miraculous. Massimo Ganci notes that Mongitore’s descriptions involve bodies that contradict and overcome restrictions of
taxonomies and putative normality. Ganci affirms Mongitore’s celebration of the miraculous, but risks subsuming the interest in strange bodies into a general and undeveloped idea of an irrational undercurrent running through Sicilian culture: “La Sicilia Ricercata di Mongitore, insieme con Villa Palagonia, vanno quindi lette come esempi siciliani di quel ‘filo rosso’ dell’irrazionale che si dipana dall’alto medioevo al romanticismo, non interrotto dal rinascimento, questo filo non lo sarà neppure dell’età dei lumi.”

Ganci’s link between Mongitore and the Villa Palagonia at Bagheria near Palermo is interesting however. Between 1751 and 1772, Ferdinando Francesco Gravina Prince of Palagonia commissioned strange hybrid sculpture for the garden walls and one of its gates (fig. 40). These creatures resonate with Mongitore’s descriptions. The sculptures include demonic figures with wings and tails, a woman with three breasts and a horse’s head attached to the side of her own head, and a dragon with a face growing from its chest.

Ganci’s alignment of Mongitore’s descriptions in Della Sicilia Ricercata with the sculpture of the Villa Palagonia suggests that both partake of a Sicilian tradition that operates against an international programme of supposedly rational enlightenment. While the Villa Palagonia, and the Palazzo Beneventano, do show that Sicilian architecture was more than just a copy of treatise architecture, Ganci’s binary between the local and idiosyncratic on one side, and the international and rational on the other, risks placing the Sicilian decoration in a tradition that runs in the background to a supposedly more important and rational artistic lineage periodised as the Renaissance and the Enlightenment.

Although Mongitore describes strange events, the universe he presents in Della Sicilia Ricercata is not one of fragmentation and randomness. It is disconcerting and sometimes frightening, but there is also sympathy between things. There is mutuality and connection between phenomena which seem different, but which can give rise to each other. Mongitore’s causality resembles James Frazer’s early-twentieth century definition of sympathetic magic, where “an effect resembles its cause”. There is interaction between elements, humours, stars, bodies, and materials.

Mongitore gives an explanation for some of the phenomena he describes. He describes many of the hybrid human-animal births as generated by something fearful the pregnant mother sees. In a case from 1701, a horse frightened a muleteer’s wife. She gave birth to a baby with four legs and a horse’s head. In other cases, something experienced manifests itself later as a birthmark or other bodily feature, such as the macabre story of a girl born with
a red face and “twisted mouth and neck”, caused when her pregnant mother watched a public hanging. 195

Powerful emotions, particularly fear, are given as the causes for these changes in the body of the unborn child. Mongitore reports that the influence of the imagination is strong, particularly in women about to conceive. 196 In all of Mongitore’s strange events, there is a strong sense that all things are interconnected and can affect each other. Trauma and emotional shock can affect unborn children, such as in the stories of pregnant mothers. Trauma can be passed to another generation and result in bodily mutations.

This belief in the interrelatedness of phenomena could also take the form of portents. Inexplicable or troubling experiences might presage an event such as an earthquake. Some Sicilian writers considered these portents a sign of divine wrath. Many of the accounts of the 1693 earthquake refer to these portents. Vincenzo Bonaiuto’s account mentions a great flame or bright light in the sky on the evening before the first earthquake of 9th of January. On the 10\textsuperscript{th} of January, the air was dark and yellow, presaging the second earthquake of 11\textsuperscript{th} of January. 197

The sculpture of the Palazzo Beneventano facade is enigmatic and complex. It contrasts the violent and tormented demons, Africans and Moors with singing, angelic heads and the beneficence of Saint Joseph with Jesus. Some of its sculpture can be located in an interest in mutations and strange bodies that does not partake of an Enlightenment drive towards framing nature as a predictable mechanism. Instead, it posits that the world is mysterious, unpredictable and uncontrollable. Other elements of the facade can be read within insecurity and fear of violence, as the next section will discuss.

**Urban Rivalries in Scicli.**

The trauma and violence on the Palazzo Beneventano facade can also be related to the insecurity and potential violence present in Scicli during the eighteenth century. Although some of the political and economic factors in Scicli’s history, such as religious and family rivalries, also occur in towns where the menacing decoration of the Palazzo Beneventano is not present, the religious conflicts in Scicli, and the issue of slavery and possible attack from North Africa, suggest a state of insecurity that resonates with the Palazzo Beneventano facade. 198
Religious and family rivalries divided Scicli’s population in the seventeenth century. Religious processions sometimes led to violent conflicts involving clergy as well as members of lay confraternities. The strongest rivalry in Scicli, and one which divided the population into two opposed groups, was between the confraternities of the church of Santa Maria la Nova (known as the marianisti), and Saint Bartholomew (the bartolari). The marianisti argued that only they should use the title of arciconfraternità, as theirs was the older church. This would make them senior over the rival bartolari.

Processions on feasts such as Christmas, Easter, the Immaculate Conception and Saint Paul often led to violence between the two groups. To prevent this, the giurati ordered that the confraternities would not hold processions simultaneously. This led to one group celebrating the Immacolata on 8 December, and the other on the following Sunday. There were also two feasts of the Addolorata, one on Palm Sunday and the other on Easter Tuesday. The processions and their followers also had to keep within geographical limits. Violence could erupt if one group moved outside its boundaries. Bartolo Cataudella writes: “Erano pugnate e bastonate, tutte le volte che, in una processione, con la statua del santo, per il Natale o per la Pasqua, o per le ‘Immacolate’, i portatori a spalla del fèrcolo sgarrassero di un palmo sui limiti convenuti, invadendo il territorio assegnato alla chiesa rivale.”

Other conflicts include the 50-year lawsuit the church of San Matteo pursued against the church of Santa Maria la Piazza, as San Matteo argued that Santa Maria should be its dependent church, and discord between the Jesuits and the Capuchins. These rivalries continued but became less violent after the eighteenth-century. Paolo Balsamo, visiting in 1808, reported: “the town is now at peace, since the tremendous disputes and animosities between the rival parishes have subsided. There are still, however, discontents, and parties and factions amongst the leading people, which cannot fail to influence the public morals.”

The Beneventano of Scicli were implicated in these conflicts as they were marianisti. Scholars have found very little documentation on this family before the nineteenth century. The Scicli Beneventano were a branch of a noble family that included the Beneventano of Lentini and the Beneventano del Bosco of Syracuse, and were members of the nobility in Scicli before the 1693 earthquake. In February 1693, a request to the viceroy for aid after the earthquake mentions the recent death of Don Guglielmo Beneventano, an important person in the town. The Beneventano retained noble status in the eighteenth century. Antonino Carioti’s map of Scicli from the 1740s lists the town’s principal churches and palaces, and includes the Beneventano among the town’s noble families.
Family members served as rettori of the church of Santa Maria la Nova. Their allies were the Spadaro and La Rocca families, fellow mariastri. On their rivalries with other families, a Mario Pluchinotta’s unpublished 1936 transcription of an undated, but possibly late-nineteenth century manuscript entitled Notizie su alcune comunità religiose di Scicli, by a historian named Valdigne, includes an interesting account of a conflict between the mariastri Baron Carmelo Beneventano and the bartolo Baron Francesco di Paola Penna. This provides one reading of the Palazzo Beneventano’s demonic east facade, with its fearsome monsters and hostile depictions of Africans and Moors, and which faces both the rival church of San Bartolomeo and the site of the now demolished Palazzo Penna.

Pluchinotta relates that in the second half of the eighteenth century, Carmelo Beneventano and Francesco Penna were rival claimants to the estate of Giovanni Grimaldi, head of one of the Contea di Modica’s richest families. Francesco Penna won the legal battle, but Carmelo Beneventano remained hostile after the legal case was closed. One of Francesco Penna’s ancestors was captured as a slave by North African pirates and ransomed. Paolo Nifosi argues that Carmelo Beneventano is the patron of the Palazzo Beneventano and that he included the heads of Moors as reference to Francesco Penna’s ancestor’s enslavement. This account, even if not fully substantiated by documents, does resonate with the operation of slavery in Scicli’s history.

The Palazzo Beneventano and the Edge of Europe. Pirates and Slavery.

One of the disturbing aspects of the Palazzo Beneventano facade is the inclusion of African and ‘Moorish’ heads. They bring into play institutions of slavery and fear of Islam that were central to economies on both sides of the Mediterranean and beyond. Scicli is one of the most southerly points of Europe, close to North Africa and, in the eighteenth century, guarded against a perceived threat of attack from areas including North Africa by the system of coastal defences referred to in Chapter One.

With its southern location, Scicli was a sergenzia or capital of one of Sicily’s military districts. The Mediterranean’s north-south division in this period made the southern shore unknown to most Europeans, but there is a history of slave raiding, and ransoming of hostages, between these northern and southern shores. The Sciclitani were at risk of capture by North African pirates, but there were also slave markets in Scicli. Slaves in Scicli who fled but were recaptured were branded with the letter ‘F’, which may be for fuggiasco or fuggitivo (fugitive). There was a tradition in the town for slaves’ male descendants to wear a single gold earring.
The danger from slave raiders was certainly present in the eighteenth century. On a journey between Cape Passaro (the south-eastern point of Sicily, 50km from Scicli) and Malta in 1700-1701, John Dryden describes the crew’s concern at the appearance of an unknown ship. As it came nearer they saw it was British, but their consternation shows the fear of slavers. The danger persisted into the nineteenth century. In a letter of 1810, the English visitor Thomas Wright Vaughan reports: “the exposed, or rather unguarded, state of all the southern coast of Sicily, is really dreadful; for perhaps you are not aware that they are as much exposed to the ravages of the pirates from Barbary, and the horrors of slavery, as they were in former days from the attacks of those barbarians; between whom, and the Sicilians, a constant war is kept alive.” He claims that slavers captured 200 people in 1810.

Although Sicilians and North Africans were enemies, there were channels of contact for freeing slaves. Raids might be carried out for slaves to sell or to ransom to their families. Religious orders such as the Trinitarians, founded in 1198, and Pedro Nolasco’s Order of Our Lady of Mercy, founded in the thirteenth century, devoted themselves to freeing Christians that had been captured by the Turks or North Africans. Part of the Busacca fund, a charity existing in Scicli since the sixteenth century, provided 20 onze a year for rescuing slaves.

This slave raiding and conflicts with Islam entered the imagery of European art. This imagery often took the form of the defeated Muslim, the vanquished enemy: Elizabeth McGrath writes: “After the victory of Lepanto, hailed as a Christian triumph over Islam, slaves and humbled captives in European art were often represented as ‘Moors’ (African Muslims as well as Turks), part of a widespread anti-Ottoman theme which coloured the iconography of slavery in Mediterranean areas for almost two centuries.” Imagery of defeated Muslims asserted Christianity’s strength and God’s favour at Lepanto. It also neutralised fears, showing that the threat was controllable.

In Scicli, the annual feast of the Madonna delle Milizie May commemorates the Norman’s defence of the town against the Moors in 1091. According to the legend of the Madonna delle Milizie, the Virgin appeared on horseback, armed with a sword, and led the Christians to victory. The statue of the Madonna delle Milizie is kept in the Chiesa Madre di Sant’Ignazio. It depicts the Madonna on a horse trampling a figure representing an armed ‘Moor’, and another representing an African (fig. 41). On the festival day of the last Saturday in May the people re-enact the battle between Christians and Moors, with the statue of the Madonna delle Milizie appearing to turn the battle in favour of the Christians.
The Moors and Africans on the Palazzo Beneventano facade are captive and defeated. The heads of the two Africans have heavy collars around their necks (fig. 22). They are held captive below the family shield. They shout or grimace, but they cannot move. Their heads have no bodies capable of attack. The collar and chains mark their slave status. In the eighteenth century, slaves generally did not wear collars if they worked out of sight of aristocratic society. From her analysis of European images of African slaves, Elizabeth McGrath concludes that the slave collar “appears not so much in the punitive context of sugar mills and plantations of the colonies, but in high class domestic settings”.\(^\text{222}\) Where slaves interacted with aristocrats as domestic servants, the collar emphasised that they were the family's property.

The collar and chain neutralises the perceived threat of the Africans on the facade by punishing and enslaving them. The turbaned Moor is made unthreatening through ridicule (fig. 21). He is an older, overweight man. There is something of the buffoon about him, and nothing of malevolence or intelligence. His eyes roll and his tongue lolls. He has fangs, but he seems unlikely to attack. He does not snarl or threaten like many of the other images on the facade. He does not even appear aware of the viewer's presence. He looks up, perhaps to the second floor where the master lives, or to the divine retribution that is his fate for heresy. The patron of the palace has conquered these threats. They are present, but they cannot harm the palace’s inhabitants or the people of the town.

**Violence and Resistance.**

The indeterminate aggression that can be read in some Sicilian facade decoration, manifest in extreme form in the Palazzo Beneventano, evokes forces that cannot be fully understood or controlled. Some of the anxiety the sculpture evokes derives from the namelessness of the fearful monsters, the absence of an iconographic tradition to contain them.

Aggression is mixed with anxiety in the Palazzo Beneventano decoration. Fanged faces on the facades appear ready to jump like guard dogs at passers by. Rusticated decoration on the corner pilasters includes large pointed stone bosses that suggest shields or the armour of a monstrous creature (fig. 38). This part of the decoration makes the palace seem fortified against attack. It suggests a latent, malevolent power that resides in the palace, and which is also associated with the palace’s inhabitants.

The Sicilian nobility had reason to fear the population. Besides the breakdown of order that could follow earthquakes, such as the looting that occurred in Avola and Grammichele
referred to in Chapter One, the frequent bread shortages when combined with the great inequalities of wealth meant that there was always a possibility that the people might turn on the nobles. Bread shortages sparked violent uprisings in Messina, Palermo, Sciacca, Agrigento and Catania (1646-1647), Palermo (1703, 1707, 1718 and 1773) and Catania (1798). The people looted aristocratic property and in some cases killed nobles who did not flee. \(^{223}\)

The possible effects of this popular violence are depicted in Micco Spadaro’s painting of the 1647 Masaniello uprising in Naples (fig. 42). The painting conjures up the danger that was always present for the aristocracy. Ragged clothed rioters drag bodies across the square and behead them. Spadaro shows the head of the nobleman Giuseppe Carafa displayed on a pike. Terror and violence were meted out in return. When the rebellions were crushed, the heads of the leaders were displayed as a warning and a reassertion of aristocratic control. \(^{224}\)

In addition to mascherone that evoke varying degrees of aggression, many Val di Noto palaces such as the Palazzo Beneventano deploy balconies with distinctive ringhiere or ironwork that suggest cages, bars, spikes, weapons and hooks (figs. 43-45). The ringhiere protect the palaces against intruders symbolically and literally. Above the stone mensole, there are usually balconies with decorative ironwork. The literature, seeking to match stone carving with motifs from printed treatises, overlooks this ironwork. The ringhiere are elegant, curling, aggressive and blade-like. They often deploy multiple sharp edges and points extending outwards. This decoration does not just imply or represent violence and defence. It is both decorative and violent.

The balconies expand outwards in smooth curves like a breeze or a wave. The iron partly envelops the person looking out on the balcony. At the same time hooks and pointed flowers could tear into the body of a person climbing over (fig. 43). The ironwork’s outward undulation makes the balcony more difficult to climb. At the corners there is often sharp, pointed decoration. Loops on the upper handrail face outwards. They join the vertical bars to the horizontal frame, but can also confuse the hand in the dark gripping the balcony from outside.

On the upper balconies of the Palazzo Nicolaci in Noto hooks on the corners add to the ringhiera’s wave-like quality (fig. 44). Iron straps transform as they became detached from the main ringhiera. The straps become claws or tentacles that try to reattach themselves to the balcony. The iron does not have the cold inertness of stone. It can be bent and twisted. On the ringhiera there is actual tension where the iron is bent and thenbolted to the bar
running around the top of the balcony, but different parts of the ringhiera also suggest different properties. The same iron can appear tense and held back like the curved bars on the front of the balcony, or flailing like the hooks on the corners.

Many ringhiera include spiked iron flowers. Like the demonic figures of the Palazzo Beneventano balcony, this is violent decoration. The spiked flowers function structurally to strengthen the junctures of the ironwork, but they also point outward like defensive spikes (fig. 44). They are decorative and aggressive. Oscar Spadola calls them fioroni. 225 His drawings from different palazzi in Ragusa show the care taken over these floral spikes (figs. 45-46). Some of them are cross-shaped (nos. 1 and 2 in fig. 45). Others include half-moon curved blades (3 and 4 in fig. 46).

On the Palazzo Beneventano facade, the spiked ringhiera combine with the mascheroni and demonic sculpture to extend and question what ornament can be. Decoration can adorn, but it also has other effects. In some cases the decoration shows pain and anguish, sometimes it partakes of angelic music or the earthly joys of life. It can partake of the benign and the reassuring, but it can also disquiet and threaten in its evocation of potential violence.

**Conclusion. Haunted Facades.**

The Palazzo Beneventano mensole and mascheroni present a challenge. They inhabit the facades like a hallucination. Sometimes the creatures seem to lurk within the facade. At other times they burst out, transforming the facade and breaking the boundaries of the frame of classical architectural members that attempt to contain them. The three extant facades or parts of facades switch between disquieting demons and reassuring, tranquil singing heads. The violent imagery of some parts of the facade subverts canonical conventions of architectural decoration and evokes a sense of aggression and of resistance to authority.

The strange facade sculpture shows disquieting metamorphosis. Carolyn Walker-Bynum argues that metamorphosis resists order. It implies that the world is fluid rather than static:

> The man who becomes a wolf (metamorphosis) can be seen as revealing his rapacity; satyrs, chimeras or mermaids (hybrids) can be understood as depicting lust, hypocrisy, or the insubstantiality of love. On the other hand, both hybrid and metamorphosis can be destabilizings of expectations. Both can suggest that the world, either in process or in the instant, is disordered and fluid, with the horror and wonder of uncontrolled potency or violated boundaries. 226
The Palazzo Beneventano facade shows the world as uncertain, but it controls the demons of imagination; both the terrifying monsters and slavers, and the slaves and poor who might rise up. The Moors and Africans of the facade are now slaves of the building. They snarl and lunge but cannot break free. Some of them pull against their chains, but can never free themselves from the building that imprisons them. The frightening nature of these beings, their potential aggression and the difficulty in controlling them, affirms the power and ferocity of the owner. The facade attests that the Beneventano conjured them, but also captured them and set them in their place. Their hybridity suggests that they may mutate again however, that their owners cannot completely control their creations.
Illustrations for Chapter Two.

Fig. 17. The Palazzo Beneventano, Scicli. Architect unknown. Second half of the eighteenth century. Upper-storey balcony of the east facade.
Fig. 18. Palazzo Beneventano. Southeast corner. Second half of the eighteenth century. Architect and date unknown.
Fig. 19. Palazzo Beneventano. Upper-storey balcony of the east facade.
Fig. 20. Decoration on the east facade of the Palazzo Beneventano.
Fig. 21. Head of a ‘Moor’ on the facade of the Palazzo Beneventano.
Fig. 22. Decoration below the coat of arms on the corner of the east and south facades, Palazzo Beneventano.
Figs 23 and 24. Detail of fig.19. Lower part of the *mensole* of the upper window of the Palazzo Beneventano east facade.
Fig 25. Sebastiano Serlio Libro Estraordinario (Lyon, 1551). Plate XV.
Fig 26. Sebastiano Serlio *Libro Estraordinario* (Lyon, 1551). Plate XX.
Fig. 27. *Mascherone* on the portal of the Palazzo Napolino Tomasi Rossi, Modica. Eighteenth century. Architect unknown.
Fig. 28. Mascheroni on a portal on the north side of the Convento dei Carmelitani, Scicli. Eighteenth century. Architect unknown.
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Fig. 30. *Mascheroni* on the portal of the Palazzo Napolino Tomasi Rossi, Modica. Eighteenth century. Architect unknown.
Fig. 31. Southeast corner of the Palazzo Beneventano. The photograph shows how buildings that appear to be of a later date now surround the palace.
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Fig. 37. Scroll decoration on the upper window of the east facade of the Palazzo Beneventano.
Fig. 38. Southeast corner of the Palazzo Beneventano.
Fig. 39. Saint Joseph and the infant Jesus, Palazzo Beneventano.
Fig. 40. Sculpture on the garden wall of the Villa Palagonia, Bagheria. c. 1751-1772. Sculptor unknown. Possibly Rosario L'Avocato.
Fig. 41. Statue of the Madonna delle Milizie, Chiesa Madre of Sant Ignazio, Scicli. (Image edited from http://immaculata.ch/Index_2006_04_07.htm).
Fig. 42. Micco Spadaro. *The Murder of Don Giuseppe Carafa*. 1647. Museo di San Martino, Naples. (Image from Wikimedia).
Fig. 43. Palazzo Beneventano. Ringhiera of east facade upper-storey balcony.
Fig. 44. Palazzo Nicolaci. *Ringhiera* of Balcony Six.
Fig. 45. Oscar Spadola. Drawings of fioroni of palace balconies in Ragusa. Drawing 1 is from Palazzo Zacco, 2 is from Palazzo Sortino, 3 is from Palazzo Cosentini and 4 from Palazzo Sortino-Trono. (Image from Spadola, 1982: 122).
Fig. 46. Oscar Spadola. *Fioroni*. Drawings 1–4 are side views of the *fioroni* in Fig. 45. (Image from Spadola, 1982: 123).
Chapter Three. The Palaces of Noto. Ornament and Order.

Introduction. Contesting Facades.

This chapter investigates the palace facades of Noto. I discuss the effects of these facades in terms of decoration, decorum and transformation. This analysis opens up important questions about how art historical discourse separates ornament, sculpture and architecture. I focus in particular on the complex facade of the Palazzo Nicolaci in Noto (fig. 47). This facade operates at the borders between architecture, sculpture and decoration. Its decoration slips between these distinctions in an analogous way to how the creatures on the facade oscillate and slip between taxonomies of architectural component and human, animal, plant and other indefinable forms.

Noto’s architecture is unusual in banishing the zoomorphic decoration common in other Val di Noto towns such as Catania, Ragusa, Modica and Scicli. The Palazzo Nicolaci facade is an anomaly in Noto as it is the only palace facade that includes hybrid decoration where ambiguous forms compete with and transform the canonical architectural elements.

After the 1693 earthquake destroyed Noto’s old hill town site, the Netinese created a new town on a flat site 7 km away, and nearer the coast. Churches and palaces deploying understated, classicising facades line the town’s straight main streets and squares. On this restraint in Noto’s architectural decoration, Stephen Tobriner writes:

Noto’s architecture keeps ornament in check. The city has a hauntingly classical character that contradicts one’s expectations of a provincial Sicilian city. [...] Although these elements of southern Italian ornament [caryatids, putti heads and other anthropomorphic forms] appear in Noto, they are always circumscribed and delimited; the overall effect remains one which has the quality of cool control.

The Palazzo Nicolaci challenges the “cool control” that Tobriner sees as characterising the other Noto palaces. Its sculpture commands our attention. It takes architectural elements such as volutes and consoles and remakes them into unexpected forms. From below the balconies, part-human part-animal creatures emerge. Winged horses, angel-sirens, young men who transform into lions, old men who transform into plants, and other strange creatures inhabit the facade. Some creatures observe us ironically or suspiciously. Others are locked in fear or rapture. Above the second storey windows, faces lurk in the foliage. These figures are more hidden, remaining cautiously close to the building.
In contrast to the growing and bursting energy of the Palazzo Nicolaci, the Palazzo Landolina and Palazzo Trigona facades are settled and still (figs. 48 and 49). There doesn’t seem much to surprise us. Energy is diffused more evenly across the surface. No elements jump forward. There are no mascheroni, strange bodies, or other anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms. The facades are self-effacing in their regularity and in the absence of individual features to catch the eye. There is order and understatement. They appear to give little away.

This chapter is also concerned with what happens by looking for a longer time at the facades and considering their affect. The facades create a problem for language. Many of the existing art historical terms become inadequate. Looking and writing are not unmediated or ‘pure’ or autonomous. They are linked. We experience the facades by looking, but we tend to rely on an established architectural vocabulary to describe them. This is one reason why the scholarship generally describes the Val di Noto palace facades in terms of an existing vocabulary deriving from treatises on the classical orders, or ignores the decoration completely.

The creation of “an aristocratic utopia.” Readings of Noto in the literature.

In his Lexicon Topographicum Siculum (Catania, 1757), Vito Amico praises Noto’s wide and straight streets and majestic architecture: “qui adunque sorge Noto in ampie e rette vie, maestosa negli edifici e a poche seconda in Sicilia...” Amico reports that Noto is a flourishing town at the centre of a productive agricultural zone. Arcangelo Leanti, Amico’s contemporary and author of a similar work on Sicily, Lo stato presente della Sicilia (Palermo, 1761), promotes a vision of agricultural plenty. Like the descriptions of Avola and Grammichele discussed in the previous chapter, Noto and its surrounding area is a place that is somehow blessed. The fields around are abundant in wheat, wine, honey and livestock.

In a similar vein, the anonymous eighteenth-century author of Del nuovo risorgimento e costruzione della città di Noto writes:

Le sue strade con perfetta direzione si dipartono da levante a ponente e da tramontana a mezzogiorno [...] Le fabbriche oltre alla sodezza che conservano, sono d’una perfetta architettura. Appaiono maestosissimi per la pietra bianca e delicata, ed atta a ricevere i più delicati membretti dell’architettura, da cui vengono vestite ed ornate.
The writer describes the perfection of the town’s architecture. The streets are regular and straight. Its buildings are solid, but dressed with delicate ornament. After the disaster of the 1693 earthquake, the new town, with its planned streets and attractive buildings, is a success.

Noto therefore appeared, on the surface, an aristocratic utopia. Charles Burroughs uses this term to describe aristocratic enclaves such as the Strada Nuova in Genoa that arose in Italian towns from the sixteenth century. The Strada Nuova is “an aristocratic utopia repressing all visible evidence of ancillary or subordinate populations and their functions…”

In Noto, the principal streets and the three main squares, connected by the central Corso, can be read as a continuous aristocratic enclave. The main noble residences, churches and monastic buildings face onto these streets and squares.

Eighteenth-century writers present Noto as harmonious, but this apparent harmony depended on hiding conflict. After the earthquake there were strong disagreements over whether to rebuild on the existing site or on a new one. When the new site was chosen, there were further disagreements over which part of the site should form the town’s centre. Scholarship on Noto narrates the chronology of these conflicts, but once rebuilding gets under way the conflicts mainly disappear. The scholarship then celebrates Noto’s harmonious urbanism, and suggests similarities with scenographically planned towns in other parts of Europe. There is an overwhelming sense in the studies that, conflicts notwithstanding, the urbanism of Noto came to embody a putatively rational ideal planning and control.

The emphasis on design and control operates in many of the studies on the town. For Cesare Brandi, Noto was a planned town where nothing was left to chance in its design: “[una città] in cui ciò nulla è stato lasciato al caso, e tutto è stato previsto con coscienza, e scienza e bellezza.” (A city in which nothing was left to chance, and everything was planned with conscience, and science and beauty). John Ide, visiting in the 1950s, entitled his description Noto, the Perfect Baroque City. Noto is “a vision of restrained and harmonious Baroque architecture”. Ide compares the town to the aristocratic residences of Würzburg and Nymphenburg, locating it within a network of refined culture by quoting a description of Noto as “one of the finest achievements of the age which produced Mozart and Tiepolo.”

Many studies highlight scenography, an architectural programme that places buildings and streets in relations so that the town is experienced as a series of views. Tobriner writes: “[t]he balanced piazzas and symmetrical positioning of churches created the order into which the
excitement of Baroque scenographic effects could be injected.” Cleo Canale’s monograph on Noto includes maps that highlight the town’s geometric urbanism and show regular geometrical relationships between the principal buildings.

The new town showed and displayed, but also concealed. Nuns and monks were hidden in convents and monasteries. In the central area, the houses of most of the non-noble population were in small alleys within the isolati. Corrado Fianchino and Tobriner have examined some of this urbanism of small alleys within the isolati, where small courtyards and lanes, invisible from the main streets, link the dwellings of the majority of the people. The dominant emphasis in Tobriner’s work in particular, however, is on Noto as a site of scenographic harmony.

The investment in facade decoration reveals that this decoration was important to Netinese patrons, but it features little in the scholarship. Most of the studies of Noto concentrate on the chronology of the rebuilding. Of these, only Tobriner analyses individual buildings. He devotes one short chapter to facade styles and ornament, but his main interest is in the history of the rebuilding and the balanced urbanism of the central area, with some focus on the architects Rosario Gagliardi, Paolo Labisi and Vincenzo Sinatra. In the scholarship, the ornament of the palaces is subsumed into a reading where it is a by-product of buildings and streets seen as spatial masses.

“An archipelago of different powers.” Contested power relations in the rebuilding of Noto.

Noto’s rebuilding involved alliances and manoeuvre. The conflicts over the new town’s site reveal how power was shifting and continuously negotiated between the aristocratic families and the government representatives. Power needs to exist in relationships. On these relationships, Michel Foucault argues:

A society is not a unitary body in which one power and one power only exercises itself, but in reality it is a juxtaposition, a liaising, a coordination, a hierarchy, too, of different powers which nonetheless retain their specificity. Marx continually insists, for example, on the simultaneously specific and relatively autonomous, in some way impermeable, character of the de facto power that the employer exerts in a workshop, in relation to the juridical type of power that exists in the rest of society. Thus the existence of regions of power. Society is an archipelago of different powers.
Noto’s aristocrats were not a unified social group. In the rebuilding, aristocratic families had to renegotiate their positions within the town. The long-standing Landolina and Trigona families maintained or strengthened their position by building on the main square. The Nicolaci, merchants at the time of the earthquake, acquired noble status in 1701 and built their palace near the main square. The Impellizzeri, who opposed the move to the new site, built on a higher site that can be read as an attempt to create an alternative centre above the central area.

Tobriner, Dufour, Huet, Raymond and other scholars have narrated the rebuilding’s complex chronology. The correspondence between officials in Palermo and Noto reveals that government representatives often responded to events that one of the conflicting groups in Noto initiated. The changes in rulings mean that the viceroy and his officials were unable to impose their will on a demaniale city. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, after ten years of conflict over where to rebuild, the government officials seemed frequently to ignore and therefore sanction what was already happening in the town, rather than enforce earlier decisions.

Baron Giuseppe Asmundo and members of the Landolina family to whom he was connected by marriage were the most instrumental in establishing Noto on the new site. Asmundo, a Catanese noble and Grand Court judge in Palermo, was part of the group of high-ranking officials sent by the Viceroy to the Val di Noto in February 1693, six weeks after the earthquake. The group visited the principal Val di Noto towns to ensure measures were in place for the rebuilding. The Duke of Camastra led the group, which also included the Flemish military architect and royal engineer Carlos Grunembergh, and Antonio Ibañez, a government adviser. In June 1693, Camastra passed supervision of Noto to Asmundo. In his account of the events, Asmundo reports that he stayed in Noto for two and a half years, living in a cabin exposed to the rigours of the seasons.

At a meeting of 15 January, the town council decided to rebuild on the same site. When Camastra’s group arrived on 24 February, another meeting changed this decision. Instead, a new town would be built on a new site. The 24 February meeting is the first of many instances where an earlier decision was overturned. After this meeting, there was further disagreement over which part of the new site to build on. Camastra ordered rebuilding on the Pianazzo, the higher part of the new site situated on a 16-metre high escarpment (fig. 51). Many of the nobility favoured the Pianazzo. It was easier to fortify, further from the potentially malarial zone near the river Asinaro, and open to breezes. The majority of the non-nobles,
who were against moving to a new site in any case, preferred the lower area nearer to the water supply of the Asinaro. The Pianazzo and its escarpment made access to the town more difficult for people working in the surrounding fields. The richer inhabitants continued to press for the higher area. Some of the citizens ignored the demarcations for the new site and began building on the lower area.  

In the next stage of reversed decisions, more citizens built on the lower area. In June 1693, Baron Asmundo moved the relics of the patron saint Conrad to a temporary building on the lower area. By July, 600 temporary dwellings now clustered around this building. Tobriner argues that Asmundo decided to leave the relics in the lower area when he saw that so many people were rebuilding there, thereby endorsing the lower site. This is plausible as plague in the summer of 1693 killed around 3,000 of the 12,000 earthquake survivors. Many inhabitants now decided to leave Noto and settle elsewhere. By the end of the summer the population had dropped to 4,000. The nobles were in danger of losing workers. The population had moved to the new site, but their hostility to the higher Pianazzo, and the outbreak of plague, may have persuaded Asmundo and others to compromise.

Asmundo’s 1693 transfer of the relics seemed to close the option of rebuilding on the old site, but 5 years after the earthquake, disagreement among the populace, and government indecision, continued. Most of the population had now moved to the new site, but a group led by Antonino Impellizzeri continued to press for rebuilding on the old site. In October 1698, a referendum of all male citizens was called. 484 of the 757 voters, including the majority of the poorer citizens, wanted to return to the old site. A group of aristocrats managed to block this, and building continued on the new site.

To reach a final decision, the viceroy sent another group of officials to Noto in the spring of 1699. Asdrubale Termini, the Bishop of Syracuse, led the group, which included the government engineer Giuseppe Formenti. Termini privately interviewed all 33 Netinese nobles except 2 who were absent, plus the heads of the 10 main religious institutions, on whether to stay on the new site or to return to Noto Antica. 19 nobles voted to remain on the new site and 12 to return to Noto Antica. 6 religious heads voted to remain on the new site, 1 to return to the old site, and 3 were indifferent.

In his report to the viceroy, Termini went against the results of the interviews and recommended returning to the old site. He based this on engineer Formenti’s view that the old city had healthier air, better water supply, abundant stone for rebuilding, and could be better defended. To prevent further conflicts, Termini banned public or private discussion
of the rebuilding, reporting that the people should wait “with blind obedience” for the viceroy’s decision. By this point however, too many inhabitants had invested money and work into the new site. In 1700 the viceroy decreed that the inhabitants could either stay where they were, or return to the old site. The implication of this ruling is one of government abdication of control. As with many of the events since the earthquake, some nobles and religious heads exerted influence at the local level to complete their building projects regardless of government orders.

A final change of ruling in 1702 further shows the government’s ineffectiveness, although by now this new ruling probably made little difference. A delegation led by Cardinal Giudice, Archbishop of Monreale, visited Noto and declared the new site the official one. Once again, this decision seems a reaction to the de facto situation rather than furthering any consistent government plan for Noto.

**Antonino Impellizzeri against “the faction of Asmundo”**.

Marriage connections made in the years immediately after the earthquake between Baron Asmundo and the Landolina-Deodato were significant in the resiting of Noto. In 1694, Maria Landolina married Adamo Asmundo, Baron Asmundo’s nephew. In 1696 Asmundo himself married Costanza Deodato-Landolina, Maria Landolina’s mother, further strengthening his connections with the Landolina.

Baron Antonino Impellizzeri, leader of the rival aristocratic faction who wanted to rebuild on the old site, complained of an alliance between Asmundo and the Landolina. In a letter of 1698 to the viceroy, Impellizzeri argues that the new site resulted from collusion between Asmundo and his relatives:

Che poi s’ha scritta a Sua Maestà (che Dio guardi) et a Sua Eccellenza che il popolo sono pentiti d’haver a rimanere qui altri mesi e vogliono tornarsi ilico, che mai volsero venire e così non vi è pentimento perché non vennero voluntarij ma forzati come sopra dissi e così si doveva rappresentare. Adesso quello che ho inteso dal Pubblico si è che il Signor Asmundo con li suoi parenti che si trovano qui vogliono sostenere l’operato fatto e vogliono mantenere la nova habitazione da loro portata.

Impellizzeri asserts that the majority of the citizens want to return to the old site “eccetto quelli della fattione di Asmundo che vanno sostentare l’operato” (except those from the
faction of Asmundo who are supporting the [new] project). The group he describes as “the faction of Asmundo” forced the change on the population.

Impellizzeri’s attack on Asmundo, a high-ranking official appointed by the viceroy, may result from personal enmity between Impellizzeri, Camastra and Asmundo. At the time of the earthquake, Impellizzeri was Noto’s Capitano Generale, responsible for law and order. The role included preventing looting and reallocating of the property of those killed by the earthquake. Stephen Tobriner argues convincingly that Impellizzeri abused this position by confiscating for himself the land of owners who were now dead. Camastra and Asmundo prosecuted Impellizzeri, leading to his rift with Asmundo and Asmundo’s allies.

In the rebuilding of Noto, there is a factional split between family alliances linked to Impellizzeri on one side, and Asmundo and Costanza Deodato-Landolina on the other. Stephen Tobriner implies that the Landolina family operated as a single group in favour of the new site, but members of the various branches of the Landolina operated differently. The voting during Asdrubale Termini’s 1699 visit shows division by marriage connections rather than just by surname. 16 of the 33 nobles interviewed were Landolina, but from different branches. 8 Landolina supported the new site, but 8 wanted to return to the old. Impellizzeri is the most frequent surname after Landolina. Of the 5 Impellizzeri, 3 voted to return to the old site, 1 for the new site, and 1 was absent.

Two family trees by Michele Luminati can be used to reveal that many of Costanzo Deodato-Landolina’s relatives made up the faction voting for the new site (figs. 52 and 53). Figure 52 shows marriages between branches of the Landolina and the Deodato. Giuseppe Asmundo appears as Costanza Deodato’s second husband in the line of the third generation shown. Adamo Asmundo and Maria Landolina are shown in the generation below. The aristocrats that Termini reports as in favour of the new site, Antonino Impellizzeri’s “faction of Asmundo”, include a Bartolomeo Deodato, Costanza Deodato’s father, or possibly her nephew of the same name, Costanza’s two brothers Pietro Deodato Baron of Frigintini and Rinaldo Deodato Baron of Burgio, and Giovanni Filippo Landolina, father of Costanza’s first husband.

Figure 53 shows the Impellizzeri family. 3 of the 5 Impellizzeri wanted to return to the old site. Giovanbattista Landolina also supported the move to the new site. His role is complicated, as he voted to return to the old city, but then threatened to abandon Noto for nearby Avola. In his 1712 history of Noto, Padre Tortora describes Giovanbattista Landolina as the “principal designer of the city”. Giovanbattista may have supported the new site when it was clear...
that the old site would be abandoned. His branch of the Landolina, the Landolina Sant’Alfano, later established their palace in the new town’s cathedral square. This seems more the result of manoeuvre and compromise than a drive by the Landolina Sant’Alfano to establish the new city as a site for a larger palace in a prestigious location from the beginning.  

**Commerce and defence over geometry.**

Noto’s new site allowed for an urbanism that was different in many ways from the old town. Antonio Tedesco’s engraving of Noto Antica shows winding streets and less geometrically regular isolati than those of the new town (figs. 54 and 55). Old Noto’s huge defensive walls, largely intact to this day, contained the town and made space a premium as the population grew. Many of the aristocratic palaces were more vertical than in the new town, with three orders on the facade instead of the two orders more common in the new Noto (fig.55). Some of the important buildings faced onto open areas, but narrow winding streets make facades less visible from a distance.

A new town opened possibilities for better locations and larger plots for palaces and ecclesiastical buildings. As the locations of the old town’s palaces and ecclesiastical buildings were already established, rebuilding the old town of Noto meant the aristocrats and church institutions would probably have to rebuild on their old plots. Unless they could expropriate land whose owners had perished in the earthquake, it would be difficult to build on a larger or more prominent site.  

Although a new location allowed a new urbanism, the correspondence on the rebuilding does not refer to the geometric planning and harmony that later writers see. Similarly to the eighteenth-century accounts of Avola and Grammichele from the previous chapter, the documents prioritise commerce, defence and the health benefits of the new location. In his 1698 report to the viceroy Giuseppe Asmundo gives seven arguments in favour of the new site. Two of these argue that the old site is unsafe. Asmundo reports that the earthquake has opened up chasms in the ground and that a horse and rider recently met their deaths due to this. He argues that risk of further collapses frightens the inhabitants so much that they prefer to abandon their jewellery or money to robbers rather than re-enter their ruined houses.  

One of the new site’s advantages regards economic rivalry with nearby Avola. Asmundo notes that Avola, which originally had a hilltop site like Noto, was now near the coast road,
linked to the ports of Syracuse and Augusta. Asmundo argues that Noto’s new site is also near this road, important for “l’avanzo d’una città la di cui anima si stima l’introduttione del commercio” (“the advance of a city whose spirit values the introduction of commerce”). Commercial benefits would also go to Noto, a demaniale town paying taxes directly to the crown, and not just to baronial Avola. 288

Noto’s new site, like Avola’s, was also nearer to the coast, risking attack from the sea. Asmundo anticipates this, arguing that the three-mile distance from the coast is near enough to the coast road and to flat coastal farmland, which by implication would facilitate the sale of agricultural produce, but far enough from “enemy incursions”. He reassures the viceroy that in any case, the shallow coastline makes it difficult for boats to land. 289 Additionally, an escarpment between the new site and the sea acts as a natural fortress wall. 290

Finally, Asmundo praises the new site’s air. Vitruvius posits that unhealthy vapours emanate in marshlands from the bodies of noxious animals. The sun heats these vapours and wind blows them towards a town. In the first volume of his treatise L’architetto pratico (Palermo, 1726), Giovan Biagio Amico quotes Vitruvius and elaborates, affirming that bad air brings diseases but healthy air gives the people good complexion and stature. 291 To further improve the new site’s air, Asmundo drained the surrounding rice fields. 292

In October 1698, Antonino Impellizzeri wrote a counterclaim to Asmundo’s report of 2 months earlier. Impellizzeri gives three main arguments for the old site’s superiority. 293 On defence, he argues that Noto Antica’s fortifications protected the town from invasion and plague in the past, and reinforced the important nearby port of Syracuse. 294 He also reports that many buildings at the old site, including cisterns and mills, were still intact. Rebuilding was easier and the water supply was already in place. This made the old city “più comoda a tutti li cittadini” (more suitable for all of the citizens). 295

Impellizzeri’s last argument is “perché gli antichi furono di più senno” (because the ancients were wiser). 296 He claims antique knowledge as support, but does not elaborate. The inference is that people long ago chose Noto’s site and the town prospered over the centuries. This must mean that the original site was the right choice. Any defects would have become apparent long ago. Impellizzeri’s letter, however, was a last, and failed, attempt against the fait accompli of Giuseppe Asmundo and Costanza Landolina-Deodato and her relatives.
Palaces and zones of visibility and prestige in the new Noto.

Angelo Italia, architect of the rebuilt hexagonal town of nearby Avola, was Noto’s designer, although his original design has never been found. It seems from Giuseppe Asmundo’s 1698 letter to the viceroy that Italia made the design within 2 years of the earthquake. Giuseppe Formenti’s map of 1699 shows the implementation of Noto’s grid plan within the first 6 years of rebuilding (fig. 57). This map depicts the new town’s existing and projected streets. It shows the town forming according to a layout of straight streets and isolati with regular outlines. The larger area in the south became the town centre, and to the north there is a smaller, upper section on the northern Pianazzo.

A map by Tobriner shows the city as he believed it to be in 1712 (fig. 58). The map shows the two new urban areas taking shape. The lower area, with the cathedral and main Corso, became the most prestigious area. The higher Pianazzo became a secondary area, separated from the lower zone by the escarpment, and reached by steps or winding streets on the town’s eastern and western edges (figs. 51 and 59). The division of the two areas also means that the upper and lower grids are separate street systems that do not need to align.

Aristocratic and ecclesiastical buildings are concentrated in the central area with the cathedral square in the middle. Via Cavour emerges as a site for important buildings, but its narrowness makes it secondary to the Corso. The Corso marks a divide across the central area. Most important buildings are located north of it (fig. 60). There are some ecclesiastical buildings on its south side, such as the large isolato of the Jesuits, and the church and monastery of Santa Chiara, but there are very few prestigious buildings more than one block south of the Corso. A location on the northern side has several advantages. The site slopes gently up towards the north, making the buildings on the north literally rise up above those further south. It also improves drainage and allows for a south-facing facade, permitting more daylight to enter the piano nobile and to illuminate the facade decoration.

The Palazzo Nicolaci and the Commercialisation of Aristocratic Status.

The Palazzo Nicolaci, Palazzo Landolina, and Palazzo Trigona are all located close to each other in the prestigious area near the cathedral (fig. 60). The Palazzo Landolina is on the main square directly to the cathedral’s west. The Palazzo Trigona faces the main square to the east. These two palaces flank the cathedral. By contrast, the Palazzo Nicolaci is in the first narrow street to the west of the Palazzo Landolina. The Palazzo Nicolaci facade faces
onto a narrow street, in a less prestigious position making it much less visible from the
cathedral square or the main Corso (fig. 47). 299

The Palazzo Nicolaci became a centrepiece of the Nicolaci’s power and wealth in the new
Noto. From their position as tuna merchants in the old town, the post-earthquake rebuilding
coincided with their rise into the aristocracy and their architectural competition with the
established families. The palace’s location near the cathedral allowed the Nicolaci to
compete architecturally with the Landolina, Trigona, Astuto, Impellizzeri and Di Lorenzo, the
principal Noto families.

This section discusses how the commercialisation of fiefs, where land carrying noble titles
was bought and sold, enabled the Nicolaci’s fast ascent. It will also show how this social
fluidity contributed to insecurity of status and rivalry among aristocrats. In the early part of the
eighteenth-century, other Noto families were opposed to the Nicolaci serving as giurati in the
town council. These families wanted to exclude the Nicolaci. By the middle of the century
however, the Nicolaci were established among the Noto families, intermarrying with them
and carrying great influence in the town.

The Nicolaci’s entry into the aristocracy began in 1701, when Maria Landolina put the family
fief of Bonfalà up for auction. This fief carried with it the title of Baron. 300 For 5,250 onze it
went to Corradino Nicolaci, a sixteen year old from a family whose business interests
included the nearby tonnare or tuna processing plants of Marzameni and Vendicari. 301 In
order to operate and take all profits from the tuna plants the Nicolaci paid an annual fee or
gabella to their feudal owners. 302 The tuna plants made the Nicolaci very wealthy. 303 The
family had been close to entering the Noto aristocracy for several generations. Female
members had married nobles, allowing connections with aristocratic families, but it did not
give the Nicolaci family a title. 304

Acquiring Bonfalà put the male line of the Nicolaci family into the aristocracy. Corradino
formally assumed his new title of Baron of Bonfalà a year later. 305 With the purchase, he
obtained the full privileges of noble status, including the right of mero e misto imperio, or
legal jurisdiction over the inhabitants of his new feud. 306 Nobility allowed him tax exemptions
and legal immunities and privileges.

Attaining a noble title for Corradino was one of the first steps in the Nicolaci’s rise in the new
Noto. In 1710 Corradino married Dorotea Bellia, a noblewoman from Palermo, gaining
another fief and title as Baron of Canemi through Dorotea’s dowry. 307 On his death,
Corradino left 12,000 onze worth of objects, jewels and paintings. \(^{308}\) This was in addition to the money from the tonnare and the potential capital that could be released from the sale of lands owned.

As the eighteenth century progressed, the Nicolaci bought more fiefs. By 1774, they owned Santanimo e Patro, Spinagallo e Ricalcaccia, Gisira e Gisirootta di Pagano, Ogliastro, and Villadorata. \(^{309}\) Villadorata was particularly important as it carried the title of prince, the highest-ranking Sicilian title. It also put the Nicolaci on a par with the powerful Landolina family. The Landolina were one of the oldest aristocratic families in Noto, but only rose to the highest level of nobility when they bought the title of Principe of Cuba Reale in 1744. \(^{310}\) Between 1744 and their acquisition of Villadorata in 1774, the Nicolaci therefore ranked lower than the Landolina. The Nicolaci’s rise was complete in 1789 when Corrado Nicolaci built a palace in Palermo, at the centre of Sicilian power.

This accumulation of fiefs by the merchant Nicolaci demonstrates that, although the aristocracy presented themselves as born to social distinction, as I discuss further in the chapter on the Palazzo Biscari, money allowed access to noble status. Commercialisation of fiefs increased in the Spanish Empire from the sixteenth century. In addition to aristocrats selling fiefs, the king raised money by selling newly created titles. There was a formidable growth in new titles in Sicily in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Between 1556 and 1598 Philip II of Spain granted 16 new Sicilian titles. This increased greatly in the next century, reaching 165 in Philip IV’s reign (1621-1665), although it fell to 74 in the reign of Charles II (1665-1700). At the end of the sixteenth century, Sicily had 1 prince, 2 dukes, 1 marquis and 21 counts. By the end of the eighteenth century there were 142 princes, 1,500 dukes and barons, and 788 marquises. \(^{311}\)

This increase in the number of aristocrats is part of a process where, in Sicily as in other parts of Europe, selling new titles and monopolies became more common as the expenses of kings and governments rose. In many countries rulers increasingly asserted their power through expanded ministries and other state mechanisms, frequent warfare involving larger armies using artillery, firearms and extensive earthwork fortifications, and material splendour. \(^{312}\)

There was also a demand for titles. The desire for social distinction, and for the aristocratic legal, fiscal and commercial privileges discussed in the previous chapter, produced willing buyers such as the Nicolaci of Noto. For more established families, this social fluidity was a threat. Jerzy Lukowski argues: “the need to maintain their position and distinctiveness at a
time when, at least in parts of western Europe, wealth and influence were becoming more accessible to ever-larger non-noble groups was an increasing problem for those already established within the nobility."  

Chandra Mukerji, discussing the France of Louis XIV, notes: “[a]s new social mobility was making definitions of rank vexed and complicated, markers of high standing gained social salience. Land was clearly implicated in this change.”

Building and architecture played a role in these contests of social standing.

A letter Noto’s giurati wrote in 1710 to the Protonotaro del regno, the official responsible for confirming public appointments, shows the insecurity and hostility of some of the Netinese aristocracy towards the new Nicolaci family. The letter protested the Protonotaro’s ruling that the recently ennobled Corradino Nicolaci was eligible as a giurato, or for any other public function in Noto. The giurati assert that these posts were always held by “persone nobili in conformità di privilegij osservati per inveterata consuetudine” (noble persons in conformity with privileges observed through inveterate custom). They argue that because Corradino was not born into the nobility, but acquired it, he was not eligible for public office in Noto. Corradino’s acquisition of a title was not enough for full acceptance by the Netinese nobility of his aristocratic standing.

Fifty years later, Padre Giacinto da San Gaetano’s funeral oration for Corradino Nicolaci’s son Giacomo, Orazione funebre-accademica di Don Jacopo Maria Nicolacy e Bellia (Syracuse, 1761), promotes the idea of the Nicolaci’s transformation from outsiders to illustrious members of the Noto aristocracy. The oration was made in the name of “Signor Duca Reggente Don Domenico Landolina, Consigliere nell’Aggiunta di Sicilia in Napoli’ (Councillor of the Sicilian deputation in Naples). A high-ranking member of the Landolina, and Sicilian representative to the Bourbon king, validated Giacomo Nicolaci’s funeral oration.

Although hyperbolic, the oration is a public affirmation of Giacomo Nicolaci’s nobility. Giacinto di San Gaetano emphasises Giacomo Nicolaci’s status by listing his titles. He singles out Giacomo Nicolaci’s creation of the Accademia de’ Trasformati, a learned society which he argues made Noto famous: “indi giustamente impegnata di portarlo a bello studio a terso lume conosce, convenire per ogni lato, che le lodi di un Eroe, i di cui meriti han resa famosa questa natia città, ossequiosamente a Lei si consagrino, che è celebre si per la vetusta nobiltà degli avi, e per cui la città stessa fortunatamente riceve ancora singolar gloria, e splendore.”

Earlier in the century, some of the Netinese aristocracy protested that Giacomo’s father was not worthy to serve on the town council. 50 years later, Giacomo’s ancestors give the city
glory and splendour. His parents are virtuous exemplars of nobility: “e nella pietà lo allatta or il famoso Genitore Don Corradino Nicolacy, delle cui singolar virtude vivida, e fresca esser dever fra noi la ricordanza, ed or la nobile Madre Donna Dorotea Bellia, che fu l’esempio delle insigni Madrone di questo inclito terreno.” 321 On his death Giacomo Nicolaci, born into the aristocracy, is “il migliore esemplare di un Cavalier Cristiano” (the best example of a Christian gentleman), and “il giusto modello di un Cittadino di Noto” (the very model of a citizen of Noto). 322

The Palazzo Nicolaci. Acquiring the Site for the Palace.

As they began buying fiefs in the first part of the eighteenth century, the Nicolaci expanded the site for their palace by buying small houses and plots. 323 The programme of acquiring land for a palace was in place at an early stage of the Noto rebuilding. Corradino Nicolaci’s mother Eleanora began the process in April 1696 by buying a plot from the priest Vincenzo Ragusa for 29 onze and 2 tari. This site was adjacent to her house, and to that of her stepson Pietro. 324 Giacomo Nicolaci later records in his will that in 1716 his father Corradino bought the site of “quondam Pietro Nicolaci” (“the deceased Pietro Nicolaci”) in order to “far qualcosa di magnifico” (“ make something magnificent”). At that point Pietro Nicolaci’s plot still consisted of “barrache” (temporary houses). 325

The noble status the Nicolaci acquired in 1710 enabled them to buy land through a law called I Privilegi di Toledo e Maqueda. This law let nobles take ownership of a complete town block if they owned some of the land on the block. They could expropriate the remaining land, paying the owner a compensation of only 8 per cent of the rental value. The justification was that this added to a city’s beauty by allowing construction of large palaces in the main streets and squares, although it was another of the legal advantages that nobility allowed. 326 In his will Giacomo Nicolaci reports that in 1739 he bought the temporary houses of the Cannarella family using the Law of Toledo and Maqueda. 327

Although land acquisitions for the palace are documented, there are problems in identifying the architects and clearly dating the stages of construction. The keystone on the inside of the portal records a date of 1737. Giacomo Nicolaci, head of the family from 1738 to his death in 1760, was the palace’s principal patron. 328 Between 1733 and 1736 he had stone blocks transported from Noto Antica and from a nearby quarry he owned. 329 However, in 1739, the capomastro Vincenzo Sinatra bought, on Giacomo Nicolaci’s behalf, “2,000 cantoni d’intaglio” (2,000 pieces of stone for carving) to be delivered to the Palazzo Nicolaci. 330 The facade is the only part of the Palazzo Nicolaci that employs elaborate stone carving, so it is...
likely that this quantity of stone was for the facade. The portal of 1737 may therefore have been constructed earlier than this purchase. The date of 1739 also coincides with Giacomo’s use of the Law of Toledo and Maqueda to buy land from the Cannarella family to expand the palace.

If the palace was constructed in the 1730s and 1740s, it does not appear on Paolo Labisi’s 1749 map of Piazza San Domenico. This piazza is to the west of the Palazzo Nicolaci. The isolato that became the Palazzo Nicolaci appears at the edge of Labisi’s map (fig. 61). The map labels the northern part of the isolato as the property of “Preposito Mazzone and others”. The southern part belonged to “Don Francesco Rau and others.” The property of the aristocrats Francesco Rau, the Baronessa del Burgio and Giuseppe Battaglia is included, but there is no mention of the Nicolaci family owning the block where their palace now stands. The Nicolaci are therefore among the “others” who own a section of this block with Francesco Rau.

The Palazzo Nicolaci appears on another map by Labisi of c.1750- c.1760. This shows Noto with all of its buildings complete (fig. 62). The map’s original date appeared in the cartouche in the upper right, but was later overwritten with ‘1783’. Stephen Tobriner argues that Giacomo Nicolaci commissioned the map between 1750 and 1760, but after the Nicolaci gained the important title of Prince of Villadorata in 1764, Giacomo’s descendant Franzo Nicolaci changed the map’s inscription to include the new noble title. Franzo also overwrote Giacomo’s name with his own, and overwrote the date.  

The numbers next to the buildings were also overwritten, making it more difficult to match them with the keys at the top and bottom (fig. 62). The inscription at the top reports the existence of 20 palaces in Noto. The detail (fig. 63) shows the Palazzo Landolina in the centre, above the numbers 48 and 42. The Palazzo Nicolaci is to the left of the picture. There are two smaller three-storey buildings owned by the Rau family in front of the Palazzo Nicolaci, but it still appears larger than the Palazzo Landolina.

By the 1760s, the Palazzo Nicolaci was complete, or at least shown as complete on Labisi’s map, and the Nicolaci were established within Noto’s aristocracy. The Nicolaci now owned a large palace in Noto’s centre. However, the palace did not enjoy the same prominent visibility as the Landolina and Trigona palaces. The Palazzo Landolina and two smaller buildings to its south block it from the Corso and the cathedral square. The long east side became the main facade, but it is only fully visible by walking up the narrow street separating the Palazzo
Nicolaci and Palazzo Landolina (fig. 64). The Nicolaci obtained their palace, but other palaces push it out of the central square.

**The Palazzo Nicolaci Facade. Aporia, Transformation and the Marginal.**

This section discusses the remarkable Palazzo Nicolaci façade in relation to liminality, marginality and the subversive. The façade includes six balconies with profuse decoration and sculpted *mensole* figures (figs. 65-70). Commissioned in the earlier part of the eighteenth century when the newly-ennobled Nicolaci were not yet accepted by the Netinese aristocracy, the palace’s exuberant façade is defiant and provocative compared to the more restrained ornament of Noto’s other palaces. Displaced from the central square and confined along a narrow street, the façade issues a challenge to the Palazzo Landolina that pushes it away from the square and cathedral.

The Palazzo Nicolaci facade territorialises the street. Unable to claim a position on Noto’s main square, the palace’s long facade covers most of the west side of the street. Its balconies protrude into the space above the street. Unlike the Palazzo Landolina and Trigona, which did not originally have balconies, the aristocratic space of the Palazzo Nicolaci’s *piano nobile* extends conspicuously outwards. The *mensole* sculptures loom over the spectator but look towards the palaces of the rival, more established Landolina and Trigona families. The *piano nobile* and its balconies, the space of the socially aspiring Nicolaci, rise above and over the passer-by.

This ornament is worth taking seriously. It is more than *capriccio* or *fantasia*. The façade’s profuse ornament and defiantly zoomorphic sculpture question the separation of architecture, sculpture and ornament. The palace’s marginalised location, and its provocative decoration, also relates to interesting arguments concerning the marginal and the liminal. Writing on the marginal location of medieval misericords, Christa Grössinger argues: “The misericords, with their seemingly humorous subject matter could have been the only distraction [for the clergy who were separated in church from the laity], and they can be compared to drolleries in the margins of manuscripts.”

Misericord sculpture is therefore marginal in that it is hidden below the misericord, and the body of the monk resting on the misericord might also cover much of the sculpture. Grössinger argues that although this sculpture often contains a moral message, much of its subject matter is marginalised, relegated to the level of folklore or taboo. This subject matter involves such areas as everyday occupations, popular sayings, imaginary animals.  

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and scatology, rather than a more privileged culture of religious or philosophical literature. The implication is that a marginal physical location, such as below a misericord, is likely to be the site for marginalised artistic forms and subject matter.

However, the misericord’s location can also be read as more privileged if we consider that they were carved into the choir stalls, in an area reserved for the clergy and screened off from the laity. Grössinger posits that the separation of clergy and laity was to prevent the clergy from distraction, but this separation also creates a privileged area.  

The misericord sculptures still operated within a privileged part of the church where only the clergy could see them. They were in a marginal space below the misericord, but still contained within a more privileged section of the church. This is useful with regard to the Palazzo Nicolaci balcony sculpture, which occupies the privileged palace façade, but is below the balconies on which the aristocratic occupants stand.

Michael Camille’s study of medieval manuscript marginalia also discusses images in a space which is both marginal and privileged. He argues that the marginalia’s often provocative imagery flourishes in marginalised locations: “At a monastery or cathedral, for example, the fringes are where we find ejected forms, taboos sculpted in stone that seem to intensify the very desires they delimit.”  

In Camille’s paradigm however, the marginal is still incorporated within the privileged space of the cathedral or monastery. For manuscript marginalia, the manuscript, including its margins, is also a privileged object. Very few people could afford manuscripts, and manuscripts circulated among the clergy or as psalters or courtly romances for wealthy private patrons.

Paul Binski criticises conceptions of marginalia as necessarily subversive by arguing that people in power usually commissioned architectural decoration, and that medieval manuscripts and their marginalia were increasingly produced for private patrons rather than for monasteries. Although Sicilian facade ornament often includes strange, hybrid creatures that might call to mind the grotesques of medieval manuscripts, like the manuscripts it is still commissioned by elites. Binski proposes that marginalia still operate within a politically dominant discourse. He writes: “actual harm is done to any social or political investigation if it is imagined that things intended for elites in fact spoke with non-elite voices.”  

He reads marginalia as a form of controlled rebellion but which is still produced by artists working for a dominant patron. Marginia may therefore be limited in their subversive power because their creators had to earn a living by pleasing their patrons.
Secondly, Binski argues that theories of the marginal assume a dualism between centre and periphery that presents the marginal as always dangerous and exciting, as a force that renews the controlling but more conventional centre. 343 For Binski, the margins and the centre interact, and the centre isn’t necessarily devoid of strangeness and innovation but can be “impure or mixed”. 344 There may be a political agenda to Binski’s argument, as he reads the marginal as promoted by scholars who are politically hostile to an established centre, but he presents an important critique. 345

A further problem with any connection between the marginal and the subversive is that geographical margins might also need validation from the centre, or an imagined centre. Valerie Fraser questions assumptions that architecture necessarily becomes more experimental or subversive the further it moves from its dominant centre. She argues that even though there was more experimentation from the late seventeenth century, architects in the Spanish Americas initially clung to conservative classical forms, asserting what they saw as the fundamentals of European tradition rather than attempting innovation. 346 The implication is that initially the Spanish colonisers presented their culture to the colonised as fully formed and unchanging. Later, as Spanish domination was more established, more experimentation appeared. The geographical ‘edges’ can therefore also produce forms of hypercorrectness.

A connection between Michael Camille’s “ejected forms” and a building’s physical location is therefore not straightforward. In the case of the Palazzo Nicolaci, the marginal is useful for analysing the palace’s location and decoration. The palace employs unusual and provocative decoration, and its location in a side street is marginalised. In some other towns rebuilt after the earthquake however, palaces with profuse and aporetic decoration occupy prominent locations. Examples include the Palazzo Massa in Catania and the Palazzo Bertini in Ragusa, both on important thoroughfares (figs.3 and 29). It is therefore necessary to consider each architectural case separately and, as Binski cautions, not to see differences between the marginal and the centre as clear-cut.

Turning to the Palazzo Nicolaci façade, some of its sculpture may resemble decoration from Spanish America, but it is difficult to argue a connection. Although Sicily was a Spanish colony, Spanish architects did not work in Sicily and Spanish architecture does not appear to have been a model for Sicilian architects. In contrast, the opposite situation was more common, where Italian architects and treatises were a source for Spanish architects. There are many cases of Italian architects working in Spain, particularly in the eighteenth century. George Kubler discusses the presence of the Borromisti in Spain, and how Philip V’s
marriage to Isabel Farnese in 1714 brought Italian architects to Madrid. Probably the most notable example is the Sicilian-born Filippo Juvarra, who designed the royal palace of La Granja in Madrid in 1735. Juvarra’s student Giovanni Battista Sacchetti completed La Granja, and later became chief architect of Madrid.

Joan Sureda notes that Spanish artists studying in Italy brought back images of grotesque decoration in the sixteenth century. On the effect of designs such as the Loggetta and Stufetta of Cardinal Bibbiena in the Vatican, she writes: “Grotesque decoration came to Spain thanks to the artists who returned from Italy with their eyes and ears absorbed by the filigree of those fantastic natural forms, as well as through the engravings and the books of drawings they brought with them, such as the *Codex Escurialensis.*” I am not suggesting that all later Spanish decoration derived from Italian grotesques, but there is much more evidence for Italian designs and architects operating in Spain, as opposed to Spanish or Spanish American architecture having influence in Italy.

The Palazzo Nicolaci mensole’s marginal location below the balconies invite comparison with medieval marginalia, but Sicilian palace sculpture is more aporetic because it cannot be placed within an iconographical tradition. Camille is able to find many iconological matches or references for manuscript marginalia. These references might be to the text of the manuscript in whose margins the marginalia appear, to literary texts including the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux or Peter of Celle, to folk tales including the riddle of the hare or the knight and the snail, or to daily events such as relating the beggar-atlantes in Amiens cathedral to the people who begged outside cathedrals.

Christa Grössinger’s approach in her study of English misericords has methodological similarities with Camille’s work. Grössinger discusses misericord sculpture in terms of an established iconography that ranges across Biblical references, pattern books, folk tales and popular linguistic expressions. Indeed, the second part of the study is devoted entirely into grouping the misericords into iconographic themes or groupings including Biblical references, medieval bestiaries and courtly romances.

The iconological approach that Camille and Grössinger employ is therefore problematic for Sicilian facade decoration, as the Sicilian facades cannot be matched to such sources as literary texts or folk tales. However, Camille’s observations on the liminal, transitional nature of marginalia are more useful for the Palazzo Nicolaci. Camille argues that medieval marginalia are ambiguous because they operate between established categories: “I am more interested in how they pretend to avoid meaning, how they seem to celebrate the flux of
‘becoming’ rather than ‘being’, something I am able to suggest only in the completed sentences and sections of these essays”. The Palazzo Nicolaci mensole evoke becoming and taxonomic ambiguity where architectural members becoming plants or animals, animals becoming human.

The Palazzo Nicolaci sculpture plays with the limits of the possible. Although some of its imagery of religious figures, mermaid-sirens, young men becoming lions or lion-men hybrids, and winged horses of aspiration and the cavalieresque could be related to the training of an aristocratic prince, the sculpture is essentially aporetic. It refuses to be bound to stable explanations. To discuss some parts of the façade in more detail, I have numbered the balconies from one to six, beginning from the left as one looks at the facade (figs. 65-70). Reading horizontally, the mensole at each end of the facade (Balconies 1 and 6) include the faces of young men. The two middle balconies on each side of the portal (Balconies 2 and 5) show winged animals (winged horses or winged lions). The two balconies flanking the portal (Balconies 3 and 4) show winged male and winged female figures respectively.

Close examination of three balconies shows how they consist of complex transforming and aporetic decoration. Within each balcony, the sculptures interrelate as if there is some form of narrative that the viewer cannot determine. On Balcony Six, the lowest part of each mensole begins as a scroll-like modillion that quickly transforms into faces of older men (figs. 71 and 72). The men’s’ beards metamorphosise between human hair, foliage and a lion’s mane. The hair over the forehead becomes an acanthus leaf, although still suggesting a lion’s mane.

Above the ancone, the mensole transforms again. It becomes the head of a creature that is part lion and part young man (figs. 71 and 73). Reading horizontally in either direction across this upper line of mascheroni, the young man transforms into a lion as the viewer’s eye moves to in the centre, and then transforms back to a young man as the heads move outwards again. The lion-youths are looking at something that is approaching. They are transfixed, some in rapture and some in fear. Some faces are taut, others are more relaxed. It is unclear what these faces might be reacting to.

These faces are in flux between human and lion, and between emotions of calm, and fear or aggression. Reading from right to left, the youths become more aggressive. The youth on the right is the most human. His expression appears optimistic. In the face immediately to his left, the mouth drops at the corners. Furrows appear at the bridge of the nose and a frown bulges above the eyes. The transforming youth now looks out with hostile wariness (fig. 73).
He is more leonine. Above his forehead a mop of hair appears over the parting, analogous to the hair of the lion in the centre. The young man’s nose is broader and flatter, his ears more pointed. Reading the balcony from left to right, the youth on the far left is tenser than the one on the far right (fig. 74). His teeth hint at the lion transformation. To the left, the next face is less anxious but more leonine.

On the architrave of the window above Balcony Six there are further creatures in a state of what Camille, quoted earlier, refers to as “becoming” rather than stable “being”. Above the window a vegetal face watches, half submerged in the foliage, but also partly created from it (figs. 75 and 76). Like the faces below the balcony, this older man has vegetal and leonine qualities. He is created from many of the elements that can be found elsewhere on the balcony; male faces, vegetal faces, lions, leaves, volutes, and forms rippled by wind. Volutes that can also be read as the curls of leaf forms constitute his mouth (fig. 76). Nearby, two ambiguous owl-like heads support the entablature above the window (Fig. 76). They are perched and bird-like. They are between categories, both bird-like and angel-like. In terms of architectural elements, they are modillions, but also mascheroni and caryatids.

Various creatures in a process of becoming inhabit the other balconies. Like the young man-lion sculpture of Balcony Six, they seem to point to an iconographical source, but this then evaporates. On Balcony Three, the mensole flanking the central one consist of winged male figures (fig. 77). Their long beards and emaciated bodies suggest ascetic prophets or the four evangelists. They allude to religion in a way that the hybrid man-lion faces allude to the training of a young prince, but they evade being matched to a stable textual referent. In the centre of the line of cherub heads there is a monstrous male face (fig. 78). His face is composed of nameable parts such as eyes, nose, and lips. All parts of the face that are less easily labelled, such as temples or areas of the upper or lower cheek, disappear. Many of these nameable elements are shifting into forms that suggest vegetation or seaweed. There are transitions of taxonomies such as furrows of the lower forehead resembling both veined skin and leaf veins.

The mensole of Balcony Four are the only ones depicting female figures (fig. 79). They are winged like their male counterparts of Balcony Three on the other side of the portal. Their wings make them partially angelic. Their upper bodies are naked but their lower bodies transform into foliage. The central figure and the two outer ones merge into cornucopia-like lower mensole (fig. 80). The owl-angel-Minervas on the upper-storey windows are the only other female figures on the facade. Female figures are uncommon in the Val di Noto mensole sculpture. Where they appear, they are always young women. The mascheroni that
watch and guard within the facades are always male. A female mascherone, if it existed, might suggest Medusa, or a deformation of an idealised female beauty. Female figures cannot be monsters. Unlike the male figures of the facades, they cannot question or threaten the viewer.

The portal of the Palazzo facade differs from the other parts of the façade. It does not include the transforming sculptural decoration of the balconies (fig. 81). Tobriner argues that the portal derives from Vignola’s Ionic order in Plate XVIII of Regola delle cinque ordini d’Architettura (Rome, 1563). Situated in a part of the palace that is not marginal but at the important interface between the palace’s public and private spaces rather than below the balconies or in the clearly private space around the balcony windows, the portal remains restrained and conservative.

Paul Binski refers to marginalia as involving a kind of play or pleasure without a referent, although he questions the idea of the marginal as a theoretical tool. This sense of aporia, or play without a stable referent, resonates with Sicilian decoration, as do Noel Malcolm’s three categories of impossibilita that Binski’s discusses. Malcolm defines impossibilita as: “the literary device which presents reversals of the natural order of things.” Impossibilita are impossible reversals of a usual situation, such as rivers running uphill. Malcolm’s three types of impossibilita are dystopian, utopian and hyperbolic. He defines the hyperbolic as: “the one type which is essentially rhetorical: that is, it makes reference to impossible things not because it is trying to describe an impossible world (whether pleasant or unpleasant) but as a rhetorical figure, to emphasize and dramatize impossibility itself.” The Palazzo Nicolaci façade evokes this sense of delight in strangeness and bodily wonders. Its aporetic quality produces the effect of an enigmatic narrative whose meaning is always just out of reach.

“Cool Control” and Self-Control. Palace Facades.

The puzzling and exuberantly bodily decoration of the Palazzo Nicolaci stands out from the less ambiguous classicising decoration of the other Noto palaces. These other facades exude the “cool control” that for Stephen Tobriner defines Noto’s architecture. The Landolina, Impellizzeri, Trigona, Astuto and Rau palaces have received very little attention from the scholarship, and little documentation has been found. This section discusses their facades to show how their restrained decoration contrasts with the Palazzo Nicolaci. I read these facades in terms of assertion of aristocratic distinction and self-control.
The Palazzo Landolina is closest to the Palazzo Nicolaci, and seems to block the Palazzo Nicolaci from the cathedral square. Its main facade occupies the shorter south side of its isolato, facing onto the cathedral square. The palace’s alignment with the facade of the cathedral creates a visual continuity between these buildings (fig. 82). The Landolina family are now extinct, and the architect and dates of building phases are unknown. The date of 1734 appears on the main portal keystone. In the nineteenth century another building programme extended the palace westwards to create new apartments for Ferdinand II Bourbon’s visit to Noto as the Landolina’s guest. This western extension is the same height as the original two-storey eighteenth-century facade, but employs giant order pilasters and exaggerated difference between smaller lower storey and larger piano nobile windows. The three-bay palace to the west of this extension was originally owned by a branch of the Deodato (fig. 83).

The Palazzo Landolina’s non-zoomorphic and relatively unornamented classicising decoration suggests control and self-effacement (figs. 82 and 83). There does not appear much that is challenging in this facade. Nothing burst out or creates incongruity. There is some rhythm in the back and forward movement of cornices and pilasters, but the facade’s overall effect is relatively flat and grid-like. It avoids incident or emotion. The lack of incident creates a curtain or mask. Passers-by looking at the Palazzo Nicolaci mensole might speculate on the strange creatures’ meaning, or why the patrons put them there. By contrast, the Palazzo Landolina presents a smooth continuity, as if we are not invited to look for a long time.

The predominance of straight lines and the grid-like effect of the facade suggest an imagined world of mathematics and perfect forms. The facade evokes what Charles Burroughs calls “the Platonist-Pythagorean conception of an architecture grounded in transcendent formal values, an integral and orderly classicism resonated with an integral and orderly imagined wider world." The legible outlines of the pilasters and windows of the Palazzo Landolina facade, devoid of ambiguous ornament, assert ideal Platonic forms. Complex ornament does not confuse the geometric forms of windows and cornices. There is density of decoration in the closely repeated corbels of the second-storey cornice, but the overall effect is calm legibility.

Other Noto palaces show a similar restrained classicism. The Palazzo Impellizzeri dates from 1752, twenty years after the Palazzo Landolina (figs. 84-85). It is the only aristocratic residence in the upper Planazzo area. It is possible that Baron Antonino Impellizzeri, who led the initial resistance to Noto’s new site, chose a site for his palace on what could have been
an alternative power centre, rising above the cathedral square, but none of the other noble families followed him.

The Palazzo Impellizzeri deploys a classicising style and avoids zoomorphic decoration. The facade employs austere Doric pilasters, although the lower-storey pilasters include plinths. Rusticated pilasters cover much of the lower storey, creating a strong sense of fortification. On the second storey these pilasters continue in a lighter form without rustication. The different cornices for the second and third storeys suggest that in the eighteenth century the Palazzo Impellizzeri had two storeys, with the attic storey added later.

The Palazzo Landolina and the Palazzo Impellizzeri facades employ single-storey pilasters, with few small details in the decoration and with richer but canonical ornament only in the cornices. The other three important Noto palaces, the Palazzo Trigona, Palazzo Astuto and Palazzo Rau, date from the mid to late-eighteenth century. They display the restraint of the Palazzo Landolina and Palazzo Impellizzeri, but depart more from the canonical classical orders. Their facades deploy giant order pilasters, separate balconies for each window, lower-storey window cornices that often flow into the balcony above, and curving and plant-like ornament around windows.

The Palazzo Trigona occupies the other side of the cathedral from the Palazzo Landolina. Its main facade now faces north on the narrower Via Cavour (fig. 86). Before the construction of the Bishop’s Palace, the Palazzo Trigona was oriented towards the cathedral square (fig. 87). Its facade aligned with the cathedral and the Palazzo Landolina, creating the trio of buildings in Noto’s most prestigious location.

The Palazzo Trigona’s construction history is complicated. Paul Hofer reports three main phases during the second half of the eighteenth century. The date of 1747 appears on a vault in the palace’s lower storey. Hofer also cites a delivery of 2,000 tiles to Gaspare Trigona in March 1749. A palace on the site appears to the right of the cathedral, above the number 44, on Paolo Labisi’s drawing of Noto from the 1750s (fig. 63). This palace is very different to the current one. Its facade is closer to the cathedral square, in line with the Palazzo Landolina on the other side of the cathedral. It employs a central bay with a triangular pediment that comes forward from the rest of the facade. This suggests that the first palace was completed around 1750 and then appeared on Labisi’s drawing.

If Labisi’s drawing is correct, then this earlier building was demolished, probably as part of a second large project commissioned by Bernardo Trigona that took place at the end of the eighteenth century. This project was important for Bernardo Trigona. In his will of March
1791 he orders his heir Vincenzo Maria Trigona to complete the building within three years from Bernardo’s death. Bernardo Trigona repeats this order later in the will, describing the building as “essa mia casa nuova” (this, my new house).

This project created the current palace. In his will, Bernardo Trigona refers to a new commission involving two floors (a *quarto nobile* and *quarto medio*), and “officine”, which usually means shops to rent out. In the same year he contracted the stonemasons Giuseppe Musco and Francesco di Tommaso, and the glazier Aloisio Morello, for work on the palace. Stephen Tobriner notes the date of 1781 over the entrance, so some of the building began at this point.

Bernardo Trigona’s project created a large space between the palace and the cathedral square (fig. 88). The Trigona sold the southern part of this plot to the diocese in 1855 for the Bishop’s Palace. This large open area in front of the south facade of the Palazzo Trigona, at what is now the back of the palace, suggests that there was once a garden or driveway, now covered by buildings, facing onto the cathedral square (figs. 88-89). Aristocratic villas built in the latter part of the eighteenth century at Bagheria near Palermo often employed large circular or horseshoe driveways, for example Villa Palagonia and Villa Valguarnera (fig. 90). The space in front of the Palazzo Trigona may have emulated these villas. It gave the Trigona the only palace in Noto set back in a large garden and curved driveway.

The Palazzo Trigona’s north facade is calm and restrained (figs. 86 and 91). Widely spaced giant order pilasters and modillions on the second-storey cornice create a slow rhythm (fig. 91). Representations of creatures or plants are not common. The cherub’s head supporting the saint on the north-west corner of the second storey, and the giant pilasters’ floral capitals are exceptional and are used sparingly. Sinuous forms such as the scrolls decorating the sides of the upper part of the second-storey windows or the curved balconies below, suggest slow expansion and contraction rather than more sudden movements.

The Palazzo Trigona facade has some similarities with the Palazzo Astuto, almost directly opposite on Via Cavour (fig. 92). Via Cavour runs along the top of the lower town, just below the escarpment that separates the lower town from the upper Pianazzo. The Palazzo Astuto therefore occupies a site that is slightly higher than all of the other Noto palaces except the Palazzo Impellizzeri. Via Cavour is narrow and runs behind the cathedral square however. For their palace, the Astuto had a location that was less visible than the area around the cathedral square.
The Palazzo Astuto’s construction dates and architects are unknown. Stephen Tobriner argues that the palace was built in the second half of the eighteenth century. Stylistic similarities with the Palazzo Trigona support this. The closeness of the two palaces, and the similarities in their decoration, put them in a dialogue with each other.

The Palazzo Astuto deploys superimposed pilasters for the portal, and giant order superimposed pilasters on the facade (fig. 92). The lower-window cornice moulding continues upwards to link with the balcony of the window above (figs. 92 and 93). As on the Palazzo Trigona, the upper and lower windows are different in their decoration but connected by the fluid, plastic shape of the rising cornice of the lower window. In both palaces, the lower windows use rounded arches whereas the upper windows are larger and rectangular. Regular geometric pediments top the upper windows of both palaces. On the Palazzo Astuto the pediments are triangular whereas on the Palazzo Trigona triangular and curved pediments alternate.

The Palazzo Astuto’s floral decoration, such as the delicate hanging garland around the upper storey windows, or the strange capital-like motif half way up the giant pilasters, which also suggests a garland or a sheaf of wheat, is finely carved and kept in small areas (fig. 93). The upper windows have a more rigid, geometric quality. By contrast the mouldings above the lower windows are looser (fig. 94). They generate themselves forwards and outwards from the wall, suggesting wood worked with a lathe.

The Palazzo Rau della Ferla is the last of the major Noto palaces this chapter will discuss (figs. 95-96). As with the other palaces, the architects and construction dates are currently unknown. The Palazzo Rau is one street south from the Corso. It is the only palace south of the Corso. Like the Palazzo Nicolaci, Palazzo Impellizzeri and Palazzo Astuto, it has a long two-storey facade of six bays plus the central portal bay. Its small, outwardly curving balconies and finely carved decoration are similar to the Palazzo Trigona and Palazzo Astuto.

Like the Palazzo Trigona and Palazzo Astuto, the decoration suggests a date in the second half of the eighteenth century. There are giant pilasters at either end of the facade, but a large amount of the surface consists of the open space of the wall, giving a light, uncomplicated effect. There are small, finely carved garlands and scrolls around the windows. The lower window cornice rises in a curving, fluid form, linking the lower and upper windows into a single unit.
Unlike the layered pilasters of the Palazzo Trigona and Palazzo Astuto portals, the Palazzo Rau’s portal employs heavy, square rusticated columns backed by pilasters on the outer sides (fig. 96). The strap-like rustication of the columns suggests Serlio’s engravings for rustic portals in the *Libro Estraordinario* (Venice, 1584). In Serlio’s designs, the strap-like forms which act like belts or metal hoops bind and imprison the columns or pilasters onto the facade. On the Palazzo Rau this effect is weakened as the columns are not strapped to the wall. These rusticated portal pilasters contrast with the light and curving forms on other openings of the facade. Much of the decoration is gentle and plant-like. The volutes on either side of the bottom of the upper-storey windows unfurl quite slowly, like plant roots (fig. 96).

Moving up, a leaf or flower form grows out of the volute and touches the moulding of the window. The volute continues to uncurl, finishing with a motif suggesting opening leaves. A study of these palaces reveals that Noto’s aristocrats avoided the *mensole* and *mascherone* decoration common in surrounding towns such as Ragusa, Modica, Scicli and Catania. In Noto, the established families preferred ornament that suggested restraint and conformity to canonical architectural forms. This more canonical ornament produced effects of prudence and restraint that I discuss in the next section.

**Netinese Palace Facades. Excess, Prudence and Modesty.**

Many writers on architecture associate profuse and complex ornament with negative values of luxury and excess. In the 1950s, Jonathan Ide read the intricate decoration on the Palazzo Nicolaci facade as deviation from the purportedly moderate and reasonable norms of a classical architectural canon:

> The simple main entrance is framed between Ionic columns supporting a classic although richly decorated entablature. Also, the ground floor windows are fairly conservative. However, the second-floor balconies with their bulging iron grilles are supported by the most outrageously fantastic corbels possible to imagine. Each group of five brackets is composed of different figures including nymphs, Moors, Chinamen, cherubim, and lions. The great windows above are crowned by broken cornices supported by female heads. Happily, the architect knew when to call a halt to richness and the cornice of the building is very light and devoid of carving.

In Ide’s argument, the portal has rich decoration, but its Ionic columns and “classic” entablature keep it within the bounds of architectural normality. The corbels or *mensole* however become “outrageous”. Ide’s observation that the architect of the Palazzo Nicolaci knew “when to call a halt to richness” by refraining from using this decoration on more of the
façade, suggests that the use of ornament risks the architect falling into excess. It also implies that this ornamental excess reveals an architect or patron’s lack of personal self-control.

Alberti argues in *De Re Aedificatoria* that excessive ornament on one part of the façade, such as Ide sees in the *mensole* of the Palazzo Nicolaci, disrupts a façade’s harmony. Instead, ornament should be equally distributed:

> The parts ought to be so composed that their overall harmony contributes to the honour and grace of the whole work, and that effort is not expended in adorning one part at the expense of all the rest, but that the harmony is such that the building appears a single, integral and well-composed body, rather than a collection of extraneous and unrelated parts. 382

The restrained façades of most Netinese palaces, such as the Palazzo Landolina and Palazzo Impellizzeri, with their evenly deployed classical members, or the small-scale, evenly spaced scroll-like ornament of the Palazzo Trigona, Astuto and Rau, follow Alberti’s rule that ornament should not be conspicuously concentrated in certain parts of the building.

These façades also follow Alberti’s rule that all citizens, including the rich, should not show extravagance:

> I notice that the most prudent and modest of our ancestors much preferred frugality and parsimony in building as in any other matter, public or private, judging that all extravagance on the part of the citizen ought to be prevented and checked, and that both admonitions and laws were issued to this end with the utmost vigour and persistence. 383

Alberti argues that a family’s frugality must also extend to their architectural commissions. He associates ornament with luxury and waste: “I would rather the private houses of the wealthy were wanting in things that might contribute to their ornament, than have the more modest and thrifty accuse them of luxury in any way.” 384 For Alberti, ornament therefore has the potential to create political discord. Over-elaborate decoration on buildings could provoke envy, or accusations of waste and egotism. Alberti praises prudent and modest citizens. The rich must show that they also follow these rules.

Alberti does allow ornament in the form of the classical orders however, and admits some licence in how decoration is used, but within limits. He does not define these limits, but by
implication they are the proportions for buildings and classical orders that he sets out in De Re Aedificatoria. Restraint is the central rule:

The severest restraint is called for, for the ornament to private buildings, therefore, although a certain license is often possible. For instance, the whole shaft of a column may be over slender, or too retracted at its entasis perhaps, compared to what is strictly permissible in public buildings, yet it should not be faulted or condemned, provided the work is not malformed or distorted.

The classical orders are therefore associated with both personal and social order. The control and balance of the Noto facades suggests control and balance as personal traits of the building’s owners, and as necessary to maintain political power. Tempering wealth that allows excessive consumption purportedly shows modesty and self-control, and also reduces a population’s discontent over economic inequality. In his manual for princes Opere Politiche Cristiane (Mazzarino, 1692), Carlo Maria Carafa includes a chapter entitled “Il Principe temperi il lusso, e le pompe” (“The prince must moderate luxury and pomp”). He writes: “A’ sovrani più, che a’ vassalli per riformare col loro esempio gli eccessi, conviene dare un calcio alla superfluità, perché il lusso intollerabile delle reggie è forse una delle principali cagioni delle gravezze de’ popoli.”

Modesty for Carlo Maria Carafa is therefore more than just the exercise of a noble virtue. It is a tool for preserving a ruler’s political power. Like Alberti, he argues that a ruler should avoid accusations of luxury. By implication, the discontent of a population aggrieved by a ruler’s “intolerable luxury” could lead to riots or desire for a change of ruler. Carlo Maria Carafa goes on to prescribe that a prince must set an example of moderation to his vassals:

Temperi poi il Principe le pompe, et i lussi de’ sudditi; essendo queste bastanti a rovinare le prime Monarchie del Mondo, mentre la magnificenza della tavola, la splendidezza delle veste, e la superbia delle fabbriche superando le proprie forze, vengono in conseguenza a rovinarsi gli fondamenti per la conservazione degli Stati.

Carlo Maria Carafa does not explain which “first monarchies of the world” he refers to, but the phrase calls to mind ancient empires described in the Bible, such as Egypt or Babylon. His reference to ancient examples gives his proscription of luxury a putative universality. It also places the ruler at the centre, as the person whose behaviour his subjects should emulate.
Carlo Maria Carafa cites extravagance in food, clothing and architecture as vices that attack the foundations of the state. He does not expand his arguments on food or architecture, but on clothing he asserts that it is the soul itself which should be beautiful, not the body’s garments:

Del Principe devono essere oggetto di meraviglia le virtuosi azioni, e non gli abiti pomposi, essendo cosa più bella, e degna di Re, haver l’anima composto, e ornato, che i vestimenti del corpo. Iddio volle far ad’ Adamo di sua mano il vestito di pelle, e senza ornamento alcuno, per dar ad intendere al Principe, che è suo successore nel comando, che deve vestirsi senza pompa alcuna, ne alterar la forma in tanti modi inventata per mera vanità, e capriccio. 389

If ornament is the metaphorical clothing of a building, it must therefore be simple and modest. As the facades of Noto, and a reading of writers including Alberti and Ide reveal, ornament must be kept in check, but the components that make up the classical orders, the canonical pilasters, columns, capitals, entablatures and so on, are not classified as ornament. They are considered part of the building’s essential body. An ideal building will be nude like the perfect body God made for Adam. This perfect body includes the canonical classical orders, but other forms of ornament are considered dressing.

In a description of his visit to Catania in the 1760s, the eighteenth-century traveller Johann Von Riedesel conflates nobility, simplicity and nudity. On the classicising facades of Catania’s architecture he writes:

Per la sua sollecitudine [Ignazio Paternò Castello] le strade che restavano da rifabbricare, sono state in parte e saranno oramai fabbricate sopra un piano conveniente che areca un’eguaglianza perfetta nelle facciate delle case; queste facciate sono in bello stile antico, di una nobile semplicità, e nude di ornamenti. 390

Von Riedesel appears not to notice the mascheroni and other profuse sculptural of Catanese palaces such as the Palazzo Massa (fig. 3), the Benedictine Monastery or the Palazzo Biscari. The buildings he admires are “nude” of ornament. Ornament is therefore analogous to the clothing or jewellery added to the body of the building.

On the casting of architectural ornament as clothing, Mark Wigley examines Alberti’s assumption that a building has an abstract ‘structure’ determined by geometric rules, to which is added the ‘clothing’ of ornament:
Alberti’s text begins with its well-known division of architecture into ‘lineaments’, which derive from the mind, and ‘matter’, which derives from nature. The lineaments are the order of lines that prescribes the ‘appropriate place’ for the building and all its parts. Formulated in the masculine mind of the architect, this geometric order controls the feminine body of the building that has been appropriated from Mother Nature.  

In Alberti’s conception, the *lineamenti* generate a building’s body. What he defines as surface becomes the building’s skin. Wigley argues that in much architectural discourse the walls that constitute a building’s body receive a skin-like layer of plaster or colour, and are then dressed with ornament. The skin-like surface of the wall separates ‘decoration’ from ‘architecture’. Paraphrasing Alberti, Wigley writes:

> The body of the building is ‘constructed naked, and clothed later.’ After putting on its thin white layer, it is ‘dressed with ornament.’ The white skin divides the body from its clothes, isolating the representational system of ornamentation from the presence of the building.

Ornament is considered lesser, because it is a dressing to the purportedly more essential ‘structure’ of a building. This relates to production of gender. Wigley discusses how Alberti’s ‘structure’ is produced as masculine, whereas the ‘surface’, the wall or skin of the building, becomes feminine. On this relegation of ornament in terms of gender, Alberti associates decoration with cosmetics. It hides or embellishes the ‘essential’ body, and can also deceive. In his discussion of Alberti, Wigley quotes Xenophon’s statement in the *Oikonomos* that the male body has transparency, whereas the female body is disguised through cosmetics.

Alberti makes decoration threatening due to its connection with sensual pleasure. Because he links ornament and embellishment, ornament functions only to please the eye. On this perceived threat, Wigley argues: “the threat of ornament is its sensuality, which distracts the proper eye. The risk of ornament is an impropriety in which the sensuality of the body confuses the mind that seeks to control it.” For Alberti, the “proper eye” is one that can read the *lineamenti*, the geometric arrangement of building parts. Ornament does not concern itself with geometry in this way. Indeed, it can mask and distract from geometry.

Ornament’s casting as feminine also relates to a distinction between high and applied arts that associates applied arts such as textiles with weaving and sewing. Wigley argues that
the emergence of the institution of architecture involved binary distinctions, with one of the binaries subordinate:

The gender division only emerges with the institutions. Their gesture of appropriation is only possible when a certain gap has opened up, the gap between masculine and feminine, art and craft, form and colour, structure and decoration. The feminine term in each case is produced as such in the very moment of its subordination by the other term which both depends upon it and upon a veiling of that dependence. 397

Associations of ornament with luxury and excess, clothing and femininity underlie discussions of architecture from Alberti to Von Riedesel’s observations on Catania and Ide and Tobriner’s twentieth-century descriptions of Noto. The contrast between the Palazzo Nicolaci facade and the facades of the other principal palaces brings to light how these assumptions operate in reading the palace architecture of Noto.

Conclusion. Aristocratic Competition and the Challenge of the Palazzo Nicolaci.

Like the geometric outlines of Avola and Grammichele, the balance and harmony that scholars see in Noto’s urbanism is the result of political coercion. Unlike Avola and Grammichele, Noto’s new town was achieved through the political exertions of a group of aristocrats rather than a single feudal owner. The town resulted more from these exertions than from the application of purportedly neutral ideal town plans. The earthquake allowed the nobles to reconfigure the town to their advantage, with larger palaces in a new location near the coast road that would bring economic benefit, and whose urbanism of straight streets and regular piazze associated the nobility with modernity and putative rationalism.

This chapter has also analysed facades and ornament in terms of arguments and assumptions about how nobles presented themselves to others. The choice of palace facades was part of aristocratic competition. Most eighteenth-century palaces in Noto deploy classical facades where ornamental understatement and conformity to canonical precepts support aristocratic distinction. These facades produce effects of restraint and self-control, qualities that by implication extended to the family who commissioned the palace.

Scholars such as Stephen Tobriner attempt to tame Sicilian facades like the Palazzo Nicolaci by subsuming some decorative elements into templates from architectural treatises, and relegating the remainder to a local tradition assumed unworthy of analysis. Tobriner contrasts the mensole and mascheroni, decoration he labels “boisterous” or provincial, with a
more classical or “severe” element in Noto’s architecture. I have not relegated the non-canonical ornament, but have analysed it in terms of ambiguity and liminality. 398

For Tobriner, the canonical classical orders underpin facade ornament. I have argued instead that classicising ornament is not a neutral architectural template, but can produce a range of effects and associations including restraint or luxury. I have also argued that closer analysis of the Palazzo Nicolaci facade shows that its complex, ambiguous decoration cannot be placed within any iconographic systems. The balconies and windows deploy beings that make strange transitions and experience rapture or terror. Unlike the discreet and restrained ornament of the other Noto palaces, the facade depicts strong emotions but is also enigmatic. Its marginalised location and transforming, hybrid creatures issue a challenge to the stability and decorum that the palaces of rival families evoke.
Illustrations for Chapter Three.

Fig. 47. Facade of the Palazzo Nicolaci, Noto. 1737. Architect Unknown. (Image from Muti, ed. 2008:167).
Fig. 48. Facade of the Palazzo Landolina di Sant’ Alfano, Noto. 1748. Architect Unknown.
Fig. 49. South facade of the Palazzo Trigona, Noto. Various architects. Later phase by Bernardo Labisi, 1790s. The two-storey Bishop’s Palace is in front of the Palazzo Trigona. (Image edited from Muti, ed. 2008:162-163).
Fig. 50. View of Noto looking north. (Image from vicerespeciale.com).
Fig. 51. View of Noto showing the two levels of the town. Parts of the escarpment marking the edge of the raised Pianazzo can be seen one block back from the dome of the cathedral. (Image edited from Muti, ed. 2008: 162-163).
Fig. 52. Family relations between branches of the Landolina and Deodato c. 1600-1710. (Image adapted from Luminati, 1995. Plate 6/2). Luminati's caption reads “The most important kinship relations of the Landolina and Deodato families.”
Fig. 53. Family relations between branches of the Impellizzeri and Landolina c. 1600-1710. (Image from Luminati, 1995. Plate 6/1). Luminati’s caption reads “The important kinship relations of the Impellizzeri family.”
Fig. 54. Padre Antonio Tedeschi. Engraving of Noto. 1780. Copy of a lost drawing that was made before the earthquake. Biblioteca Comunale, Noto.
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Key.

1. Cathedral.
2. Palazzo Landolina.
3. Palazzo Trigona.
5. Convent of SS Salvatore.
8. Palazzo Ducezio (Town Hall).
9. Church of SS. Trinità.
11. Church of Montevergine.
12. Convent of Montevergine.
15. Church of S. Antonio Abbate.
17. Monastery of Padri Crociferi.
18. Palazzo Battaglia.
19. Church of S. Michele Arcangelo.
20. Monastery of S. Maria del Carmelo.
22. Church of S. Spirito.
23. Convent of S. Maria dell’Arco.
24. Church of S. Maria del Purgatorio.
25. Palazzo Astuto.
27. Palazzo Zappata.

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Chapter Four. The Palazzo Biscari in Catania. Lightness, Refinement and Distinction.

Introduction. Placing the Ballroom at the Centre.

The Palazzo Biscari, built by the Paternò Castello family, princes of Biscari, is situated in the dark grey streets of Catania’s historical centre. At the centre of the palace, the ballroom is a place of surprising opulence (fig.97). Light reflects from elegant gold frames, mirrors, tiles and paintings. The ballroom once hosted large numbers of guests, but the bodies that occupied it and the entertainments that took place can only be imagined. The empty room evokes aristocratic dancers enveloped in a world of luxury and swirling golden energy. Its slightly worn and faded decoration sends signals from a vanished world.

One can imagine the room filled with guests. Some of them converse; they flutter their fans nervously and turn their heads to observe other groups. If the ball is in summer, a breeze might blow in from the adjacent sea-facing terrace. The musicians begin to play. The energised shapes of the decoration echo the dancers’ flickering, changing reflections in the mirrors around the ballroom and the flashes of light from their silk clothes. The dancing nobles are illuminated and reproduced by the mirrors. They monitor themselves and others in the mirrors and under the light of the chandeliers.

In addition to the ballroom, the Palazzo Biscari contained a theatre, a library, a museum of antiquities and mineralogy, a collection of armour, a room of chinoiserie, a room decorated with painted birds, and a room incorporating floor tiles from a Roman bath. There are eighteenth-century chairs and consoles, portraits of the Biscari family, and painted maps of their fiefs. The palace was the site of the antiquarian society the Accademia degli Etnei, and a stop on the Grand Tour for international diplomats and writers.

Rather than pursuing all of these aspects of the palace, this chapter takes the ballroom as its centre. It investigates the ways that dancing, social interactions and the training of the body produced and sustained aristocratic status and rank. Instead of reading the ballroom in terms of chronological building phases or stylistic labels, or taking the ballroom for granted as a standard feature of eighteenth-century palaces, I investigate how the ballroom, often the largest space in a palace and the most lavishly decorated, enables aristocratic distinction. Existing literature on the palace does not consider this question. The small number of references to the palace and the ballroom excavate chronology or briefly describe the decoration, but they take the ballroom itself for granted.
Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and distinction, which I discuss later, inform this chapter. I read dance, ways of greeting and conversing in the ballroom as part of the aristocratised habitus of the body. Thus, instead of relegating the ballroom to a component of the Palazzo Biscari, this chapter makes the ballroom a starting point for investigations into the maintenance of nobility. Noble status does not exist in isolation from behaviour and material objects. Instead, it needs to be continually produced through behaviour and adaptation. Dancing at balls is one of the requirements for nobility, but it is also a way that noble status is produced. The ballroom is therefore more than a site for entertainment, or for the mere display of wealth through conspicuous consumption. Instead of reading the Palazzo Biscari ballroom as a container for activities or artworks that represent social status, I argue that the ballroom, with its dances and dancers, its etiquette and its intricate decoration, generates and enables status and distinction.

Aristocratic distinction is produced in the Palazzo Biscari primarily through lightness and adroitness. The chapter will show how the light, refined and delicate was preferred over what was deemed heavy or fixed. The chapter brings together the decoration of the ballroom, its materials, and the dances that took place there. This is not only to metaphorically reactivate the ballroom, to bring its materials and bodies back to the centre of the palace, but to investigate how lightness in bodies and materials was implicated in aristocratic distinction.

**Positivism and Formalism in the Literature on the Palace.**

There are very few studies on the Palazzo Biscari, or other Catanese palaces. The existing studies work from a combination of archival data, with little analysis, and generalising formalist descriptions that place the palaces into stylistic categories. Vito Librando’s 1965 study of the Palazzo Biscari is important because it documents building phases, patrons and architects from the 1693 earthquake to the 1803 acquisition of an adjacent house that allowed the palace to occupy an entire isolato. Librando took measurements of the palace and produced elevations and ground plans. He established a useful chronology for the palace, but a positivist methodology means that once dates and names of patrons are established, the important work is considered done.

Discussions of the palace since Librando generally reiterate his documented chronology of the building phases. They often then place the palace within a typology of ground plans, or architectural features that can be related to architectural treatises. Giuseppe Dato’s study of Catania includes a short section on the city’s palaces. Dato divides the palaces into three types based on their ground plans. There are those which he reads as forming a single
block, those with a garden loggia, and those which he describes as suburban villas. He categorises the Palazzo Biscari in terms of its ground plan only, as a palace of the single block type.  

References to the Palazzo Biscari in the scholarship often search for hypothetical architectural sources that originate outside Sicily. For example, Anthony Blunt describes the palace’s sea-facing facade as “a vein of fantasy otherwise unknown in Catania”, but then remarks on a small curved roof near the facade that suggests chinoiserie, saying nothing about the rest of the decoration. He gives a little more analysis of the ballroom, positing a German or Venetian source for its woodcarving and stucco decoration:

The decoration of the salone and the staircase is apparently without parallel in Sicily, or indeed in Southern Italy. It consists of panels of thick Rococo stucco, lovingly worked with a wooden tool, a technique which recalls late Bavarian works like the Kaisersaal at Nymphenburg or certain rooms in Venetian palaces. One can only suppose that the Principe di Biscari, who had contacts all over Europe, must have brought workmen from the north to execute the decoration of this fantastic room.

Blunt continues the search for connections with German-speaking areas in his discussion of the oval musicians’ gallery that occupies the space above the ballroom:

The architect in charge of the palace was Francesco Battaglia and he is probably responsible for the general design of the salone and the exquisite staircase, but the stucco is quite alien to his manner or that of any other local architect. To find analogies one would have to look as far north as the Veneto or even over the Alps to Austria and Bavaria.

Although Blunt praises the ballroom’s decoration as distinctive and “without parallel in Sicily,” his speculation that this must be due to the work of north-European external artisans reinforces the idea of Sicily as dependent on other parts of Europe for its most arresting or skilfully executed architecture. Salvatore Boscarino, in his survey of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Sicilian architecture, also singles out the Palazzo Biscari ballroom. He gives a formalistic description and then, like Blunt, cites the ballroom as an example of outstanding architecture: “Gli interventi di trasformazione interna, a opera del Battaglia (in particolare il salone e la scala dei musici) si possono considerare come i vertici raggiunti dal gusto rococò a Catania.”
Besides the scant references in the scholarship, two useful collections of data for the Palazzo Biscari are Domenico Ligresti’s article on the inventory of the palace’s library, and Gaetano Calabrese’s more recent (2012) catalogue of the Biscari archive. Ligresti’s article publishes the text and a commentary on *Catalogus Librorum qui in Excellentissimi Principis Bischarensis*, 3 manuscript volumes compiled by several authors after Prince Ignazio Paternò Castello’s death in 1786. Ligresti gives statistics on the number of books in the library published in a certain century or in a certain language, or by topic or place of publication. He follows with a narrative of Ignazio Paternò Castello’s life. The remainder of the article reproduces the catalogue of the sections and book titles of the library’s 1,439 printed works and manuscripts.

Calabrese’s inventory also includes a history of the archive and a chronology of the Paternò Castello from 1403 to 1886. This consists principally of births, marriages and deaths supported by references mainly from the Biscari archive. The final section consists of indices of people, corporations and places referred to in the documents, biographies of individual princes of Biscari, and histories of each Biscari fief.

Librando, Ligresti and Calabrese’s archival work provides important groundwork for further studies of the Palazzo Biscari, but remains essentially empirical. Blunt and Boscarino’s descriptions do acknowledge the ballroom’s extraordinary effect, but do not develop the discussion. There is no reference to what took place in the ballroom. The ballroom itself is taken as self-evident, and the activities it enabled are considered outside the scope of architectural history. The ballroom remains an empty shell. The importance of what the ballroom and its activities of dance, bodily and emotional control, and performance of aristocratic status enabled, is ignored.

**Distinction and Imported French Styles.**

This chapter draws on eighteenth-century dance and etiquette manuals in order to investigate how these manuals, and the dance masters who produced them, gave instruction not just in dance steps, but also in how to hold the body and interact with others in the ballroom. Many of these manuals on dance and aristocratic comportment were published in France. During the eighteenth century, French language and manners became important cultural capital in Sicily and other Italian-speaking areas, replacing Spanish fashions that dominated earlier. Arcangelo Leanti, in *Lo stato presente della Sicilia, o sia breve e distinta descrizione di essa* (Palermo, 1761), notes the aristocracy’s shift towards French fashions in dress and food. According to Leanti, only some older women or women of lower social rank,
and some royal ministers, continued to follow the older-style Spanish dress. Similarly, most nobles ate “alla moda Franzese” instead of “alla moda Spagnuola”.

The historian of eighteenth-century Catania Guglielmo Policastro refers to balls as an opportunity for the guests to speak French: “Ogni occasione era buona per organizzare delle danze che favorivano gli intrighi d’amore non solo, ma anche quell’altra mania del secolo di parlare francese”. In the Palazzo Biscari library, although most books were in Italian and Latin, of those published in the first half of the eighteenth century just under 10% were in French, while during the second half of the century this rose to 23%. In other words, nearly one in four of the books acquired in this later period were French. In 1767, the German visitor Johann Von Riedesel, when praising the accomplishments of Ignazio Paternò Castello’s children, singles out their knowledge of music and French: “essi sono de la più grande pulitezza, e molto istruiti; parlano benissimo la lingua francese, e son pieni di talenti per la musica e per diverse altre arti.”

The high status the Italian aristocracy accorded French cuisine, language, and dance caused complaints about the supposed arrogance of French teachers in Italy. Writing five years after Von Riedesel’s visit to the Palazzo Biscari, the Venetian Abbot Giovanbattista Roberti complains in Lettera sopra il lusso del secolo XVIII (Venice, 1772): “Ma la fastidiosaggine di certi francesi è tanto arrogante che arrivati in Italia al primo saggire di qualche nostro piatto cotto in foggia diversa dall’usare di là delle loro alpe, benché sieno poveri uomini, come maestri di ballo, o maestri di lingua, definiscono che esso è un piatto detestabile.”

Roberti’s remark reads the French visitors’ cultural confidence as an affront and a threat. Roberti taught theology at Piacenza, Brescia, Parma and Bologna, and published poetry and religious and philosophical works, but now he complains that even “poveri uomini”, because they were French, could challenge his social standing and cultural discernment. People who, in Roberti’s view, were mere teachers of dance or language could pronounce on matters of taste in food. Roberti’s condemnation implies that the aristocrats’ demand for French teachers who instructed the nobles in dance and language, and the nobility’s cooks in cuisine, made these teachers arrogant and convinced of their cultural superiority.

The French traveller Dominic Vivant Denon also noted the French masters’ confidence. On a visit in the 1770s to the Casino dei Nobili in Palermo, he describes the French masters of livery, dogs and horses: “mi sembrava di vedere i nostri rumorosi ‘petits maîtres’ francesi, tutti occupati dalle livree, dai cani e dai cavalli, ancora meravigliata dal lusso e dal chiasso loro concessi.” Vivant Denon presents the “little masters” as noisy, but aware of and
amazed at, the licence they are allowed. Vivant Denon’s comment diminishes the teachers as noisy “little masters”, as if they are spoiled children. It is also a criticism of the Sicilian nobility’s infatuation with France. The implication from Vivant Denon’s comment is that the French masters have a social and financial status above their due, because they prove and ensure that their employers follow the prestigious French styles.

The high status Sicilian aristocrats awarded to French masters in areas including dance, dress and etiquette shows the importance of imported French styles for families such as the Paternò Castello. During the eighteenth century, the new forms of dance and etiquette prescribed by French treatises became central to Sicilian aristocrats’ maintenance of distinction, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Ignazio Paternò Castello and “The great temple of hospitality and generosity.”

This section explores the ways in which the Paternò Castello’s new palace, rebuilt and expanded after the earthquake, operates within the family’s expanding dominance of the city in the eighteenth century. 426 This access to greater political power culminated in the second half of the eighteenth century in the architectural projects of Ignazio Paternò Castello, who commissioned the palace’s ballroom, theatre and museum, and who positioned the palace as a centre for international visitors.

The Princes of Biscari were the highest-ranking branch of the Paternò Castello, a long-established family in Catania. 427 Antonino Mango de Casalgerardo’s Nobiliario della Sicilia, 1912, lists 38 fiefs the family’s different branches owned:

Possedette i principati di Biscari, di Sperlinga; le ducees di Carcaci, Furnari, Palazzo, Paternò, Rocca Romana; i marchesati di Capizzi, San Giuliano, Manchi, Sessa Toscano e le baronie di San Alessi, Aragona, Cuba e Sparacogna, Alzacuda, Baglia e dogana di Milazzo, Baldi, Belmonte, Bicocca, Bidani, Biscari, Burgio, Capizzi, Castania, Cuchara, Cugno, Donnafugata, Gallitano, Gatta, Graneri, Imbaccari e Mirabella, Manchi di Belici, Manganelli di Catania, Marianopoli, Mirabella, Motta Camastra, Murgo. 428

The Paternò Castello held senior governing positions in Catania before the earthquake, but after 1693 the family’s presence in government increased. 429 Only certain noble families were eligible for annual election to the city’s 8 governing positions. 430 The Paternò Castello and other Paternò branches increased the number of posts they held in the city government during the eighteenth century. 431 Between 1693 and 1743, they held 33% of senatorial
posts, compared to 5% in the 50 years earlier. This increase is due partly to deaths from the earthquake, which reduced the number of eligible families from 60 to 29, but by the 1740s, 50 years after the earthquake, the Paternò Castello and related family branches still appear frequently in lists of the city governors.

The Paternò Castello’s were the only noble family permitted to rebuild on the old city walls. The Bishop’s Palace was the only other palace rebuilt on the walls. This was a premium location. The rebuilding plan for Catania allocated the highest value to plots near the sea. The plan divided the new city into two areas. In the western part around the Abbazia dei Benedettini, the plots were valued at 13.10 onze per tumulo. In the area nearer the sea, the plots were valued at 20 onze per tumulo. As they increased their representation in the city’s government during the eighteenth century, the princes of Biscari worked over three generations to expand the palace by occupying more of the adjacent land. Through a series of acquisitions the palace grew to occupy an entire, large isolato.

Abbé de Saint Non’s 1785 engraving shows the Palazzo Biscari’s location (fig. 98). In the centre, the domes of the newly rebuilt cathedral and the Badia di Sant ‘Agatha are the tallest edifices in the city. The low facade of the Bishop’s Palace is directly to the cathedral’s left. The Bishop’s palace and the cathedral, with its relics of the patron saint Agatha, were centres of ecclesiastical power. The Palazzo Biscari, seat of the city’s most influential family and therefore a centre of secular power, is close by, to the left of the Bishop’s Palace.

The palace’s entrance hall presents the Paternò Castello’s long-term wealth and family lineage. Guests arrive first in this hall, with its painted maps of the Biscari fiefs and its heavy benches decorated with the Biscari arms (fig. 99). Like the entrance hall of the Palazzo Butera, Palermo, discussed in Chapter One, the maps emphasise the family’s aristocratic status deriving from land ownership. From the entrance hall, two salons leading to the ballroom contain portraits of the family ancestors with their names and noble titles (fig. 100).

In a discussion of the Palazzo Butera in Palermo, Stefano Piazza notes a shift in Sicilian palaces from the mid-eighteenth century away from the entrance hall as the principal space for receiving guests in favour of an enfilade of salons leading to a ballroom. The various antechambers or salons through which guests arrive allow an orchestration of representations of the family’s status, such as coats of arms, maps and portraits. In the Palazzo Biscari the move from the entrance hall and its maps, through the salons leading to the ballroom, inscribes aristocratic status as permanent and transmitted through the putatively natural biological forces of land and genetic lineage. The maps of the fiefs and the
portraits of the ancestors show permanence of noble status over time in the form of both land ownership and a pedigree of ancestors.

On the high value attached to maintaining social distinction over extended time, Pierre Bourdieu writes:

Legitimate manners owe their value to the fact that they manifest the rarest conditions of acquisition, that is, a social power over time which is tacitly recognized as the supreme excellence: to possess things from the past, i.e., accumulated, crystallized history, aristocratic names and titles, chateaux or 'stately homes', paintings and collections, vintage wines and antique furniture, is to master time, through all those things whose common feature is that they can only be acquired in the course of time, by means of time, against time, that is, by inheritance or through dispositions which, like the taste for old things, are likewise only acquired with time and applied by those who can take their time. 439

In the 1770s, when the ballroom was finished, the Palazzo Biscari was less than a hundred years old. The eastern section including the ballroom, finished in 1772, was completely new. 440 Although parts of it were relatively recent, the palace incorporated the fact that the Paternò Castello lineage was much older. The palace had to work within the acquisition, over time, of status and luxury that Bourdieu describes. The maps and the portraits of the entrance hall and salons are the “crystallized history” Bourdieu mentions. The Paternò Castello’s assertion of the longevity of their aristocratic status makes this status appear established and natural in the present, and permanent for the future.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, at the time of Ignazio Paternò Castello, the palace included the ballroom, museum and theatre. It was also a centre for foreign visitors. Giovanni Ardizzone, in his Elogio d’Ignazio Paternò Castello Principe di Biscari (Catania, 1787), describes the palace as “the great temple of Ignazio Paternò Castello’s hospitality and ‘beneficenza’: “La sua casa, che non è una piccolo veduta, è stata il largo tempio della ospitalità, e della beneficenza. Qui sono venuti signori, e letterati di quasi tutto l’universo, ed è stata l’oggetto della loro ammirazione, e della loro penna.” 441

Ignazio Paternò Castello was one of the Val di Noto’s wealthiest landowners. 442 He maintained correspondence with nobles and antiquarians around Europe. This furthered his influence by linking him to an international elite of classical scholars and archaeologists. 443 He was known in Sicily and beyond for the archaeological projects he funded in Catania.
These projects, and his collection of antiquities, maintained his reputation as an erudite patron. He published two books on archaeology, *Discorso accademico sopra un'antica iscrizione trovata nel Teatro della città di Catania* (Catania 1771), and *Viaggio per tutte le antichità della Sicilia* (Naples, 1781), an account of the classical sites he visited. From 1744 the Palazzo Biscari became the meeting place for the *Accademia degli Etnei* or *Aetnorum Academia*, a learned society that he founded. Between 1752 and 1757 he built a museum in the palace with 10 rooms, 3 galleries and a central atrium. Here members of the *Accademia degli Etnei* and foreign visitors could study his collections of antique statues and medallions, minerals, lava, shells, coral and dried sea creatures.

Ignazio Paternò Castello’s funeral elegy by his librarian Giuseppe Buda, entitled *Varj componimenti dell’Accademia degli Etnei per la morte di Ignazio Paternò Castello Principe di Biscari* (Catania, 1787), shows the extent of Ignazio Paternò Castello’s international network. The elegy lists 30 visitors from countries including France, Britain, the German-speaking countries, Flanders and Russia. These include William Hamilton and Patrick Brydon from England, Baron von Riedesel, Frederick Muenter and the Prussian Minister Loesch, a governor of Jamaica, a Mr Gibbs from Pennsylvania, the Comte de Borch, Count and Countess Potoski, Prince Poniatowki of Poland, Count Czernischew of Russia, Baron Elsesheim of Sweden, and Count Neni, Imperial Minister of Flanders.

Notable visitors Buda does not mention include Goethe, the French antiquarians Jean Houel and the Abbé Saint Non, and the English writers John Dryden Junior, Henry Swinburne, and Patrick Wright Vaughan. Many of these visitors were writers and antiquarians who later published accounts of the Palazzo Biscari or of Ignazio Paternò Castello’s archaeological interests. These accounts promoted Ignazio Paternò Castello as a member of an international network of academicians and antiquity collectors.

Ignazio Paternò Castello corresponded with the foreign writers and politicians mentioned above, and was also one of Catania’s most revered citizens. His elaborate funeral on 1 September 1786 asserts his importance in the city. In Antonio Zacco’s engraving of the funeral procession, a winding line of nobles, clerics and city companies snakes towards the church of the Carmine (fig. 101). The procession followed the streets of Catania, but in the engraving the buildings and the streets disappear. There was in fact no large area of open ground in front of the church. Zacco invents the open area with its winding lines of mourners to emphasise the multitude of people.
Writing of the funeral 43 years later, the historian Francesco Ferrara describes how religious groups, guilds, the senate and other companies of the city filed through the streets:

Quel giorno fu di pubblica mestizia. Quasi tutto il popolo riunito in compagnie, e in congregazioni, i religiosi di tutti i conventi, i due capitoli della cattedrale, e della collegiata, la deputazione delle strade, il consolato di seta, e finalmente il senato in tutta la sua pompa accompagnarono il cadavere che condotto per le strade alla chiesa dei carmelitani imponeva a ciascuno il dovere di versar lagrime sulla memoria di un eroe della patria, sul grande amico della umanità, sul letterato, sul mecenate dei dotti. 448

Ferrara calls Ignazio Paternò Castello a “hero of the homeland” and “great friend of humanity”. Ignazio Paternò Castello is established as the city’s premier citizen. His funeral is a day of mourning for the whole city. Important religious groups such as the cathedral chapters, civic entities such as the senate and the deputazione delle strade, and merchants such as the silk guild, ensure that they are present at the funeral.

Ignazio Paternò Castello’s ballroom in the Palazzo Biscari became the site that enabled an apotheosis-like spectacle of mourning. In an engraving contemporary to Zacco’s depiction of the funeral procession, Ignazio Paternò Castello is represented sitting high on a throne-like catafalque, looking down from an elaborate monument with obelisks and funerary urns that fills most of the ballroom’s centre (fig. 102). As at the dances that he hosted in the same room, groups of people move around the room conversing. Others gesture from the gallery above the centre of the room, as if marvelling at the palace’s beauty, or looking up and remembering Ignazio Paternò Castello who is now in heaven. 449

The tragedy of the earthquake aided the Paternò Castello to amass political influence. It reduced the number of families eligible for election to the city government and gave an opportunity to rebuild the palace. The palace was expanded during the same period that the family increased their political power. This accumulation of power culminated in Prince Ignazio Paternò Castello, whose expansions to the palace included the museum and the ballroom. The museum was a node for learned visitors who came to see Ignazio Paternò Castello’s antiquities and natural history collections. The ballroom, as will be seen, produced aristocratic distinction through refined materials and aristocratic skills of dancing and polite conversation.
The Ballroom. Permanence, Lightness, Distinction.

This section investigates the ballroom’s materials and the effects they produce. Instead of treating the ballroom as an example of a purportedly generic rococo style, I look for what is specific about its materials and how these materials are deployed. My discussion is informed by Helen Hills’ term “affective material productivity”. Writing on seventeenth-century architecture, Hills argues that historians should pay attention to materials in terms of the emotional or suggestive affect they produce:

To look at these buildings today in terms of their affective material productivity, even if they can only be articulated incompletely, is to ask historians to undertake the kind of visual work that they are seldom accustomed to. It means staying the customary hastiness that sees architecture as mere insubstantiation of idea and instead – while resisting the urge to interpret architecture as merely the sum of its parts – requires a willingness to inquire into the materiality of aspects of architecture and objects which yield ‘nothing’ to see (such as dark areas within sculpture, non-figurative passages within architecture, the shine of silver, illegible letters or unknowable alphabets).

This requires looking at the effect the materials of the Palazzo Biscari produce. It means asking how the ballroom’s decoration and materials combine to produce refinement and lightness.

In contrast to the accumulated land and permanence of lineage in the decoration of the entrance hall and two adjoining salons, what is aristocratic in the ballroom is light and fleeting. The ballroom does not present a narrative of slowly acquired noble status. Instead, it is a site of fast flowing energy. Swirling ceiling decoration, shining mirrors, and reflections around marble consoles and glass chandeliers create dancing light (figs. 103-105). Light reflects from a multitude of polished ceramic, glass and marble surfaces. It reflects from gold mouldings around the edges of paintings, doors and mirrors. It creates the effect of fire or liquid gold running around the ballroom.

No images of the entertainments in the Palazzo Biscari ballroom have been found, but Antoine-Jean Duclos’ etching Le Bal Paré. The Evening dress ball at the House of Monsieur Villemorien Fila, from the same decade that the Palazzo Biscari ballroom was built, showing a French aristocratic ball, gives a sense of what the Palazzo Biscari ballroom, with its chandeliers, mirrors and nobles following French fashions, may have been like (fig. 106). The room’s bright chandeliers, carved wood and stucco suggest delicacy and fragility. As
opposed to the permanence and mastery of time implied in the maps and portraits of the entrance hall and salons discussed earlier, the ballroom is light, adroit, flickering, rare, exclusive.

Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of distinction is important in reading the materials of the ballroom in terms of social distinction. Bourdieu argues that distinction is embodied in materials where lightness is assumed to be aristocratic and refined, and where heaviness is associated with coarseness. 452 He identifies a binary between light and heavy where lightness is privileged:

All the agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes, which receive the beginnings of objectification in the pairs of antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or objects in the most varied areas of practice. The network of oppositions between high (sublime, elevated, pure) and low (vulgar, low, modest), spiritual and material, fine (refined, elegant) and coarse (heavy, fat, crude, brutal), light (subtle, lively, sharp, adroit) and heavy (slow, thick, blunt, laborious, clumsy), free and forced, broad and narrow, or, in another dimension, between unique (rare, different, distinguished, exclusive, exceptional, singular, novel) and common (ordinary, banal, commonplace, trivial, routine), brilliant (intelligent) and dull (obscure, grey, mediocre) is the matrix of all the commonplaces which find such ready acceptance because behind them lies the whole social order. The network has its ultimate source in the opposition between the ‘élite’ of the dominant and the ‘mass’ of the dominated, a contingent, disorganized multiplicity, interchangeable and innumerable, existing only statistically. 453

In this network of oppositions, material possessions have a relationship where they can be contrasted in terms of light or heavy. In Bourdieu’s argument, lightness also implies such terms as ‘high’, as in elevated and sublime, and ‘brilliant’ as in intelligent or superior. The Palazzo Biscari ballroom’s glass and mirrors, intricate gilded wood and delicate stucco, and the silk costumes of the noble guests, are materials of distinction.

This aristocratic lightness is implicit in the delicate, flickering shapes and intricate silhouettes of the Palazzo Biscari ballroom decoration. In the ballroom there is delicacy in the brittle ceiling stucco (figs.103 and 105). The lower parts of the walls are painted to look like swirling marble. Above the trompe l’oeil marble there are panels of painted birds and flowers that suggest silk painting or embroidery (fig. 107). The combination of birds and flowers also resonates with the eighteenth-century fashion for chinoiserie. The birds themselves are light, and with their delicate wings they can ascend to the sky.
The ballroom, with its decoration evoking lightness and refinement, is the largest room in the Palazzo Biscari. Francesco Milizia, in *Principii di architettura civile* (Venice, 1785), recommends that ballrooms should be the largest room in a palace. The room must have an elevated section for the orchestra. The best shape is circular, elliptical, or polygonal: “la sala di ballo vuole essere delle più spaziose con tribune elevate per le orchestra, e con delle scalinate intorno per maggior capacità degli spettatori. La sua forma più conveniente è la circolare, o l’ellittica, o la poligona.”

The Palazzo Biscari ballroom anticipates Milizia’s recommendations. Built by Francesco Battaglia between 1769 and 1773 as part of the palace’s expansion to the east commissioned by Ignazio Paternò Castello, it is rectangular with rounded corners at the east end and hexagonal corners at the west, but with an overall oval effect in its ground plan. Doors give access to the private sections of the palace (fig. 103). Along the north side, doors open onto a gallery, which in turn leads to the sea-facing balcony. Above the tiled floor, in the centre of the elaborate ceiling decoration, there is an oval gallery and above this a cupola with lantern windows and a painted ceiling (fig. 104).

Milizia advises that ballrooms be decorated with crystal glass mirrors and marble. A ballroom is therefore a site for the most lavish decoration. The mirrors and lamps should be placed between the orders of architecture made from the most beautiful marble. Milizia argues that once the mirrors, lamps and marble orders are in place, a further benefit is that the ballroom will be suitable for all events, with no need for additional decoration.

The fact that the ballroom was completed in time for the marriage celebration in 1772 of Ignazio Paternò Castello’s heir Vincenzo, attests to its importance in assisting the family’s networks of power and social status in Catania. The ballroom was also the site for the presentation of the family heir. The western end incorporates an *alcove nobile* for the *letto di parata* or presentation bed that showed the mother and newborn baby (fig. 105). Portraits of the prince and princess of Biscari on either side of the alcove, and the family arms above, reinforce the alcove’s association with dynastic lineage. The ballroom, with its luxurious reflective decoration, was used for a variety of events, as Milizia recommends. It was chosen as the place for the public presentation of the birth of new princes of Biscari, and for their wedding celebrations and funerals.

The ballroom’s stucco and woodcarving are charged with fleeting, complexly outlined shapes that ripple across the surface or rise and fall like waves or music (figs 103-105). They have an unresolved quality. Ornament becomes energy. Unlike decoration made up of harmonies
of simpler geometric shapes, the exact form the wave and flame-like shapes will take is less predictable. Around the edges of the larger shapes there are always smaller versions, continually born from the larger ones, like fractal patterns. On this restless energy in eighteenth-century interior decoration, Mariana van Rensselaer, in an essay entitled Rococo from 1879, writes: “Not a straight line, not a regular edge, not a single repetition, not a particle of symmetry is allowed. Above all there is no rest, no base, no centre, no appearance of careful planning, of deliberate design: all is changeful, unpremeditated, liquid.”

In the ceiling decoration, attributed to Gioacchino Gianforma and Ignazio Mazzeo, the outlines of the lighter stucco decoration seem to burn at the edges, but the colour scheme resists any sense of heat (fig. 104). The restless lines suggest surging energy, but their white, blue and peach colours have a calming and cool effect. These pastel colours, like cake icing or sorbet, contrast with the heat and energy of the forms. The chromatic coolness in the middle of teeming ornamental energy creates some respite from the swirling, undulating decoration.

Antonio Pepe’s gilded wooden decoration gives great attention to detail around mirror and doors, particularly in carved and gilded wooden frames with layered cornices and small cartouche features (figs. 108 and 109). The forms around the mirrors and other edges are smaller versions of the ceiling’s wave-like energy. The energy writhes around the frames of the doors and mirrors but then dissipates into smaller and smaller fractal forms. There are delicate, irregular shapes that sometimes mutate away from flame-forms into shapes suggesting leaves or tendrils (fig. 109).

The two eastern corner alcoves contain portraits of Ignazio Paternò Castello and his wife Annamaria Morso (figs. 103 and 108). Gilded wooden cartouches swirl over, but do not completely cover, floral painted walls resembling wallpaper or bolts of silk cloth. The yellow background and blue and red of the flowers are a similar colour to the panels of the painted birds. This delicate yellow floral painting also backs the mirrors in the two western corners (fig. 109).

**Gold and Glass. Liquidity and Transformation.**

The ballroom’s refined materials of gold and glass are obtained through transformation. The materials are refined in two senses; refined because in their material circulation they are considered to be elevated, rare, precious and aristocratic, and refined in their complex
processes of manufacture that require transformation of the coarse, impure and heavy to arrive at the purified substance.

Gold is the material of noble distinction *par excellence*. In *Della Fisica Sotterranea* (Naples, 1730), Giacinto Gimma compares it to the sun. He associates it with purity and virtue:

> L’oro è detto sole da’ chimici, e si trova nelle miniere sotterranee, nel sabbione de’ fonti, e de’ fiumi, nelle arene, e nelle pietre. È vero metallo, perfettissimo: non si fa putrido, non si corrompe dal fuoco, non ha cosa bruciata, che da se mandar possa, come dice il Fallopio, né può essere offeso dalla ruggine. Fregato non lascia alcuna tintura negra, o gialla come fanno quasi tutti i metalli, il che afferma il Berenguccio; non ha odore, né sapore, né è velenoso mangiandone, come qualche altro; ma più tosto a vari mali è medicina; anzi per la sua gran perfezione e bellezza, è opinione universale, che in lui siano virtù giovevoli a gli uomini ecessive.  

For Gimma, gold is immaculate. It cannot rust or be stained. It is pure because its material qualities in the Aristotelian sense, such as odour or taste, are few. Its immaculate nature can be linked to the putatively perfect qualities of the aristocrat. Gimma describes gold as the “sun of the chemicals”, around which the other metals revolve like planets. It is like a king who bestows his sun-like warmth on his subjects who revolve around him. Gimma describes gold as possessing “virtù giovevoli” (jovial virtues). This relates it to Jove or Jupiter, king of the gods, as well as to ‘jovial’ in the sense of well-being and happiness.

Like mirrors, gold reflects chandeliers’ light. In her study of material effect in sixteenth-century French palaces, Rebecca Zorach describes the liquid quality of gold decoration and the way that it shimmers and reflects light: “Gold possesses not only liquidity but a kind of (false) liveliness or animation. Shine implies movement; gold threads in tapestry or clothing would have shimmered as they moved or caught the light of candles or torches, making inanimate objects appear animate.” The movement and reflections of shining materials such as gold gives a sense of movement like water or fire. The effects of gold surfaces also correspond to Bourdieu’s material binaries discussed earlier. Polished, light reflective surfaces, fleeting reflections and lightness are materials of distinction. They contrast with less refined coarse, dull and heavy materials.

Gold is not carved like wood or stone. Like glass, it can be melted and made into a liquid. It can be moulded and hammered. It can cover any surface. In the Palazzo Biscari ballroom, Antonio Pepe and his workshop carved the wooden door and mirror frames into intricate
patterns (figs. 108-110). The complexity of the three-dimensional forms of the carved wooden surfaces, the smoothness of their gold surfaces and the way the gold is now worn, suggests that the artists used a varnish made from powdered gold, rather than sheets of finely hammered gold leaf. 466

As with most prestigious materials in Sicily, gold was more precious because it was imported. Sicilian aristocrats greatly prized imported luxuries such as gold, silk and mirrors. In the 1770s, the decade the Palazzo Biscari ballroom was completed, the English visitor Henry Swinburne reports that luxury items were imported, often trans-shipped through Naples rather than directly from the producing country. Swinburne criticises the Sicilian aristocracy: “almost every article received into these kingdoms may more properly said to be called in by artificial wants and the caprices of luxury, than to supply the real call of necessity.” 467 Sicilian exports consist of “the raw unmanufactured produce of the soil”, principally grain.468

The Spanish Americas were Europe's main gold supplier. 469 Arcangelo Leanti, writing a decade or so before the building of the Palazzo Biscari ballroom, reports that although the Bourbon government had attempted to mine gold, silver, iron and tin in Sicily, the island still imported “tutte sorte di acciajo, ferro, stagno, rame e ottone, piombo, oro, ed argento lavorati, ed in massa da Svezia, e da altre parte settentrionali.” 470

Glass is another material of distinction in the Palazzo Biscari ballroom. Mirrors line the bays between the doors on the two long sides of the ballroom, and there are smaller mirrors at the ends of the room (fig 109). Glass was another luxurious foreign product that wealthy Sicilians imported. In 1761, Arcangelo Leanti reports that Sicily imported crystal glass from Venice and Bohemia.471 Venetian glass was still prized in Europe in the eighteenth century, but outside Italy it faced competition from England, France and Central Europe.472 Reino Liefkes describes a changing European preference for more robust looking glassware, but this is not the case in eighteenth-century Sicily. 473 The interior decoration of the Palazzo Biscari, and other Sicilian ballrooms such as the Palazzo Mirto and Palazzo Gangi in Palermo, continued to deploy complex shapes and delicate materials.

Glassmaking involves refining, purifying and clarifying. Silica and other granular materials become fused and transparent. It can be made into any shape and in any colour. It can be a flat mirror, its surface like a still lake. Alternatively it can take the rounded, tubular forms of glasses or chandeliers.474 It is precious because it is delicate and fragile. 475
Jean Hadicquer de Blancourt’s *Les Secrets de l’Art de la Verrerie* (Paris, 1697), translated into English as *The Art of Glass. Shewing how to make all sorts of glass, crystal and enamel* (London, 1699), categorises glass as a perfect metal. Like gold, it resists corrosion. It is created from silica and other elements that come from the earth, the place that also produces metals. Glass is moulded by fire, like metals. Only very powerful fire can destroy it:

> We have asserted in our book, that glass is a perfect metal, since it will bear the utmost force of its fire as well as gold: And that there is but one sort of fire, more puissant than the vulgar, that can consume it: but here we will take notice, that there are two ways to make glass, and that it may be made more or less fixed, which is the least beautiful and least transparent, resists everything: no preparation of mercury, nor any species of aquafortis, can dissolve it, nor the most subtle poisons, or highest corrosives, arrive any further than to break it. The less fixed, on the contrary, which is the most clear and transparent, as that of Venice, is less capable of resistance, being composed of a more purified salt.  

Hadicquer de Blancourt treats glass as a material with a noble essence. His writing has an alchemical quality. He asserts that liquid and volatile states allow transmutation: “It is not with common gross matters that philosophers work, nor can they bring anything to perfection, before they have converted their matters into fluid, volatile, and spiritual substances, such as they were before their coagulations.”  

In his description, glassmaking uses fire and liquid glass to liberate a fluid and volatile material from its coagulation as silica. He then presents glassmaking as a secret transmutation leading to a putatively higher form of matter:

> Glass has something in it so beautiful to the sight, and its transparency is so agreeable, that it is no wonder we find it by several, and even in the Holy Scripture itself, compared not only to gold, the most perfect of all metals, but also to things far more high and spiritual. They are mysteries of deeper consequences, than at first we imagine, since by them we are informed, that vitrification gives a better being, or nobler nature.

Although glass is forged in the heat of fire, the final product is clear and reflective like ice. Hadicquer de Blancourt makes this connection between glass and ice:

> The name of glass, which the French, Germans and English have given it, seems to be taken from its resembling or approaching somewhat in its colour to azure, or sky-colour. The word *glass*, also seems to be derived from its resemblance to ice (from glacies), while fire does much the same thing in glass, all the frost in the water: Thus all glass looks like frozen water.
Sparkling, reflective wall surfaces were once produced in palaces through colourful and intricately patterned tapestries of silk thread. Mirrors now replaced these shimmering surfaces. By the latter part of the seventeenth century, large mirrors replaced tapestries in palace corridors and expanses of wall. Jean Delumeau writes:

In the sixteenth century, both steel and glass mirrors were used. But glass triumphed in the seventeenth century, most notably at Versailles, where 306 panels gave the illusion of eighteen huge, solid mirrors. At the end of the century, two-thirds of Parisian households owned a mirror. In the eighteenth century, the object invaded household décor, encroaching on the domain of tapestries. 480

Innovations in glass technology allowed for mirrors such as those in the Palazzo Biscari that had a brighter, clearer reflective surface than the earlier mirrors made of polished sheets of metal or marble. In the fifteenth century, the Venetians developed cristallo, a clear and colourless glass. The technique uses a compound of silica and a very pure form of soda derived from distilled ashes of marine plants. In the sixteenth century, sheets of very thin tin or silver were fixed to the back of the glass using mercury. This process was known as ‘silvering’. 481 In the eighteenth century Giacinto Gimma describes the newer tin-backed mirrors as an “invenzione moderna.” 482

Large mirrors reproduce light in a way that the earlier tapestries do not. They multiply light from candles and chandeliers to create a much greater sense of clear, bright opulence. They reflect the spaces of the room and the dancers and their movements. Instead of the more static patterns of tapestries, mirrors allow for a continually shifting background of colours, lights, and flashing images.

Mirrors emphasise the people in the room as subjects who create the event, and as objects observed by themselves and others. As subjects, guests are visually presented to themselves. The fact that the guests create the ball is made overt. Mirrors realise and make public the desire to look at oneself, as well as the awareness that one is the object of others’ gaze. This self-regarding can be for monitoring appearance. In their reflections, the nobility could check that their postures and gestures were correct. They could see in the mirrors what others around them were doing. They could see how their dancing, and their appearance and movements, compared to those of others.

The historian Orlando Figes points out this connection between mirrors and aristocratic posture and gesture. Although Figes is discussing aristocratic entertainments in Russia, the
importance of mirrors in salons and ballrooms applies to Sicilian palaces such as the Palazzo Biscari. Figes points out how the mirrors of the ballroom allowed the nobility to monitor themselves:

Etiquette demanded that they hold themselves and act in the directed form: the way they walked and stood, the way they entered or left a room, the way they sat and held their hands, the way they smiled or nodded their heads – every pose and gesture was carefully scripted. Hence in the ballroom and reception hall the walls were lined with mirrors for the beau monde to observe their performance. 483

Hadicquer de Blancourt argues that this potential for self-evaluation and self-correction is a positive attribute of the mirror:

Among all the excellencies of the art, none comes near this, nothing can be finer, or admit of greater admiration, than to see that all of the actions of the beholder, are so justly and lively represented in these glasses, that he has an opportunity of discovering what is to be valued on him, and correcting what's amiss; these truths are too apparent for any to disprove; for the experience of them are at this day to be made as easily by the meanest as the greatest persons. 484

For Hadicquer de Blancourt, distinguished people should control the body and its presentation. The mirror can help a person decide which parts of their physical appearance to maintain and emphasise, and which to hide or modify. The great increase in availability of mirrors by the eighteenth century that Jean Delumeau refers to above, aids the nobility to practise dance steps or other aristocratic activities, such as fencing. In palace ballrooms such as the Palazzo Biscari, the mirror is both a material of refinement and distinction an instrument for monitoring and modifying one’s own body, and for observing the bodies of others.

The Volcanic Apotheosis of the House of Biscari.

The ballroom’s ceiling decoration evokes aristocratic distinction, ascent and lightness, but this is enmeshed within a brooding, volcanic landscape. The unpredictable power of nearby Mount Etna appears to both menace and sanction the power of the princes of Biscari. Ascending clouds, putti, smoke, armaments, the forge of Vulcan and the generative fertility of the Sicilian land combine in the apotheosis of the house of Biscari.
The decoration presents a series of ascending stages culminating in the Biscari arms rising to heaven (fig. 111). Most of the ceiling consists of the energized, wave-like stucco decoration discussed earlier (fig. 104). The ceiling’s centre, however, is broken by the oval cupola of the musicians’ gallery. Where the edges of the stucco decoration meet the cupola, white scrolls surge and break like sea foam. On the cupola, Sebastiano Lo Monaco’s fresco *Triumph of the Paternò family* includes armed figures, a cannon and pink and grey smoke billowing up behind the Biscari arms (fig. 111). The stucco and the cupola fresco give an effect of rising energy, warfare and Vulcan’s forge in the smoke and armaments of the fresco, and in the ornate iron railing around the opening that looks down to the ballroom.

The ascent from the ballroom floor to the painted Biscari arms in the fresco’s centre begins in the gallery connecting the ballroom to the outside terrace. A remarkable spiral staircase leads from the gallery up to the second floor (fig. 112). Musicians may have used this staircase, but the care spent on its decoration suggests that aristocratic guests might also use it to ascend to the cupola, as in the image discussed earlier of Ignazio Paternò Castello’s catafalque (fig. 102).

The blue and white eddies and swirls of the staircase’s stucco decoration resonate with the stucco of the ballroom ceiling. A person ascending this staircase seems borne aloft by foaming and churning waves or clouds. The decoration suggests waves which break against the underside of the staircase, but which cannot rise above the level of the stairs (fig. 112). Viewed closer, swirls take on the appearance of rosettes. Under the white wave-like forms, whose shapes echo the gilded cartouches in the ballroom, a gold lattice pattern grows small white flowers. This lattice follows the curve of the staircase, adding to the sense of spiralling movement (figs. 112 and 113).

White cartouche forms continue in the ceiling above the staircase, where they frame Sebastiano Lo Monaco’s fresco of the apotheosis of the Biscari crown. There is rising movement from the waves below the staircase up to the cartouches framing the fresco, and then to the fresco itself, where smoke and rising *putti* bear the princely crown aloft (fig. 114). At first glance, the *putti* appear to be on a cloud, but white smoke pours from a flaming urn they are carrying. Two of the *putti* rest on the smoke, carried upwards. Higher up, the smoke becomes black. The dark grey sky and distant red-tinged clouds are volcanic and menacing.

The *putti* carrying an urn heavenward suggest a funeral apotheosis, but the painting is unsettling. On the urn there is a small, demonic *mascherone*. The *putto* at the highest point looks up to heaven. Perhaps he is awakening from the drapery enveloping him, or he is
using the drapery to hide. No part of the sky is blue. Heavy and slowly swirling grey predominates.

Apotheosis and menace continue to combine in Lo Monaco’s fresco *Triumph of the Paternò family* in the cupola above the ballroom (figs. 111 and 114). In the centre, *putti* and a trumpeting angel carry the golden Paternò Castello arms up to heaven. Repeated Biscari arms and their crests of princely crowns ring the lower part of the fresco, framed with white cartouches (fig. 111). All of the ballroom and staircase’s rising energy leads to these crests. Above the crests, in the fresco’s painted sky, rising energy culminates in the clouds supporting the immortal figures that look down on anyone gazing up from the ballroom floor.

Vulcan, god of fire, forges and volcanoes, takes the prominent place of Zeus. Vulcan, his lameness shown by one leg that is a stump, rides the eagle associated with Zeus. His left hand holds a thunderbolt, crackling with the electrical energy suggested by the stucco and gilded door and mirror frames of the ballroom decoration discussed earlier. His right hand places the princely crown, earlier borne aloft by the *putti* in the painting above the staircase, onto the Biscari arms (figs. 113 and 114). Golden sprigs of wheat spring from the crown.

The Paternò Castello are subject to Vulcan. He places the crown giving the princely title onto the Paternò Castello arms. The Paternò Castello enjoy Vulcan’s benevolence, but the threatening sky and its billowing smoke suggest that they should not take it for granted. The fast rising smoke could be from a volcano, or from war. In the fresco’s lower part, *putti* point a cannon towards the sky (fig. 114). Many of the gods are armoured and holding spears. Others hold sprigs of wheat or plants. One could be Ceres, the fertility goddess associated with Sicily. Imagery of volcanoes, metalwork and warfare mingles with wheat and agricultural fertility.

Warfare and agriculture, in different ways, were sources of the Paternò Castello’s power. Warfare relates to the aristocracy’s original role as knights whose duty was to fight for the king. Decoration incorporating armour and military flags occupies the corners of the ceiling frescos in the palace’s two entrance salons, and in the alcoves and ceiling corners of the ballroom, maintaining the Paternò Castello’s symbolic status as knights. Golden wheat was central to eighteenth-century Sicily, with its economic reliance on grain exports. The golden wheat alludes to the produce of the agricultural fiefs that sustained the Paternò Castello economically.
The volcanic and fiery dominate the fresco. Near the canon a brooding Cyclops looks at the viewer. The Cyclops, and the pink and grey smoke behind him, locate the scene in the Catania area. Although in the Odyssey Homer does not name the island of the Cyclopes, later classical writers such as Thucydides and Euripides located Polyphemus’ cave on the slopes of Etna. Thucydides writes: “the earliest inhabitants spoken of in any part of the country are the Cyclopes and Laestrygones”, and Euripides’ play Cyclops is set on the slopes of Mount Etna. 488

Something of the fresco’s volatile imagery is found in the Canzone Recitata dal Signor Principe di Biscari, a poem Ignazio Paternò Castello composed in 1758 for the founding of the Accademia degli Etnei. 489 The opening lines evoke a ship at sea passing through peril, risking the wrath of Aeolus, Neptune and Mars:

Scioglie avaro nocchier le ardite vele, fida l’avide speme al mare, ai venti, e Nettuno disprezza, ed Eolo insieme; Finché l’onda è fedele co i passegger contenti di ricche merci ha speme; ma se si turba il mare, pallido il volto, fra mille rischi avvolto duolsi, si affanna, e geme; E crescendo il periglio, afflitto, e smorto si pente alfin di aver lasciato il porto. Per secondar talun l’innato sdegno d’irate Rè si fa ministro all’ira, Marte seguendo sanguinoso, e fero. 490

For the establishment of his academy, Ignazio Paternò Castello uses the metaphor of the ship embarking on a journey. The canzone evokes the imagery of waves and wind found in the surging clouds of the ballroom’s stucco decoration. The poem presents him as an Odysseus figure, challenging the unpredictable ire of Neptune and Mars, gods of sea and war. Ignazio Paternò Castello warns: “Mars remains bloody, and fierce.” Like the sense of threat that emanates from the ceiling fresco, the blood red fire of Mars or a volcanic sky overshadows the ascending energy of waves and clouds. The unsettling combination of ascent and volcanic threat in the ceiling fresco, and of storms and warfare in the poem, present Ignazio Paternò Castello as embarking on his projects and asserting his will regardless of hostile nature and fate.

Lightening the Aristocratic Body. “Dance which gives grace to the advantages we receive from nature”.

This section investigates the importance of dance for eighteenth-century aristocrats such as the Paternò Castello in maintaining aristocratic distinction. Dancing at balls made nobles perform before other members of the aristocracy. This public performance extended to the
highest social levels, including monarchs and their families. A painting attributed to Johann Weikert shows the young Marie Antoinette of Austria and her brother performing a public ballet (fig.115). The royal children have learnt a ballet and are performing it for the adults’ approval. Young women are on one side, young men on the other. All those present are under scrutiny. The children’s bodies appear stiff, mechanical. The boy’s posture is straighter, the limbs less bent. His face shows concentration. The children need to remember all of the dance movements. There is the sense of a desire not to make a mistake under the public gaze. There is display of learning, and perhaps fear of not being able to make the dance appear natural.

Dance was one of the skills that aristocrats learnt in order to produce noble status in a seemingly natural way. The Palazzo Biscari ballroom is necessary for this maintenance. Habitus is control of the body that is learnt.491 Dance is learnt through formal training, but habitus includes all physical postures, movements, tastes, habits and ways of classifying which are often acquired informally, and seemingly naturally. These ways of doing and categorising are often unquestioned, or decreed natural. They are powerful because they are unquestioned. They formulate such social categories as class and gender unconsciously.

Pierre Bourdieu defines habitus as:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.492

Habitus, as theorized by Bourdieu, is not an underlying, mechanical social driver. It comprises the many social behaviours that do not have overtly stated rules. It includes both an individual’s social practices and the way that individuals grade or calibrate their practices to the practices of others.493 These are behaviours which change and adapt, and which often seem so natural or self-evident as to be unworthy of discussion. The apparent naturalness of these social behaviours reinforces the apparent naturalness of such divisions as class and gender.494
The ballroom was central for the production and the performance of social distinction that was part of the work of aristocracy. On the centrality of balls and ballrooms in the social life of the Catanese nobility, the English traveller Thomas Wright Vaughan, in a letter written from the city in April 1810, notes the frequency of dances among the local aristocracy: “You would be much amused at the fancy dances which are frequent throughout Sicily, particularly at Catania: where the noblesse, who they calculate at three hundred, have a weekly ball, and, by constantly dancing together, have arrived at great perfection in the performance.”

Wright Vaughan’s description gives an idea of the size and frequency of the balls in Catania, but is condescending. He does not elaborate on why the reader would find the dances amusing, although “fancy dances” implies that he thought these events over-elaborate and showy. The nobles are “constantly dancing together”. Dancing is an entertainment, but is also crucially important. It is a performance that the nobles of Catania need to perfect. It is a way of producing a shared elite culture and social inclusion, and therefore by implication the exclusion of those who could not participate.

The importance of perfecting and displaying the ability to dance well is revealed in the postures of many eighteenth-century portraits depicting the subject’s feet in a dance position. In the Palazzo Biscari’s second salon, a full-length portrait shows Vincenzo Paternò Castello in a pose that echoes Hyacinthe Rigaud’s 1701 portrait of Louis XIV (figs. 116 and 117). In Rigaud’s painting, Louis is showing his dancing legs. His feet are in the fourth position of the five positions of French ballet. His left leg is forward, his right hand resting on a cane. His feet are pointed outward. He shows balance and poise. The cane and the high heels of his shoes reduce the amount of contact his body has with the ground, furthering the impression of lightness.

Vincenzo Paternò Castello is painted in a similar pose, in three-quarter profile, but the position is reversed compared to the Rigaud portrait. His right foot is forward. His right hand is on his hip, sweeping back his coat to show more of his legs, his left hand rests on a cane. His feet point outwards. Unlike the portrait of Louis XIV, Vincenzo Paternò Castello does not have a sword. The books and pen on the table, and the balcony and palace behind him, suggest the administrator and builder rather than the warrior.

Many eighteenth-century portraits show their sitters in one of the dance positions. Mickaël Bouffard discusses portraiture’s use of outward appearance, and in particular bodily posture, to show distinction and inner virtue. On turned out feet, Bouffard writes: “In daily life, a nimble body and good manners were among the most important guarantees of social
advancement. There can be no doubt that the outward turn of the feet was perceived as a sign of nobility. Conversely, feet kept parallel or turned inward conveyed grotesqueness or rusticity and, consequently, excluded an individual from the company of the elite.”

The outward turn of the feet, both in motion and at rest needed, showed training in dance, a requisite for noble status.

Chandra Mukerji reads the Rigaud portrait as showing the elegance and physical fitness of the ageing Louis XIV and his imposition of dancing upon the court:

The importance of ballet to this culture of the courtier under Louis XIV cannot be overestimated. The king appointed a court ballet-master to ensure that nobles had dancing lessons, and he elevated the dance as an art form by setting up an Academy of Dance. The results were palpable. Many of the prints depicting gentlemen of the period, whether they showed men standing in the garden or engaging in war, presented them in ballet positions with their toes pointed out and their hands held in a graceful line.

Dancing, along with other aristocratic activities such as riding and fencing, enabled and evidenced the nobility’s purportedly natural superiority and grace when performing these activities, and in their everyday posture and movement. Aristocratic men learnt dancing, riding and fencing within a system of bodily comportment that involved pointed toes, delicate balance, and self-conscious control of arms and hands. This body control aimed to produce lightness, adroitness, and fleeting, springing movements. Bodily lightness relates to Bourdieu’s distinction in lightness of materials discussed earlier. Refined materials imply that impurities have been removed, and desired properties accentuated. Refinement and lightness in bodily movement have the same implication. Dance training removes the heavier, baser traits of physical movement. It refines the actions of the aristocrat body.

Eighteenth-century dance manuals stress dance’s importance as an accomplishment that aristocrats must master. In Trattato del Ballo Nobile di Giambatista Dufort indirizzato all’eccellenza delle Signore Dame e de’Signori Cavalieri Napoletani (Naples, 1728), dance teacher Giambatista Dufort argues that the ability to dance well confers many benefits, including social distinction, admiration, moderation in bodily movement, and physical health:

Ed in vero non v’è in esse cosa più magnifica, e che dia maggior diletto, quanto le feste di ballo, nelle quali si fanno ammirare, e contraddistinguere, tra gli altri, coloro che sanno perfettamente la danza. Questo nobile esercizio, non essendo già violento, ma temperato,
According to Dufort, skill in the “noble pursuit” of dancing not only distinguishes the dancer from others, but is necessary for people of distinction. These two forms of distinction are mutually reinforcing. An aristocrat who is distinguished must be able to dance well, and the ability to dance well makes that aristocrat distinguished.

The Neapolitan dancer and dance master Gennaro Magri, in *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo* (Naples, 1779), also argues that dancing well is not only pleasurable, but endows grace and poise in many other aristocratic activities:

> Non il solo dilettevole, come altri credono, è l’oggetto di questa piacevole facoltà; ma l’utile, che si ricava da essa è più del dolce; a segno, che oso dire, rendersi in un cavaliere necessaria, ed importante. La maniera di presentarsi in una conversazione, il ricevere con garbo le persone in casa, il modo di contenersi in una adunanza, e distinguere con il salute, e con le riverenze le persone, son cose tutte, che si apprendono dalla danza.  

Whereas Dufort argues that the dancer will be distinguished from others while dancing at the ball, in Magri’s text the skills of dancing extend outwards to other aristocratic social necessities. Magri uses the verb “contenersi”, literally “to contain oneself”. This resonates with a part of Dufour’s treatise quoted earlier, where Dufour conceives of dance as “questo nobile esercizio, non essendo già violento, ma temperato.” In learning dance, the movements of the body must be moderated. The training of dance in moderating outward signs of emotion extends to social situations such as conversing or receiving guests. It contributes to the aristocracy’s presentation of themselves as superior to others because they appeared not to be controlled by their emotions.

Dance not only makes a person admired and distinguished, but also perfects the body. Pierre Rameau, dance master at the Spanish court and author of the dance manual *Le maître a danser* (Paris, 1725), emphasises how dance strengthens and reinforces natural physical grace, and masks imperfections of posture and movement:

> C’est la dance qui donne la grâce aux avantages que nous recevons de la nature, en régulant tous les mouvemens du corps, et l’affermissant dans ses justes positions: et si elle n’efface pas absolument les défauts que nous apportons en naissant, elle les adoucit, ou
les cache. Cette seule définition suffit pour en voir l'utilité, et pour exciter le désir de s'y rendre habile. 505

Dufort claims that dance perfects natural grace and hides defects. He argues that this makes dance the most noble of the three noble arts of dancing, riding and fencing:

Questa danza è uno de' tre nobili esercizi che s'insegnano in tutte l'accademie e collegi dell'Europa, i quali sono il cavalcare, la scherma, e la danza. De' quali quest'ultima perfeziona, e dà grazia alle persone ben fatte, ed all'incontro nasconde difetti di coloro, a' quali la natura è stata poco liberale de' doni suoi. Questo si è il più nobile, e leggiadro divertimento, così delle corti sovrane, che dell'altrè città cospicue. 506

Both Rameau and Dufort argue for dance training as an activity which not only gives pleasure, but which is also an implement that works with, and on, nature. Dance accentuates or reduces existing traits. Although it cannot create what is not originally present, or completely remove what nature determines, it can improve a person by aligning their appearance and outward behaviour more closely with aristocratic grace and self-control.

Gennaro Magri also argues that dance refines and perfects nature, but he reads dance less as a corrective than a return to a purportedly more original state: "Ne questo solo, ella dà pure alle membra una bella disposizione, qual dalla danza vien data al corpo nostro, sia il dotarlo di una nuova simmetria: ma solo rende più disposta, e ben messa quell'istessa, che dalla natura ebbe il corpo umano." 507

This claim presents dance not as a form of training towards new ways of controlling the body, but as a reverse training, a process of undoing the accretion of bad physical habits to reveal the body’s essential, divinely endowed symmetry. This symmetry is Platonic or Edenic, but becomes weakened or lost through wrong habit. Magri returns to pre-Edenic innocence and essence. Dance brings the dancers closer to humanity’s putative original and purer state. The physical grace and self-control associated with nobility, which dance perfects, is by implication part of humanity’s Edenic and putatively more perfect nature.

Dance in the staging of politically meaningful hierarchies.

This section addresses the relationship between aristocratic dance and the maintenance of political hierarchies. Dancing at balls, both with other aristocrats and for the ruler in allegorical court balls, was political. The ball was an instrument where courtiers showed
allegiance to their ruler. The ballroom was also a site for the enactment and assertion of
differences of gender and of social rank, of marriage arrangements and erotic encounters. As
will be seen, the protocol for entering and leaving the room, and for greeting others, varied
according to gender and to the hierarchy of aristocratic rank. Dance manuals including those
by Rameau and Magri, and etiquette manuals such as the Chevalier de Méré’s *Discours de
la Conversation* (Paris, 1677), laid out this protocol.  

For Louis XIV of France, dancing was serious. With his *Lettre patente du Roy pour
l’établissement de l’académie Royale de danse en la ville de Paris* of 1661, Louis
inaugurated the *Académie Royale de Danse*. The academy determined conventions of
dancing for French aristocrats. In the *Lettre patente*, Louis proclaims dancing as respectable
and necessary, essential for forming the aristocratic body:

Bien que l’Art de la Danse ait toujours esté reconnu l’un des plus honnestes et plus
nécessaires à former le corps, et luy donner les premières et plus naturelles dispositions à
toute sorte d’exercices, et entre autres à ceux des armes, et par conséquent l’un des plus
avantageux et plus utiles à notre Noblesse, et autres qui ont l’honneur de nous approcher,
non seulement en temps de guerre dans nos armées, mais mesme en temps de paix
dans le divertissement de nos Ballets: Néanmoins il s’est pendant les désordres et la
confusion des dernières guerres, introduit dans le dit Art, comme en tous les autres, un si
grand nombre d’abus capables de les porter à leur ruine irréparable, que plusieurs
personnes pour ignorans et inhabiles qu’ils ayent esté en cet Art de la Danse, se sont
ingérez de la monstre publiquement.

Louis combines dancing with the bearing of weapons, an essential aristocratic male right and
one where they had to show accomplishment both in military service and potentially in
duelling. In Rigaud’s portrait, Louis lifts his robe to display his dancing legs and the
conspicuous sword in its jewelled scabbard (fig. 117). The king dances, and is by implication
also able to fight with the sword. In his *Lettre patente*, aristocratic dancing and service to the
king in war reinforce each other. Louis’ message to the nobles is that their bodies will serve
him by fighting in his armies and by dancing at the balls that he provides. His new dance
academy will correct what he sees as defects in the aristocrats’ dancing. It will standardise
not only their dancing at balls but, as will be seen, many other aspects of how they behave in
public.

At a ball, dancers followed the systematised steps that dance masters showed in their
manuals and dance lessons. The dances subordinated the individual dancer into a larger
group where all the members followed prescribed and learnt movements. On choreography and the training of bodies, Mukerji writes:

The dancers or soldiers were not supposed to act as trained individuals, but formed members of a group that could act as a political force, whether showing grace in a public ballet or prowess in battle. They submitted themselves to common formations, ways of moving, and relations to one another. The dances and military formations depicted in books of the period, significantly enough, presented generic turns for dances, marching formations, ballet positions for the hands and feet, or ways of holding weapons. These strategies/choreographies ordered the bodies of aristocratic men into politically meaningful forms; these techniques yielded French aristocratic men who were visible and subservient members of court society and military life. 511

Mukerji emphasises the connection between dance and warfare implied in Rigaud’s portrait of Louis XIV, with the King’s dancing legs and sword. 512 Alain Mallet’s Les Travaux de Mars ou l’Art de la Guerre (Paris, 1684) brings out a shared concern with timing, rhythm, formation and footwork in both military manoeuvres and dancing. On drilling soldiers, Mallet observes that the new recruit must learn “tous les temps et mesures que l’on observe dans le régiment” (all of the timings and measurements that are observed in the regiment).

These measurements include always marching and turning with the left foot first, and keeping one foot of distance between the feet when marching. The soldier must always align his shoulders with the shoulders of the man to his left. When the battalion halts, he must use the front of his right foot to align himself with the feet of the soldier to his right. 513 Mallet gives other rules on the spaces between soldiers. When under cannon fire, the distance between ranks (rows) and files (columns) should be 6 feet. In infantry combat, this distance should be one and a half feet. 514

The imposition of geometric symmetry extends from the arrangements of large numbers of troops down to the movements of each individual. Mallet advises that the ranks and files must always be perfectly straight. This is so important that the commander must ensure very strict observance. A large number of sergeants should assist: “Une bataillon pour este bien dressé, doit avoir ses files parallèles entr’elles aussi bien que les rangs. C’est une chose que l’officier qui commande, doit estre fort soigneux de faire observer, aussi bien que de faire tenir les rangs et les files droites; à quoi servent beaucoup les sergents, qu’il fera tenir sur les ailes.” 515
In Mallet’s manual there is a concern with symmetry and with beauty. Mallet shows how battalions can change direction and form themselves into squares, rectangles, hexagons, octagons and crosses. The number of ranks and files changed according to numerical formula through *doublements*, or manoeuvres for doubling (fig. 118). Wherever possible, there should be an even number of ranks and files: “pour la facilité des évolutions et la beauté de l'exercice, il faut, ci cela ce peut, que les rangs et les files soient en nombre pair.”

One illustration shows a battalion of 10 ranks and 12 files (fig. 119). The ensign and officers are arranged in front, but the troops show repetition in their uniforms, spacing and postures. The individual becomes part of a greater unit. The soldiers' ordering, and the results of their training, are clearly visible. The implication is that an ordered entity is underlyingly more powerful that one which is less geometrically regular.

Geometry and measurement continue in military treaties into the eighteenth-century. Philippe-Henri de Grimoard's *Essai Théorique et Pratique sur les Batailles* (Paris, 1775) gives measurements for distances between squadrons in battle formation. Le Roy De Bosroger’s *Principes de L'art de la Guerre* (Paris, 1779), published in the same decade that the Palazzo Biscari ballroom was finished, shows the drills that all soldiers need to learn: “faire à droite, à gauche, former des rangs, les doubler, les dédoubler, observer les distances, s'aligner, marcher en avant, ou part quart de conversion, ce sont des mouvemens simples et purement mécaniques, aux quels chaque troupe doit être rompue.” In De Bosroger's words, soldiers need to be “broken in,” like animals for training. He describes their movements as mechanical, implying that after training, any soldier will perform them automatically.

Aristocrats commanded troops in war, and showed subservience to the ruler through dancing together at balls and also by dancing for the ruler in allegorical dances that assigned particular virtues to the ruler. Wendy Hilton writes:

Dance in the serious or noble style had two aspects for the French courtiers. They performed social dances in the ballroom, where it was usual for only one couple to dance at a time, and theatrical dances in court entertainments. In the latter the content of the dances approximated those composed for the ballroom, but the costumes were elaborate and symbolic of the dancers’ roles.

Sicilian aristocrats performed theatrical balls at the Viceroy’s court in Palermo. Pietro La Placa’s *Relazione delle pompe festive seguite in Palermo capital della Sicilia nella celebrità*
delle regie nozze di Carlo Borbone re di Sicilia e di Napoli, con Maria Amalia principessa di Polonia e di Sassonia (Palermo, 1736) describes the celebrations in Palermo for the wedding of Charles Bourbon and Maria Amelia of Saxony:

Godutesi intanto le armonie della detta serenata, fu coronata la festa con un ballo concertato, e altre vaghissime danze fatte dalle dame, e cavalieri, procurando ognuno di corteggiare con tripudio le comuni allegrezze alla presenza dell’Eccellentissimo Signor Viceré, che dava spirito col suo lieto, e generoso accoglimento al brio della nobiltà. 522

La Placa emphasises “comuni allegrezze” (communal happiness) and the viceroy’s generosity, but the entertainments also involved ordering and subservience. He describes how the dances were regimented. On day one of the celebrations there is a ball at the viceroy’s palace. It takes place in the hall where portraits of previous Sicilian kings and viceroys look down upon the guests (fig. 120). Four couples dance in a circle. The viceroy watches, seated on a large chair with his feet on a cushion. Behind the viceroy a line of women watch, and behind them a line of men. The viceroy is sitting further forward than the other spectators. None of the other chairs are in line with his. The seating appears to follow Rameau’s rules for the ceremonial at a royal ball. Bova’s engraving does not include the circle or oval of fixed wooden seats that Rameau prescribes, within which only high-ranking nobles are admitted, but it shows men seated behind women, as in Rameau’s treatise. 523

On the evening of the second day, there is another carefully staged dance (fig. 121). The nobles first listen to a serenata or choral work praising the royal couple, then aristocratic dancers perform a ball alluding to the royal wedding. In La Placa’s description, the dances alternate between those performed by women and those performed by men. Although there are dances in the ballroom, the nobles are also free to wander through parts of the palace, listening to choirs singing in different rooms:

Finita che fu di cantarsi la sovrapposta serenata, seguirono gli strumenti a dare spirito ad un ballo concertato fra quattro dame, e quattro cavalieri, allusivo alle regie nozze, nel mentreché dal choro delle voci ripetesi con ecco festiva il finale della serenata, sulla musica del quale erasi composta la modulazione del ballo: quindi infino alle sei della notte si trattenne la nobiltà, servita d’incessanti rinfreschi d’acque, e piramidi di ghiacci inzuccherati, in altre continue danze, alternate dalle dame, e cavalieri, ammirandosi per tutto il brio, la gala, ed il genio, con cui si festeggiava si bella solennità. Nell’altre stanze del palagio sparsi ancora stavano diversi chori di musica, che servivano al diletto di chi volea trattenervisi. 524
As in the decoration of the Palazzo Biscari ballroom, there is lightness and impermanence. La Placa emphasises the bright illumination and praises the vivacity, spectacle and ingenuity of the festivity (“il brio, la gala, ed il genio”). The spectacle, with all its preparation, is for a short time only. Decorations such as the large portraits of the royal couple on the canopy-like apparatus on the left of figure 120, the portraits on the wall on the right of figure 121, the specially-prepared allegory of the concert ball with its dances and music, even the ice in the pyramids of sorbet-like dessert that the nobles eat, are all ephemeral.

This apparent lightness, and the festivity’s floating, ephemeral nature with its decorations, refreshments and choirs echoing from different rooms, intertwines with the seriousness of political and social hierarchies. One hierarchy involves gender. The treatises inscribe gender difference within the differences of social hierarchy. Illustrations of the dance positions in the treatises mainly show men. For example, of the 44 images of the dance positions in Rameau’s *Le maître a danser*, 3 show women dancing with men and only 4 show women alone. Rameau uses male figures to illustrate movements that both sexes will follow, such as the five foot positions. The long skirts women wore mean that male figures show the leg positions more clearly, but overall there are more movements for men, such as how to take off a hat or present the hand for dancing, than there are for women.

The dance manuals inscribe gender difference in the etiquette and movements of the ball. Gennaro Magri advises on how men and women should enter a ball or “conversazione”. Men must enter the room holding their hat in the left hand. The right hand will be to shake a man’s hand, or to hold a woman’s hand to kiss. When a gentleman is three steps away from someone he wants to bow to, he puts his right foot forward and starts to bow, moving the left foot level with the right as he continues the bow. The depth of the bow depends on whom he is saluting.

The section of Rameau’s *Le maître a danser* entitled *De la manière d’ôter son chapeau et de le remettre* (“On the manner of taking off one’s hat and putting it back on”) exemplifies this attention to precise detail. Rameau includes a diagram showing the head and arm positions. He marks a line to show how the hand and hat should move (fig.122):

Le corps étant posé suivant les règles ci-devant prescrites, si vous voulez saluer quelqu’un, il faut lever le bras droit à l’hauteur de l’épaule, comme le représente cette première Figure 1. Ayant la main ouverte 2. Puis plier le coude pour prendre votre chapeau qui fait un demi cercle, suivant ces mots, ply du coude, qui prend son point du coude même.
The performance of aristocratic distinction by men involves movements that are controlled and martial. The movements’ mechanical stiffness, with measurements such as lifting the right arm first to the level of the shoulder, suggests the military drills discussed earlier. The man removes the hat with the right hand, the same one he uses for the sword.

When a woman enters a room, Gennaro Magri advises that she should have her hands crossed above the waist, with the right hand on top. If she is carrying a fan, she should hold it between her index and middle finger. When she is one foot away from a person she wants to greet, she should move her left foot back and curtsy, bending the knees but always keeping the back straight.  

Rameau’s *Le Maître a Danser* includes a chapter entitled *De la manière dont les demoiselles doivent marcher, et celle de se bien présenter.* (On the manner in which young women should walk, and how to present themselves well). He advises that when walking a woman “aura la tête droite, les épaules basses, et les bras retirez en arrière accompagnant bien le corps, mais plie, et tenant ses mains devant soi l’une dessus l’autre avec un éventail à la main, mais sur tout sans affectation.” (Fig. 123).  

Rameau recommends that young women practice these movements in a mirror. It does not come easily, but needs practice. It must be carried out “above all without affectation”. The gender-specific ways of moving must appear natural rather than artificial. Along with the movements for men to remove their hats, and the other movements in the dance treatises, this is part of what Judith Butler calls “the gendered stylization of the body”. Butler argues that there is no “internal essence” of gender. Instead, it is produced: “The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body.”  

Rameau warns of the consequences of not maintaining the posture he describes. If the woman keeps her head and body straight, without affectation, she will be seen as a “Demoiselle d’un grand air”. If she moves her head “negligently”, she will appear nonchalant. If her head is forward she will seem indolent, if lowered, introspective or disreputable. Maintenance of the prescribed posture therefore enacts the purportedly natural qualities associated with that gender and class.

In his instructions on women’s posture, Rameau focuses on nonchalance, indolence and introspection as negative qualities in young women. These qualities involve disassociation from expectations around aristocratic social interaction. In Rameau’s description, moving the head nonchalantly implies informality or lack of respect to others, as head movements are
not controlled. Holding the head forward, Rameau’s “indolent” posture, can imply laziness, whereas holding the head back and up makes a person appear more alert. Appearing introspective implies disassociation from social expectations, as the introspective person will not be focussed on interacting with others at balls and other social events. By following Rameau’s prescribed movements instead, the young woman will appear aristocratic (“d’un grand air”).

Dance therefore not only distinguished aristocrats from others, but was also implicated in political hierarchies of rank and gender among aristocrats. Aristocrats performed for the ruler by dancing in allegorical balls at which the audience were seated according to divisions of social rank and gender. Allegorical balls, and balls where aristocrats danced with each other, were mechanisms where the nobility outwardly subordinated their individuality to the prescribed, and standardised, movements of dance, posture greeting and leave taking that operated as soon as they entered the palace where the ball was held.

“The Languid Eye.” Controlling the Emotions.

Control of the body includes control of emotions. In his treatise on social interaction Discours de la Conversation (Paris, 1677), the Chevalier de Méré gives advice to an imaginary or undisclosed female reader on how to converse. He advises that the voice should be controlled. Strong emotion and loud laughter is to be avoided:

Il faut que les mouvements de l’ame soient modérez dans la conversation; et comme on fait bien d’éloigner le plus qu’on peut tout ce qui la rend triste et sombre, il me semble aussi que le rire excessif y fied mal; et que dans la plûpart des entretiens on ne doit élever ni abaisser la voix que dans une certaine médiocrité qui dépend du sujet et des circonstances. La plaisanterie est forte à la mode; mais on s’épuise à rire comme à dire des choses plaisantes. 535

The Chevalier de Méré does not explain his recommendation that the voice and the display of emotions be controlled. On the perception of emotions, Juergen Schlaeger argues that control of certain emotions was becoming less valued throughout Europe in the latter part of the eighteenth century, in favour of notions of sincerity and authenticity of feeling. 536 They were still seen as threatening however, because they were believed to be opposed to the action of reason:
[Emotions] were perceived as part of the animal i.e. lower side of human nature and as such as shapeless and unwieldy, as disruptive of rational thought, obstructive to moral conduct, as difficult to investigate and hard to control. Their relationship with representation was, therefore, if it was at all admitted, highly regulated. Elaborate systems of mental and perceptual discipline and the regulation of the emotional aspect of verbal expression in rhetoric were to guarantee that emotions remained subservient and secondary to reason, that the dominance of mind over body was preserved. 537

Certain body parts, particularly the face, eyes, and movements of the hands, show emotions easily when uncontrolled. Gennaro Magri describes how these body parts must appear when dancing the minuet: “Il minueto ha bisogna di una maestria nascosta, la quale corrisponda alla grazia, che in esso ricercasi per fare una buona comparsa. Vuol egli l’occhio languido, la bocca ridente, la vita fastosa, le mani innocenti, i piedi ambiziosi” (The minuet needs a hidden mastery, which corresponds to grace that must be studied to give a good appearance. It needs the languid eye, laughing mouth, luxurious lifestyle, innocent hands and ambitious feet). 538

Magri argues that the “languid eye” shows humility. It also presents a certain form of diffidence, signalling that dancers have no amorous intentions towards their dance partner:

L’occhio languido dimostra l’umiltà, che devesi nel minuetto conservare; poiché se troppo si tengono fussi all’oggetto, che seco ballo par che sia fuor di se per la tanta applicazione, se siano alquanto redenti potrebbe cadere il sospetto d’esservi tra’ ballanti qualche segreta intelligenza amorosa, tenerli melanconici sarebbe contro la natura della danza: sicché convien tenerli tra il languido, in cui sospetto alcuno non può cadere. 539

The dancer must therefore consider even the emotional state that the eyes might convey. The “languid eye” diffuses the potentially erotic energy that could exist between couples dancing together.

The facial expression should be bland, masking emotion and thoughts. The ostensible equanimity towards all dance partners that the face presents makes the apparently pleasurable activity of dancing regimented. In Magri’s treatise, individual emotion must be subordinated to the mechanisms of the ball.

Magri goes on to describe how the dancer should control the hands:
Le mani innocenti, con li quali si mostra la semplicità della danza, proveniente della natura istessa: ma questo lor comportamento naturale deve essere accompagnato da un moto, che sebbene sarà artificioso, deve esser tale l’artificio, che paja naturale, e resta mista, e confusa la natura con l’arte.\textsuperscript{540}

The mouth should form a laughing gesture to show the joy of dancing. “Innocent” hands show the natural simplicity of the dance. The movement of the hands is to be of an artificiality that appears natural, so that “nature is mixed and fused with art.” A “maestria nascosta” (hidden mastery) will control the body.

A detail of Antoine-Jean Duclos’ engraving of Le Bal Paré. The Evening dress ball at the House of Monsieur Villemorien Fila discussed earlier, gives a sense of the “hidden mastery” that Magri recommends (fig. 124). The dancers movements also convey adroit, fleeting lightness; Bourdieu’s “subtle, lively, sharp and adroit” qualities against the laborious and clumsy, discussed earlier.\textsuperscript{541} In the engraving, the men’s legs, with the right leg raised and the foot slightly back, and the body lifted on the ball of the left foot, show the dance’s light, springing quality. On the right of the picture, the woman’s left foot points lightly forward from under her dress. The feet never completely rest on the floor. Contact with the ground is minimal. The dancers circulate in constant motion like the reflections of their silk costumes and the mirrors and chandeliers behind them.

Despite the complicated foot positions, the twists of the body, the changing, intertwining of hands and arms, and the movement around the ballroom in time to the music, the faces of the dancers show calm pleasure. Their mouths are partly smiling, as Magri prescribes. They maintain eye contact, showing concentration on and interest in their partner, but the eyes are languid. The uniform, unchanging facial expressions signal bland pleasure in the dance, absence of real emotion, and therefore control of the emotions.

On this masking of emotions, Eric Mckee refers to complaisance, a sense of confident ease:

Thus, according to eighteenth-century commentators on the dance, the two most important aesthetic attributes of the minuet are natural grace and noble simplicity. These two qualities were joined together in a physical and mental attitude of self-assured nonchalance – what was often referred to in dancing manuals as ‘complaisance’.\textsuperscript{542}

To demonstrate complaisance, dancers worked towards what McKee describes as “floating weightlessness”: “Complaisance in the physical realm is characterised by suave and relaxed
body motions, the look of floating weightlessness, and controlled vitality. Dancing masters sharply criticized any signs of exuberance, excess of body motions, gestures of strength and shows of virtuosity. “Aristocratic dancing was expected to evoke lightness and ascension, as against the heaviness and solidity that Bourdieu posits as opposite, but lightness and verve was to be underpinned by self-control. The complaisant dancer needed to perform the dance steps with practised ease. Displaying too much virtuosity or exertion could undermine the idea of aristocratic distinction as natural, the idea that the dancer was simply born to this practised ease.

**Ordering the ballroom. The *Maestro di Ballo*.**

An engraving of 1745 by Jacques-Philippe Les Bas shows the *maestro di ballo* in the process of instructing a young girl (fig. 125). The master’s head is straight. He points his right foot forward in the dance position he will demonstrate. His left hand holds the *pochette*, a small violin-like instrument used to mark the tempo and the melody of the dance that the students practised to. His right hand holds the bow of the *pochette* and holds open part of his coat tails in an elegant, mannered gesture. The little girl holds out the sides of her skirt, ready to begin the dance. Her face concentrates on the maestro’s gestures.

As in the painting of Marie Antoinette and her brother Ferdinand dancing for the court (fig. 115), learning to dance was serious. To train young aristocrats in the important skill of dancing, Gennaro Magri advises that a noble family employ a *maestro di ballo*, or specialised dance master. A *maestro di ballo* taught dance and sometimes organised the music and sequence of dances for the balls. During a ball, the *maestro di ballo* directed the guests and musicians, deciding the dancers’ starting places and ensuring that the ball followed a progression of different dances. Magri gives this role emphasis, devoting a chapter of his treatise to the dance master’s duties.

At the Palazzo Biscari, the *maestro di ballo* was the highest paid teacher. His salary was slightly lower than those of the *maestro di cappella* (chapel master) and the *maestro di casa* (housekeeper), but higher than the *maestro di scherma* (fencing master), *maestro di violino* (violin master) and *maestro di scuola* (schoolmaster). In the ledgers of 1780-1785, the *maestro di ballo* receives 24 *tari* per month. This is a little less than the 30 *tari* paid to the *maestro di cappella* and the *maestro di casa*. The violin teacher receives 15 *tari*. The schoolmaster and the fencing master both receive 12 *tari*. 
The emphasis on correct positioning of the feet seen in aristocratic portraits including those of Louis XIV and Vincenzo Paternò Castello was central to dance training. The importance of making these movements appear natural is shown by the *Tourne Pieds*, a machine for turning the feet outwards that the French dance master Nicolas Mereau proposed in his education manual *Réflexions sur le Maintien et sur les Moyens d'en Corriger les Défauts* (Gotha, 1760) (fig. 126). Mereau defines “maintien” as “everything concerning the composure of the body and the movements derived from its different parts”. He argues that it is essential in children’s education:

Le terme de maintien, relativement à l’art de la danse, embrasse tout ce qui concerne la contenance du corps et les mouvements qui se fond dans ses différentes parties. C’est un point essential, que les personnes chargées de l’éducation de la jeunesse ne doivent jamais perdre de vue.

In order to achieve the desired aristocratic bodily composure, Mereau’s machine slowly trained the feet into the out turned positions needed to perform the five dance positions of the dance manuals. He does concede that the parents or educators should only use his machine as a last resort. It should be used for training young people aged 11 to 13 years. It should not be used at a younger age, as it could damage a young child’s feet. He suggests that the training last “a good half hour” every day, and that the machine can be used whilst the young people are engaged in activities such as reading or writing.

The *maestro di ballo* was also an expert on manners and etiquette. In his discussion of the five foot positions and the dance master’s importance, Mickaël Bouffard writes:

Because he was considered an expert in the body and how to control or move it gracefully, the dancing master was held up as an authority on all things having to do with presenting oneself, even outside the context of a ball. Therefore, we should not be surprised to read in the article on ‘Manners’ in Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* that ‘our dancing masters are professors of manners’.

His job of training young aristocrats in manners and bodily “maintien”, and directing the nobles in dance, makes the *maestro di ballo* an ambiguous figure. He is not of noble birth, and yet his knowledge is necessary to train nobles in purportedly natural aristocratic posture and body movements. Where the *maestro di ballo* is directing nobles in a ball, Magri warns of the potential problems that could arise from this very public reversal of status. Controlling and ordering the aristocrats, if done by a commoner, needs to be exercised carefully. There
is the risk of causing affront and going against the rules of social hierarchy if a Maestro di Ballo gives explicit orders to an aristocrat. Magri advises the dance master to play a lesser role in a ball for aristocrats. Additionally, he argues that nobles will already know how to arrange themselves for the dances:

Essendo però festa di ballo di dame, e cavaliere, ed ancorché in maschere, allora non si obbliga il maestro di ballo a disponere le piazze, a dirigere il buon regolamento. Primieramente, che di ciò non vi sarà da bisogno perché tutta gente nobile sa il dover di regolarsi: secondariamente, che prendendo il maestro di ballo questa ispezione, puole incorrere a qualche affronto. 553

During an aristocratic ball, Magri advises that instead of a maestro di ballo there will be cavalieri direttori, gentlemen chosen by the host to oversee the festivities or to assist the maestro di ballo in arranging the guests into the lines and starting places for each dance. In this case the aristocrats were seen to order themselves. Someone of lower social rank could not publicly subject them to the procedures of dance too overtly.

In addition to directing the balls, or arranging music and dance for the cavalieri direttori to direct, the maestro di ballo was expected to teach the dances that were fashionable. The two most popular dances in eighteenth-century Italy were the minuet and the Contraddanze (contredance). The minuet originated in the seventeenth century and was popular throughout the eighteenth century. 554 Usually only two people danced it, with the other guests watching. 555 The presence of only two dancers made it easier for the viewers to appreciate and appraise the elaborate movements the dancers as they moved across the ballroom. 556

In order to perform the dance, the two dancers first bowed or curtseyed to the person presiding over the ball. Then they moved away from each other through the minuet steps until they were at diagonally opposite corners. After this, they moved in opposite directions back across the room to finish in opposite corners again, following an imaginary line that was often in the form of a Z. After a certain number of repetitions, the dancers joined their right hands when they passed in the middle of the room. After more repetitions they joined the left hands and turned a circle before continuing to their respective corners. The dance ended with the dancers passing in the middle, joining right and left hands and making several circles. 557

Small, delicate steps that the dancers made while following a fixed route across the floor characterized the minuet. The steps’ many possible variations contributed to the dance’s
popularity. Meredith Ellis Little writes: “The attention of both dancers and spectators was directed to the seemingly effortless performance of minuet step-units, each consisting of four tiny steps in 6/4 time set in counter rhythm to two bars of music in 3/4 and, secondarily, to the movement of the dancers in prescribed floor patterns.” The feet of the dancers therefore moved in double time, and counter to, the musical tempo. The step units of four small steps began with the right foot and ended with a step where the dancer rested on the ball of the foot.

On the need for the minuet to appear natural, Wendy Hilton writes: “In upper-class society, learning the minuet was considered to be essential. Its study enabled young persons to develop the impressive yet unostentatious air which would distinguish them in society. No action in everyday formal life was left to chance, yet the ultimate aim was to appear supremely natural”. Hilton also observes the way that the dance emphasised social hierarchy: “The minuet was an epitome of the aristocratic danse à deux, designed to be performed by one couple at a time in order of social precedence.” The dance combined springing lightness and apparently natural ease with social order.

Contredance, derived from English country dancing, sometimes employed the same steps as the minuet. Contredance increased in popularity in France and Italy during the eighteenth century. In Magri’s treatise, 38 of the 92 pages in volume 2 are devoted to contredance, while 20 are on minuets. Magri notes contredance’s popularity with the Neapolitan aristocracy, where it was danced at the court of Ferdinand IV in Naples: “Nelle feste de’ felicissimi parti della nostra clementissima sovrana, mio è stato l’onore di dirigere ed inventare le contraddanze.” Magri’s treatise includes steps and diagrams for performing 39 different variations. He promises that each year he will bring out a new volume of more contredance.

After contredance was introduced to the French court in the 1680s, Freda Burford and Anne Daye note its novelty and popularity with young people: “its gaiety and the novelty of its democratically progressive pattern appealed to the younger generation, so that French dancing masters were soon composing dances in the English style.” Contredance permitted more freedom and flexibility in dance steps. In contrast to the minuet, the contredance steps are not necessarily fixed. Magri explains that in dances for a prescribed number of dancers, certain steps are “obbligati” (obligatory). In dances for an indeterminate number, the dancers move in a pattern, but the precise foot movements were not prescribed.
Contredance allowed some increased flexibility in dance steps, and much greater variety of partners than the minuet. Unlike the minuet’s mirrored movements, where male and female dancers faced each other, in contredance the dancers circle round each other, holding hands and then twisting away into the orbit of the next partner. The varied partners, holding of hands and linking of arms permitted more interaction between different dancers, and is potentially more flirtatious.

Contredances could also accommodate an unspecified number of people. In contrast to minuets, where the majority of the guests watched, contredance allowed all guests to participate together in a dance. The potential erotic energy generated by the greater variety and faster changes of dance partner, and the fact that more guests were participating in the dance rather than observing the dancers, may be one reason for these dances’ popularity.

Dance treatises often include detailed descriptions and elaborate diagrams for these dances. These diagrams show the ballroom in plan view, and use a system of notation showing the movements of the feet, head and arms as the dancers move across the ballroom. Geometric order can be read into the contredance diagrams in Gennaro Magri’s treatise (figs. 127-128). Figure 127 shows how 4 couples change partners during a particular dance. Magri’s illustration highlights these movements’ complicated symmetry. Although the dances unfold over time and move through the ballroom space, the diagrams present an underlying plan and order that produces ideal, because symmetrical, shapes.

Figure 128 presents combinations for contredance accommodating large numbers of dancers. Again, the diagram shows geometrical planning underpinning the fleeting mutations of the dance that the viewer in the ballroom sees. The dance master has the overall sense of order and direction. The diagrams present dance as the operation of a system which substitutes people and their bodies for symbols suggesting musical or mathematical notation.

An analogous combination of springing dance steps underpinned by precise body movements and symmetrical geometry can be seen in the diagrams in Rameau’s Abbrégé de la Nouvelle Méthode (Paris, 1725) Rameau includes 8 different diagrams showing steps to a piece of music entitled La Mariée de Rolant (fig.129). In his notation, the half circle with the single bar shows the beginning point for the man’s steps, the double bar for the woman’s. The steps for the man are on the left, those for the woman on the right. The dancers begin from the bottom of the page. Although the man and woman’s movements are almost
identical, small variations in the symbols, for example at the very beginning of the dance, show differences in hand or foot movements.

Rameau’s diagram makes the dance a trace of the dancers’ route as they move across the ballroom. In figure 129 the notations suggest musical notes, but there is a springing elegance and calligraphic flourish to the curves. The swirls are held in place however, by the underlying straight line, which keeps them within geometric order. This resonates with decoration such as the Palazzo Biscari ballroom, where swirling movements insinuate around door and mirror frames. In the diagrams and in the ballroom decoration, curving, jumping forms suggest lightness and sparkling energy. The springing, energetic ballroom decoration, with its flourishes and elaborate outlines, accords with the springing lightness that the aristocratic dancers aspired to.

Conclusion.

This chapter shows why the ballroom was such an important part of the Palazzo Biscari. Instead of seeing the ballroom and its decoration as simply an example of conspicuous consumption, I have investigated the specific effects the decoration creates. I showed how lightness and the refined, in many different ways, were central to aristocratic distinction. Refined materials of gold and glass decorate the ballroom. Swirling stucco decoration produces ascent and lightness. Ascending layers of decoration culminate in the fresco in the ballroom ceiling. Although partially overshadowed by menacing references to nearby Mount Etna, the Biscari arms, carried by putti and crowned by Vulcan, rise to heaven.

The chapter also investigated dance, manners and the shaping of the body to show that architecture, through the ballroom, contributed to the training and display of aristocratic bodies. The Palazzo Biscari ballroom was more than a place for entertainment. The ballroom enabled the performance of behaviours that were learnt, but where the purportedly natural on one hand, and the mannered and artificial on the other, were interwoven. Through dance manuals, practice, and the employment of dance masters, the Sicilian aristocracy trained their bodies in movements that produced springing lightness, and which masked emotion through cultivating languid nonchalance.

Above all, the ballroom is central to the bodily training, and that training’s performance, necessary for an aristocrat. The nobility needed to show that they were born to their status. Their privileges were justified by discourses that assume the existence of a superior grace. Certain forms of dress, apparent habit, speech, movement were presented and maintained
as superior to others. Like the economic and political power they held, training made these habits appear as the nobility’s natural birthright.
Illustrations for Chapter Four.

Fig. 97. The ballroom of the Palazzo Biscari. Completed 1772.
Fig. 98. Abbé Jean-Claude Saint Non, *Vue générale de la ville et du port de Catanne* from *Voyage Pittoresque ou Description des Royaumes de Naples et de Sicile*. Engraving from Volume 4, Plate 58. (Paris, 1785). (Image from Giuffrè, 2007:161).
Fig. 99. The Palazzo Biscari entrance hall and paintings of the family fiefs.
Fig. 100. The first salon of the Palazzo Biscari. The first of the two salons between the entrance hall and the ballroom.
Fig. 101. Antonio Zacco. The funeral of Ignazio Paternò Castello. c.1786. Engraving. Private Collection. (Image from Iachello, ed. 2010: 22).
Fig. 102. The catafalque of Ignazio Paternò Castello in the Palazzo Biscari ballroom. c.1786. Engraving. Private Collection. (Image from Boscarino, 1997: 235).
Fig. 103. Eastern side of the ballroom. Palazzo Biscari.
Fig. 104. Ceiling of the Palazzo Biscari ballroom. Fresco painting by Sebastiano Lo Monaco and stucco attributed to Gioacchino Gianforma and Ignazio Mazzeo. (Image from Zalapi, 2004: 187).
Fig. 105. East side of the Palazzo Biscari ballroom. The alcove for the *letto di parata* or presentation bed.
Fig. 107. Palazzo Biscari ballroom. Painted bird panel and *trompe l'oeil* marble.
Fig. 108. Detail of the southeast alcove of the ballroom.
Fig. 109. Mirror in the Palazzo Biscari ballroom.
Fig. 110. Gold frames, mirrors and glass. Refined, light-reflecting materials in the Palazzo Biscari ballroom.
Fig. 111. Sebastiano Monaco. *Triumph of the Paternò family*. 1770s. Fresco.
Fig. 112. Palazzo Biscari ballroom. Staircase to the second floor. The door leads to a study with flooring from a Roman bath.
Fig.113. Staircase to the second floor with ceiling fresco by Sebastiano Lo Monaco. The Palazzo Biscari ballroom.
Fig. 114. Sebastiano Monaco. Detail of *Triumph of the Paternò family.*
Fig. 115. Attributed to Johann Georg Weikert. Marie Antoinette and her brother Ferdinand dancing the ballet *Le Triomph de l’Amour* at Schoenbrunn Palace, 24th January 1765. 1765. Schoenbrunn Palace. (Image from wikimedia).
Fig. 116. Portrait of Vincenzo Paternò Castello in the second salon of the Palazzo Biscari. Artist and date unknown.
Fig. 117. Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Louis XIV of France*. 1701. (Image from college.columbia.edu/core/content/portrait-louis-xvi-france-hyacinthe-rigaud-170).
Fig. 121. Francesco Cichè. Apparato del salone della corte senatoria. Engraving in Pietro La Placa. Relazione delle pompe festive seguite in Palermo capital della Sicilia nella celebrità delle regie nozze di Carlo Borbone re di Sicilia e di Napoli, con Maria Amalia principessa di Polonia e di Sassonia (Palermo, 1736). Image between pages 68 and 69.
Fig. 122. Pierre Rameau. First and second positions for greeting by removing the hat in *Le Maître à Danser* (Paris, 1725). Figs referring to pages 24 and 25.
Fig. 123. Pierre Rameau. Posture of a Woman when Walking from *Le Maître a Danser* (Paris, 1725). Fig referring to page 41.
Fig. 124. Detail of Antoine-Jean Duclos, *Le Bal Paré. The Evening dress ball at the House of Monsieur Villemorien Fila.*
Fig. 126. Nicolas Mereau. The *Tourne-Pieds*, a mechanism for training the feet in *Réflexions sur le Maintien et sur les Moyens d’en Corriger les Défauts* (Gotha, 1760): Illustration following page 126.
Fig. 127. Gennaro Magri *Trattato teorico di ballo* (Naples, 1779). Plate XIII. (Image from memory.loc.gov).
Fig. 128. Gennaro Magri. *Trattato teorico di ballo* (Naples, 1779). Plate XXXIX (Image from memory.loc.gov).
Fig. 129. Pierre Rameau. Music and dance steps for *La Mariée de Rolant* in *Abbrégé de la Nouvelle Méthode* (Paris, 1725): Part II. Plate 10. (Image from danceinhistory.com/tag/pierre-rameau/)
Conclusion. Architecture and the Naturalisation of Power.

This dissertation has adopted a materialist approach to engage with the complexity of the Val di Noto rebuilding. I questioned arguments that the towns are principally exercises in putatively rational and harmonious baroque planning. Instead, I sought to investigate how different architectural commissions in the Val di Noto - hexagonal urban layouts, palace facades and their decoration, and the palace interior of the ballroom, tied with the interests, insecurities and fears of their aristocratic patrons.

Chapter One examined how the hexagonal towns of Avola and Grammichele operated in remaking territory. I investigated the way that treatises including those by Leon Battista Alberti and Giovan Biagio Amico promote geometry as architecture’s putative principal generator. Although scholars such as Martha Pollak implicate geometry within fortifications and military power, they still present geometry as an uncomplicated, universal set of rational laws. Drawing on important work by Chandra Mukerji, I analysed the hexagonal layouts and the reshaped environment in terms of territorialisation rather than simply as exercises in ideal urbanism. The feudal status of Avola and Grammichele’s owners was justified by claims to noble lineage, but their dominance was reasserted in the architectural forms of the hexagonal layouts.

My discussion of Avola and Grammichele showed how the purportedly universal truth and rationality of the exercise of geometry supported the barons’ claim to superiority. The towns' overtly geometric urbanism associated their rulers with access to the supposedly rational. It masked unequal power relations between the absentee barons and the towns’ inhabitants. I demonstrated that Carlo Maria Carafa's writing on rulership seeks to naturalise this dominance, emphasising the prince’s place at the political centre, justified through divine order and ideal mathematics. The employment of an ‘ideal order’ supposedly inscribed in the cosmos through geometry gives the barons a claim to a putative universal and superior truth.

Although the scholarship on Avola and Grammichele places the geometric ground plan at the centre, this chapter showed how descriptions presenting the towns in terms of abundance and good governance were more prominent in the eighteenth century. Vito Amico referred to Avola’s hexagonal design, but visitors including Jean Houel and Dominique Vivant Denon emphasised orderliness and prosperity. This vision accords with the paintings of Carlo Maria Carafa’s fiefs in the Palazzo Butera in Palermo. In these paintings the labourers disappear, banished from representation in the hall of the fiefs. The paintings show the towns from afar,
as small-scale layouts, like toys. The images suggest that the towns can be moulded and manipulated by their aristocratic owners.

Chapter Two examined the unsettling facade sculpture of the Palazzo Beneventano in Scicli. I read the Palazzo Beneventano decoration together with aristocratic anxiety over slave raiding and social unrest. I related the implied violence in the facade sculpture to urban rivalries between bartolari and marianisti families in Scicli, and to the many conflicts between religious groups including the Jesuits and Capuchins. I also read the representations of Moors and African slaves on the facade in terms of Scicli’s history of slave trading and foreign raiders, and the festival of the Madonna delle Milizie, which enacts a battle between Christians and Moors. The chapter showed how ornament does not always beautify. Like Chapters Three and Four, this chapter contests the relegation of ornament as secondary to purportedly essential architectural ‘structure’.

Chapter Three discussed family alliances in the rebuilding of Noto, and related this to marginality and effects of restraint and luxury in the town’s palace facades. I argued that the alliance between Giuseppe Asmundo and a faction of the Landolina family was critical in determining the town’s new site. The changes of decision in Noto’s rebuilding create a complex narrative, but these changes reveal that, although power relations were asymmetrical, there was often resistance to imposed decisions. I show how Noto’s aristocrats frequently ignored official rulings, such as Asdrubale Termini’s recommendation to return to the old site. The populace also ignored the nobility’s preference for the higher part of Noto’s new site, and rebuilt on the lower part that became the town centre.

The rebuilding of Noto facilitated the transformation of the Nicolaci, who rose to become one of Noto’s most prominent aristocratic families by the middle of the eighteenth century. The Nicolaci were not among the nobles and heads of religious institutions that voted on Noto’s new site, but once the new site became established they took advantage of the sale of the fief of Bonfalà to enter the nobility. From this point they bought more fiefs, and land for their new palace. In this chapter I addressed the intriguing Palazzo Nicolaci façade and its marginalised location. I discussed how this profuse ornament can be read in terms of marginality and strange bodily transformations, in contrast to the ornament of the other palaces which produces an effect of restraint and self-control. I analysed the Palazzo Nicolaci ornament closely to show its various forms of ambiguity. There are hybrid, metamorphosing creatures, and ornament which operates on the borders of architecture and sculpture, and which shifts between architectural member and animal or plant form.
Chapter Four focused on the Palazzo Biscari ballroom in Catania to examine an unexplored aspect of this remarkable palace. Scholarship has devoted very little attention to interiors and interior decoration, focussing almost exclusively on town planning and building facades. I examined the ballroom’s fluid, sparkling decoration in relation to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of distinction, and his claim that the light and refined are privileged against the solid and heavy. I argued that, in the Palazzo Biscari, lightness extends from the ballroom’s materials; the shining gold and glass, the swirling stucco decoration, the frescos of apotheosis, to the physical lightness that dancers were expected to achieve.

From my reading of eighteenth-century manuals on dance and physical training including Pierre Rameau’s *Le maître a danser* (1725) and Gennaro Magri’s *Trattato teorico-prattico di ballo* (1779), I investigated dance training’s contribution to an aristocrat’s physical poise and distinction. This poise, and control of parts of the body such as facial expression, was made to appear part of a lightness produced as apparently natural. The ballroom was therefore much more than a place of entertainment and conspicuous consumption. It was a place associated with dance and bodily discipline, and with managing the show of emotions in social interactions.

Whereas existing scholarship limits itself to treatises and archival documents, in the dissertation have drawn from wider scholarship including sociology and architectural theory. Chandra Mukerji’s work on territorialisation informed my reading of Avola and Grammichele, and Pierre Bourdieu’s work on distinction was important for aristocratic lightness in the Palazzo Biscari. Bourdieu’s ideas on the different ways distinction is produced indirectly informed much of the dissertation, as did Michel Foucault’s work on how coercive power is both manifest and masked through material operations. Mark Wigley’s critique of Albertian architectural surface or skin, and ornament’s associations with dressing and disguise, assisted my discussion of how ornament is considered extraneous to a building’s putatively essential structure.

The dissertation drew on a range of texts beyond archival documents, and treated these texts not as neutral data but as voices that merited critical analysis. I took eyewitness accounts by visitors to the Val di Noto, treatises on architecture, etiquette, dance and materials such as gold and glass, funeral orations, the political writings of Carlo Maria Carafa, and works on Sicily by Vito Amico, Arcangelo Leanti and Antonino Mongitore. I also analysed aspects of the buildings that have not previously been included with discussions of architecture, such as the painted maps in the Palazzo Butera and Palazzo Biscari, and the Palazzo Biscari ceiling fresco.
I employed four case studies to examine aspects of the towns beyond those covered in the existing literature. At the largest spatial scale of urbanism, I focused on the rebuilding of Avola and Grammichele to challenge the prevailing reading in terms of ideal urbanism, and to argue instead that geometric planning was a tool for reasserting power and remaking territory in these towns. Chapter Two examined the palaces in Noto in terms of aristocracy rivalry. It argued that the town's palace facades can be read in terms of local competition and ideas around aristocratic restraint rather than simply as part of an international 'baroque'. Chapter Three moved to the small scale of the Palazzo Beneventano facade sculpture to discuss repressed and implied aggression in the context of local rivalries and the history of slave raiding between Sicily and North Africa. The final chapter examined the Palazzo Biscari ballroom to move from the facade, the most prestigious part of a palace's interior.

The dissertation analysed ways that aristocratic power was manifest and maintained. Chapter One investigated landowning and aristocratic legal and economic privileges in eighteenth-century Sicily. Chapter Two discussed how the ability to purchase noble status enabled the rise of the merchant Nicolaci in Noto, although other noble families initially challenged this status. Chapter Three included a discussion of the Scicli nobles' factionalism through attachment to religious confraternities, and their fear of popular uprising. Chapter Four investigated how nobles worked to train their bodies and present themselves at aristocratic social occasions.

Throughout the dissertation I sought to go beyond the assumptions of existing scholarship on the Val di Noto. In the case studies of the hexagonal towns and the Palazzo Biscari ballroom I related architecture to how aristocratic dominance was supported on one level through putatively rational urbanism, and on a different level through lightness and the trained body of the ballroom. In my discussion of Sicilian palace facades I related the decoration to hybridity, excess, restraint and aggression. Overall, the dissertation engaged with how the architecture enabled aristocratic power, and resisted a reading of the buildings as exemplars of established art historical templates.
Abbreviations and Glossary.

Abbreviations in footnotes for archives are ASC (Archivio di Stato di Catania), ASM (Archivio di Stato di Modica), ASNAP (Archivio di Stato di Napoli), ASN (Archivio di Stato di Siracusa, Sezione Noto), ASP (Archivio di Stato di Palermo).

Glossary.

**Baroniale.** Town or territory owned by a noble family.

**Braccianti.** Agricultural workers hired for a fixed term only.

**Burgisi.** Smallholders who paid to cultivate an area of land for a one or two-year cycle.

**Capitano Generale.** Town official responsible for law and order.

**Capomastro / Capomaestro.** Building site foreman or master mason.

**Caricatore.** Agricultural storehouse, usually for grain.

**Donativo.** Annual quantity of money and agricultural produce that the Sicilian nobility had to send to the Spanish occupiers.

**Dammuso.** Ceiling vault. Also rooms in a palace’s lower floor used for storage or rented out as shops.

**Demaniale.** Town or territory owned by the crown.

**Gabella.** A tax. Also a subcontract to profits from land or other commercial enterprise.

**Gabellotto.** Person who has paid to manage and take profit from an aristocrat’s land.

**Giurato.** Member of a town’s governing body.

**Isolato.** Town block.

**Licentia Populandi.** Licence allowing an aristocrat to establish a town and agricultural plantations on new land.

**Mensola.** Corbel supporting a balcony.

**Mascherone.** Mask-like decoration.

**Mero e Misto Imperio.** An aristocrat’s right to legal jurisdiction over the inhabitants of his land.

**Notaio.** Notary.

**Protonotaro del Regno.** Government official in charge of official appointments and confirming noble titles.

**Ringhiera.** Iron balcony railing.

**Rivelo.** Tax assessment of every town. Carried out approximately every 10 years.

**Scalpellino.** Stonecutter or stonecarver.
Sopraporta. Decoration or painting above a door and framed or included within the door mouldings.

Tonnara. Tuna processing plant.
Notes.

1 Sicily was divided into three areas known as *vali*. *Val* probably derives from the Arabic *waliya*, or administrative region. The Val di Noto covers the present provinces of Catania, Syracuse, Ragusa, and parts of Caltanissetta and Enna.


3 Eyewitness accounts include Burgos (1693), Bottone (1695), Guglielmini (1695), Privitera (1695), and Tortora (1712). See also the bibliography in Caruso, Perra, and Trigilia (1994): 109-119.

4 “The horrible earthquake of 1693 was without any doubt the biggest, and will always be the most memorable in the annals of this island. It resulted in the great tremor, and especially in the Val di Noto the ruin of many cities and lands, to the number of 60, and the deaths of 70,000 people.” Leanti (1761) Vol.1: 6.

5 The map’s inscription refers to the three *vali* of Val Demone, Val di Noto and Val di Mazara.

6 In the century before 1693, there was an earthquake in Modica in 1613. In 1669 Catania experienced a major eruption of Etna where lava covered areas around the city.

7 Eric Neil argues: “taken together, the reconstruction of the cities of the Val di Noto constitutes one of the most impressive achievements of urban planning in early modern Europe.” Neil (1998): 471.

8 Noto, Avola, Grammichele and Giarratana were rebuilt on new sites some distance from the original town. Ferla, Sortino, Buccheri and Buscemi were reconstructed closer to their original sites. Militello, Ispica, Scicli and Palazzolo Acreide, moved their centres to a lower, adjacent site. In Ragusa, a new urban area was built near to, and rivalling, the earlier town. Piazza, S. in Muti, ed. (2008): 38.

9 Stephen Tobriner notes: “Never once do the documents record efforts of citizens from one city coming to the aid of another, more stricken, community.” Tobriner (1982): 207.


11 “Questo vasto territorio contiene in realtà una costellazione di ‘microstorie’ generate sia dalle esperienze di personalità della formazione e dagli orientamenti diversi, sia allo svolgersi del dibattito artistico all’interno di centri urbani dotati di profondi radici culturali ed autonome energie creative.” (This vast territory contains in reality a constellation of micro-stories generated both by the experiences of personality, education and different orientations, and by the unfolding of an artistic debate within urban centres possessing deep cultural roots and their own creative energies). Piazza in Muti, ed. (2008): 29.


13 In the 1620s, the Moncada Aragona Paternò, who became the Princes of Biscari, the Branciforte, who married into the Carafa and were patrons of Grammichele, and the Tagliaviva Aragona, who
married with the Pignatelli and were patrons of Avola, had 48,088, circa 30,000 and 23,240 vassals respectively. These were the three highest numbers in Sicily. Piazza (2005) a: 11-12.

14 Stefano Piazza notes this need for more research on aristocratic patronage: “L’attenzione è stata focalizzata quasi esclusivamente sull’architettura chiesastica […]. Se si escludono pochi contributi, dedicati soprattutto ai palazzi catanesi, l’assenza della letteratura storiografica di approfonditi studi rivolti alle sedi delle autorità cittadine e alle dimore signorili rende mutila qualsiasi perlustrazione e valutazione del fenomeno architettonico nel suo complesso [.]” (Attention has been almost exclusively focussed on church architecture […]. If we exclude a few contributions dedicated above all to palaces in Catania, the absence of a historiography of in-depth studies on the seats of civil authority or aristocratic residences makes any investigation and evaluation of the total architectural phenomenon incomplete). Piazza in Muti, ed. (2008): 29.

15 The Landolina in Noto are an extinct family. Palaces now divided into apartments include the Palazzo Massa in Catania, Palazzo Rau in Noto and Palazzo Sortino Trono in Ragusa.


17 See Jonathan Morris on *meridionalismo*, history writing describing southern Italy in terms of what it lacks compared to northern Italy. Lumley and Morris (1997): 1-19. Marco Rosario Nobile notes: “Southern Europe and the south of Italy in particular, so the argument goes, display their condition of backwardness not only by a structural ‘delay’ in responding to innovations but also by excessive, clumsy and picturesque re-elaboration of the original artistic processes initiated and developed with much greater accuracy and coherence in the major capital cities. Consequently, the ‘dialects’ (as opposed to languages) of these peripheral areas suffer from a lack of theoretical discipline and a constant (though often cryptic) permeability to other cultures (such as those of North Africa) or to vernacular traditions that certify their marginal status.” Nobile (2016): 262.


20 Scaduto (2007) reproduces illustrations from German and French architects such as Gabriel Krammer, Karl Remshart, Paul Decker and Jean-Francoise Neufforge, or the Italian Giovanni Giardini.

21 For example the resemblance between the altar of San Giuseppe in the church of Santa Maria dell’Itria, Ragusa and a design for a portal by Franz-Xavier Habermann, or between decorative elements of the Convento del Carmine in Ragusa and a window design by Andrea Pozzo. Nobile (1997): 52 and 59. Nobile gives many other comparisons.


23 Blunt posits a linear development of 3 stylistic phases that he argues ascend in sophistication. A first style where Rome-influenced architecture meets a local “primitive taste”, a second style with more Sicilian architects trained in Rome, and a final phase driven by architects such as Giovanni Battista Vaccarini, Giovanni Battista Amico, and Tommaso Maria Napoli. Blunt adds Giacomo Serpotta’s stuccowork as a possible fourth category. Blunt (1968): 9-10 and 27.


25 Tobriner (1982).
26 Susan (2009).

27 Luminati (2009).


29 For example Piazza relates Paolo Amato’s work to the Spanish architects Juan Battista Vines, Francisco Hurtado and Leonardo de Figueroa, Tommaso Maria Napoli’s villas at Bagheria to designs by Johann Fischer von Erlach, and Nicolò Palma’s Palazzo Vanni and Palazzo Rammaca in Palermo to Gaetano Chiaveri and Bernardo Vittone. Piazza (2005.b): 114, 127, 129. Piazza makes many other connections to architects and palaces outside Sicily.

30 The four floors are “piano della strada” or lower floor, “piano principale” or piano nobile, and two “mezzalini” or floors for servants above and below the piano nobile. The horizontal orders of the palace facade will often present the palace as consisting of only three floors. Piazza (2005.b): 168 and 205: n. 1. Piazza refers to the section in Amico’s treatise entitled Dei palazzi e abitazioni secolaresche. Amico (1750) Vol. II: 63-70.

31 In her work on Neapolitan convents, Hills describes architecture as “the product and shaper of broader social forces, in relation to meaning and power.” She adds: “here I seek to expose architectural patronage and form as not necessarily arising from given specific historical, material and religious conditions, but as necessary for, or useful to, certain groups of people, always politically and socially motivated, intent on ensuring that they were not obscured by rival aristocrats, religious orders or convents in the specific and changing - often uncomfortable and awkward - historical circumstances in which they found themselves. Architecture thus assumed urgent political purpose and consequence.” Hills (2004): 5.


35 Swinburne (1783). Vol. 4. 135.


38 (It is truly a shame that the great expenses confronted by its rich inhabitants were not directed with better taste: if, instead of great palaces and immense churches of a pompous and complicated architecture, a noble and simple style were chosen, Catania would have been one of the most splendid cities of the Kingdom of Naples). Vivant Denon. Italian translation in Mozzillo, Vallet, and Mascoli, eds. (1979): 192-193.


40 Scott (2005): 137.

41 Scott, (2005): 137.

42 For example, on the facade of the church of San Carlo Borromeo in Noto, Tobriner writes “sculptural decoration in the folk tradition, perhaps deriving from Noto Antica, appears next to ornament composed with the paradigm of classical correctness, almost as if the architect of the portal had

43 Cresti (2003), Spadola (1982).


46 On the usefulness of ‘Baroque’ in the present see Hills (2015).

47 Giovan Biagio Amico (1684-1754) was an architect and priest from Trapani who worked in Palermo and western Sicily. L’architetto pratico was published in 2 volumes in 1726 and 1750.


55 (Carafa and his collaborators, by means of the geometric form, wanted to impose pure reason, which in the end subjugated the abstraction of the idea to planning needs and the perception of the landscape, and ended by producing an overall urbanistic system rationalized by means of geometry, which was the only one known and appreciated at the time). Boscarino (1997): 87.

56 “Ciò potrebbe far pensare quindi che Avola doveva essere già nelle intenzioni del suo autore una città fortificata, ma collegata in tutte le sue parti da una rigorosa geometria suscettibile di ampliamento, punto di riferimento del paesaggio circonante. La derivazione della trattatistica rinascimentale potrebbe essere occasionale, mentre sembra ragionevole considerarla figlia di quella mentalità geometrica che veniva considerate strumento per regolare e ‘vivere’ nel mondo.” (Therefore one could think that Avola already should have been, in the intention of is designer, a fortified city, but connected in all its parts by a rigorous geometry open to expansion, a reference point for the landscape around the town. Its derivation from Renaissance treatises may be accidental, whilst it
seems reasonable to consider Avola offspring of that geometric mentality that had come to be considered the instrument to regulate and ‘live’ in the world). Boscarino (1997): 85.

57 “Dopo lo sforzo del principe Carafa di realizzare una città secondo un ideale, alla fine dell’Ottocento Grammichele, che per quasi due secoli ha vissuto nel centro esagonale e nei sei borghi, torna a utilizzare il vecchio modello insediativo, a intensiva occupazione del suolo.” (After the effort of Prince Carafa to create a city according to an ideal, at the end of the nineteenth century Grammichele, which for almost two centuries lived in its hexagonal centre and six outlying sections, returned to the use of the old settlement model, of intensive occupation of the ground). Cantone (1998): 16-17.

58 “In designing Avola the architect-engineer wanted to synthesise, due to coinciding aesthetic and practical needs, the planning schemes of the ‘ideal city’ with the needs expressed by the patrons and dictated by the historical moment and the seismic emergency. The plan of Avola, conceived at the end of the seventeenth century, cannot therefore be considered, based on the cultural training and the professionalism that the Jesuit brother [Angelo Italia] needed to possess for the tasks taken on, only a passive response to the urbanistic conception of the Renaissance. This is proved by the realisation of the fortification walls which, as the documents show, were made and used for the defence of the city.” Gringeri Pantano (1997): 104.


60 Examples of this research on treatises include Di Fede and Scaduto, eds. (2007): 203-209 and 219-223. For more recent work see Nobile and Bares, eds. (2014) and Piazza, ed. (2014).


63 Tobriner (1985): 73.

64 “New colonial towns in Sicily were usually in the form of dull and repetitive grid plans but Italia shrewdly made Avola different. Of course he depended on prototypes, the most important being the ideal cities published by Pietro Cataneo in his I primi libri di architettura (1554).” Tobriner (1985): 77. Tobriner writes in a footnote that he follows Giuffrè (1966) in linking Avola to the treatise by Cataneo.

65 On Avola, Dufour and Raymond write: “Nel trattare di questa pianta si tende in genere ad esaurirne l’analisi ed i significati nel ricondurla alla trattatistica rinascimentale, oppure nel considerarla come semplicistica derivazione delle piazzaforti e delle cittadelle riportate nei numerosi trattati di fortificazione; basti l’esempio dell’eterno confronto con Neuf Brisach progettata da Vauban nel 1698.” “The discussion of this plan tends to exhaust analysis and meaning by linking it to the Renaissance treatises, or else to consider the plan a simplistic derivation of the strongholds and citadels reproduced in the numerous treatises on fortification. It is sufficient to give the example of the endless comparison with Neuf-Brisach designed by Vauban in 1698.” Dufour and Raymond (1993): 48.

66 “It is necessary, as a response to this hypothesis, that there is no certain Enlightenment spirit nor any particular social design in the plan of Avola, and neither is there in that of Grammichele, and that the only recognisable aim in the plan is one due to the need to house the population rapidly and to please the feudal owners and officials who saw in the move an occasion for profit.” Dufour and Raymond (1993): 48-49.

67 See Boscarino (1997): 69 on the foundation of these towns.


69 See the discussion and maps of twelve of these towns in Boscarino (1997): 62-76.
Vignola’s Architettura (1562) begins with a description of the architectural orders and their proportions. Most of the plates show how to draw architectural members geometrically. Many other writers, such as Juan Caramuel de Lobkowitz, Christian Wolff, and the Sicilian Giovanni Biagio Amico include mathematical tables and figures for proportions. Vignola (1562), Caramuel de Lobkowitz (1678), Wolff (1752), Amico (1726).


On discourse’s role in maintaining domination, Foucault writes: “In a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of discourse.” Foucault (1980): 93.


Lefebvre (1991): 236 refers to “absolute space at the disposal of priestly castes.”

“Fra tanto tutti li cittadini si portavano in detto nuovo sito per fabbricare le loro baracche di tavole che sino al presente arrivano al numero di duemila; ve ne sono di onze 50, onze 30, onze 20 e la meno dei poveri di onze 5 di spesa. Si che V.E. può considerare la grossa spesa si è fatta nel piantare le dette baracche.” “During all of this, all of the citizens moved to the said new site to build their wooden cabins, which up to now reach the number of 2,000; they are of 50, 30, 20 onze, and the least of the poor 5 onze of expenditure. Therefore your excellency can appreciate the great expenditure made in setting up these cabins.” Undated document, ASNAP scaffo IV, Avola, gruppo II, vol. 56 (4049) ff.119-200. Reproduced in Gringeri Pantano (1997): 237-238.

ASNAP, Scaffo IV, Avola, gruppo I, vol.47 (3954) ff.328r-331r. Reproduced in Gringeri Pantano (1997): 256-257. Francesca Gringeri Pantano lists many of the job titles relating to Avola’s sugar plantations. It is difficult to identify what some of these posts are; “la particolare nomenclatura dei mestieri e degli utensili non sempre lascia intendere il loro significato.” (The particular nomenclature of the trades and the utensils does not always allow their meaning to be understood). Gringeri Pantano (1997): 46. Pages 43-56 recount the history of sugar in Avola.


The palace area is actually in the southwest of the town. It is not known if the palace and its compound were ever built.


For the value of houses and locations of the wealthier citizens, see Dufour, Huet and Raymond (1977): 101-103.

More travellers wrote accounts of Avola than of Grammichele. Avola was near Syracuse, one of the principal sites in Sicily for antiquities, whereas Grammichele was further inland and not near places that eighteenth-century travellers usually visited. The eighteenth-century accounts include Amico (1757), Von Riedesel (1771), Houel (1785), Vivant Denon (1788).

“Fut renversée de fond en comble en 1693 par un tremblement de terre. Le Seigneur de ce pays défendit de la rebâtit dans le même lieu: il fit placer la nouvelle ville dans une belle plaine au midi, qui
n'en est éloignée que d'une mille et qu'est ornée de belles fontaines. On lui a donné le nom de Grand-Michel […] On est très laborieux dans ce pays, hommes, femmes et filles, tous travaillent à la campagne: aussi rencontre-t-on peu de mendians.” (It was levelled from top to bottom in 1693 by an earthquake. The lord of this land prohibited rebuilding in the same location; he had the new town placed on a beautiful plain to the south, which is only a mille long and adorned with beautiful fountains. He gave it the name Grammichele […] they are very hardworking in this town, men, women and children all work in the countryside. One also finds few beggars). Houel (1785). Vol.2: 57.

87 Von Riedesel (1821 Italian translation): 53. “Essa è fabbricate sopra un’altezza molto elevate, ma graziosissima, le sue strade hanno la medesima regolarità in piccole come quelle di Torino in grande.”

88 Pollak (1991) gives an important analysis of Turin’s seventeenth-century transformation.


90 Houel (1785) Vol.3: 120-121. “The inhabitants have transferred to a plain at the foot of this mountain a mile from the sea, where they have a much more temperate climate and a town which is well situated and built regularly.”

91 “And because the site of the said city is in the middle of the road named by the County of Modica, a continuous route between a good part of the Val di Noto towns. Your excellency cannot imagine the admiration that the beautiful site brings to all of the people who pass, and there are many gentlemen from the nearby towns who have come there to enjoy the beautiful vista that is a marvel to all, and is the envy of the surrounding lands and cities.” Letter from the office of the king of Spain to the Sicilian viceroy. ASNAP. Archivio Pignatelli, scaffo IV, gruppo II, vol. 56 (4049) ff. 119-200. Undated but probably 1693 or 1694. The full text of this letter is reproduced in Gringeri Pantano (1996): 237-238.


94 “Her fertile breast, with its natural abundance that produces, not only abundantly nourishes its own inhabitants, but every year supplies many things to other provinces, such as grain, oil, silk, wine, honey, manna, almonds and more in great number; to the number of 60 or more different types, according to the report of the Commercial Tribunal. The ancient poets said, regarding its fecundity, that here was born Ceres, to whom we attribute the invention of grain, and the custom of making bread.” Mongitore (1981 edition): 3.

95 Vivant Denon (1789): 368-369.

96 “Avola shows itself a hexagonal figure, with a very large square piazza in the centre and four smaller ones in the middle of the southern and northern sides and the eastern and western angles, where the four largest streets finish in the central square. Two streets also lead from each side and render the site of the city extremely elegant and comfortable for the inhabitants, because being turned towards the solstices, they are sheltered by the shadows of the buildings from the heat, and are less susceptible to cold and to winds. At the corners and the sides of the hexagon there are forts, but still unfinished, to which are attached four principal gates, which correspond to the four cardinal points.” Amico (1855 edition), Vol.1: 115.


98 “He ordered the formation of a hexagonal piazza from each side of which extend streets that finish in six smaller piazze composed of right angles. The buildings and the four intermediate streets that
divide the town correspond to the hexagon, but where the smaller squares begin they form parallelograms." Amico (1885 edition) Vol.1: 543.


103 The Aragona Cortés were descendants of Hernán Cortés, conqueror of Mexico. Aymard (1972): 30.

104 Biagio Aldimari, in the Branciforte entry in his Memorie historiche di diverse famiglie nobili, così napoletane come forastieri, published in Naples in 1691, lists the noble titles owned by the Carafa Branciforte. Aldimari (1691): 34. Francesco Benigno also refers to the title of Prince of Butera as the highest-ranking Sicilian noble title. See Benigno in Dandelot and Marino (2007): 31. On the government appointments members of the Carafa Branciforte held, see the entry under Branciforte in Mango de Casalgerardo (1912). The connection with the Colonna family is through the marriage of Federico Colonna with Margherita Branciforte in 1624 or 1625. See the entry under Federico Colonna in Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani (1982) Vol. 27. (treccani.it/enciclopedia/federico-colonna_Dizionario-Biografico).

105 The information on Carlo Maria Carafa is from the online Treccani Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani (1972) Vol. 5. (Treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-maria-carafa).

106 Nicolò Pignatelli appointed Pietro Filingeri Notarbartolo, Prince of Santa Flavia, a new aristocrat who bought the title in 1684, as the representative for his estates in Sicily. To assist the Prince, Antonio Ybañes y Arilla was administrator for the estates. Gringeri Pantano (1996): 95.


108 On the importance of agriculture in southern Italy, see Marino in Dandelot and Marino (2007): 424. In the first half of the seventeenth century, seven of the ten largest Val di Noto towns were agricultural towns (Caltagirone, Caltanissetta, Castrogiovanni, Mazzarino, Noto, Enna and Ragusa),


110 "Abundance is maintained by making sure that the lands are worked, and if there is a shortage of people, make them come from elsewhere, giving them exemptions and economic freedoms, by keeping the granaries always full, and not relaxing when there are good harvests, and not imposing many taxes on consumable goods." Carafa (1687): 80.

111 "Una lista di acquirenti, inviata all'agente della duchessa di Terranova e marchesa d'Avola negli anni 1676-1677, permette di conoscere i fruitori di tale prodotto e il loro luogo di provenienza. In quegli anni, infatti, essendo il trappeto di Avola l’unica manifattura di zucchero rimasta in Sicilia, le commesse giungono da tutta l'isola." (A list of buyers, sent to the duchess of Terranova and marchesa of Avola in the years 1676-1677, lets us know the buyers of that product and their locations. In those years, in fact, with Avola being the only sugar producer left in Sicily, orders came from all over the island). Gringeri Pantano (1996): 46. On the demise of sugar in Avola, Dominique Vivant Denon
describes a visit to the plantations in 1778. By 1792, Paolo Balsamo reports that no more sugar was

112 Competition from the Americas in particular made the Sicilian business less viable. Gringeri
Pantano refers to large quantities of sugar from the Americas and Madeira. Gringeri Pantano (1996):
46-47. She cites Braudel (1993): 191. “In 1676, 400 ships, each carrying an average 180 tons of sugar
(total 72,000 tons) left Jamaica. In the eighteenth century, Saint Domingue was to produce as much if
not more”.

113 “Travagliano in detto arbitrio più volte due, e trecento persone, e precise nella cottura che ve ne
sono più centinaia, tutti questi mantengono la loro famiglia di moglie e figli, e altro, e con questo, il
vassallaggio è numeroso, e non essendoci l’arbitrio di cannamele tutti sarebbero costretti trasportarsi
con le famiglie e lasciarebbero la città un deserto.” (More than two or three hundred people work in
the aforementioned plantation, and a hundred or so more again in cooking, all of these people
maintain their families of wives, children and others and, with this, the vassals are numerous, and if it
weren’t for the sugar fields all would be forced to move with their families and they would leave the city
a desert). ASN, Archivio Pignatelli, Scaffo IV, Avola, gruppo II, vol. 56 (4049) ff. 123-125. The text is
reproduced in Gringeri Pantano (1996): 222-223. Aymard references the document and makes the

114 “Sta insegnato questo popolo a travagliare in dette Cannamele et ogni sera se ne vengono alle loro
case, e levandosi l’arbitrio non potranno travagliare tanta quantità di popoli in altri affari della
campagna per l’angustezza del Territorio per non atto a coltivarlo come sarebbe cannavi, e così
levandosi l’arbitrio dei Cannamele tutto il Territorio non sarà più ricetto di cristiani ma covile di ladri, il
che non si è veduto mai durante l’arbitrio.” (The people have learnt how to work in the plantations, and
every evening they go to their houses, by taking away the plantations this number of people will not be
able to do other kinds of farm work due to the smallness of the territory and not being able to work
they will be failures, and so by taking away the plantations all of the territory will no longer be the place
of Christians but the breeding ground of thieves, who have never been seen during the operation of
the plantations). ASN, Archivio Pignatelli, Scaffo IV, Avola, gruppo II, vol. 56 (4049) ff. 123-125. This part of the
document is in Gringeri Pantano (1996): 222.


116 The document quoted earlier which argues against the closure of the sugar plantations, describes
the land as bare and infertile: “E primieramente fu considerate la scarsezza et infecundità del
Territorio, il circuito del quale non si estende più che à miglia venti, e non più che miglia sei di una
parte ad un altra, e la maggior parte consistono in balze, dirupi e sterilità di terreno, che però essendo
uno al Territorio così tenue e sterile, fu saggiamente dalli S.ri per conservazione del vassallaggio
istituito l’arbitrio di cannamele, senza il quale non potrebbe vivere il popolo […].” (Firstly the scarcity and
infertility of the territory was considered, the perimeter of which doesn’t extend more than twenty
miglia, and not more than six miglia from one part to another, and most of it consists of ridges, cliffs,
and sterile land, so with all of the territory being so difficult and sterile, it was wisely by the gentlemen,
in order to retain vassals, to create the sugar plantations, without which the population could not live).
ASN, Archivio Pignatelli, Scaffo IV, Avola, gruppo II, vol. 56 (4049) ff. 123-125. This part of the
document is in Gringeri Pantano (1996): 222. On the disappearance of the Miranda, see Gringeri


118 “Maddened by hunger, they removed the sugar, honey and wheat and, having been reprimanded
by the soldiers and their children sent away, we [the soldiers] came to protect the owners’ property […]
Moreover, they [other soldiers] declare that, having been unable to solve the problem at the sugar
factory they went to the sugar fields which the people had broken up, some to alleviate their hunger
and some to use the straw to make a hut to live in, without being able to do anything to alleviate the
rage of the people or the wretchedness of the situation.” Report to the governor of Avola 13 January
1693. ASN, Archivio Pignatelli, Avola, gruppo II, vol. 56 (4049) ff.34-35. The document is reproduced
The Ministros de la Junta ruled that for defensive reasons no new town could be built within two miglia of the sea. Avola was slightly over one miglia from the coast. The letter from the king orders however that the site for the new Avola should not be changed. "Because of the consequences that could follow if we moved those people of six thousand souls of such good disposition who have done things with the permission and approval of their superiors and with such good faith and legality as attentive and obedient vassals, distinguishing themselves from every other baronial territory that suffered in this way, so that everyone who has seen the new town has praised to the maximum the care and diligence of these people." ASN, Archivio Pignatelli, Avola, Scaffo IV, vol. 38 (3944) ff. 129-132. The document is reproduced in Tobriner (1982): 230 and in Italian translation in Gringeri Pantano (1996): 234-236.


The Latin text of the stone reads D.O.M, Anno domini 1693, die quarto decimo ante calendas maias, hora prima dimidia post meridiem primo lapide iacto ab Ecc.mo Dno D. Carolo Maria Carafa Principe Buterae et Roccellae ac S.R.I erecta fuit haec urbs sub nomine Grandis Michaelis ex ruinis oppidi Occhiolae terremotu horrendo concussi die XI Ianuarii eiusdem anni primea inditionis. Memoriam tanti facti iam legis: fundatoris vero nomismata effigie nempe cum stigmate intra mea viscera recondo. (To the great and optimum God, year of our lord 1693, 14 May, 1.30 p.m, the first stone laid by the most excellent master Don Carlo Maria Carafa Prince of Butera and Roccella, was built this city named Grammichele from the ruins of the town of Occhiol that was destroyed by the horrific earthquake on 11 January of the year indicated earlier. in memory of this law. The coins with a true likeness of the founder and his coat of arms are laid into my body). Scacciante (2012): 14-15.


Dufour, Huet, Raymond, (1977): 120-122 provide a French translation of this document. The Prince of Butera reports: "que de cette manière [the fact that the citizens are usurping plots then not building on them] ne verra jamais la ville achevée dans ses contours et avec ses faubourgs. Afin de remédier à ces désordres et permettre aux habitants de construire leur maison, nous avons estimé par cette ordonnance, devoir prendre les mesures suivantes." (In this way, we will never see that town plan achieved with its borders and outer areas. To rectify this disorder and allow the inhabitants to build their homes, by this ordinance the following measures must be taken). Dufour, Huet and Raymond (1977): 120.


The citadel became the microcosm of the city in the fifteenth century. It was the physical realization of a clearly structured political organization, and the model for the ideal city because it could be conceived, designed and built as a complete work of art. In the seventeenth century the ideal city, whose principles had been developed by Alberti, Filarete and Francisco di Giorgio Martini, became wholly associated with the ideal fortress.” Pollak (1991): 5.


“In the end, mathematics is the proper science for the prince, as implicit within it is the way to fortify, to defend and to capture fortresses. It is through, and with, numbers and space that one organises an army, has knowledge of nature and the inclinations of the people, the time to carry out or leave a project, [knows] the distances, heights and boundaries of the kingdom, and of places, and the true method to render the king well-instructed in those things pertaining to warfare.” Carafa (1689): 24.


“We are taught in our society to see the creation of material culture as the manifestation of an idea - a realization of a prior mental representation. As a result, we think that we cannot study the formative qualities of thought in social life by looking at things. We have to find the ideas behind the things.” Mukerji (1997): 326. “We should try to approach material culture without reducing objects to instantiations of discourses or realizations of cognitive representations. Where culture is treated as ideas and beliefs or discourses of power, the end result is the disappearance of the material world behind language. That is comparable to the loss of things in economic analysis. Meanwhile, we live in built environments, and we make sense of ourselves and others not just by what we say and write but also by our actions in the material world”. Mukerji (1997): 36.

Mukerji (1997): 21


For example, Vitruvius (1999) and Alberti (1988) include sections on measurement and building foundations and walls. Vignola (1562), Caramuel Lobkowitz (1678) and Amico (1726 and 1750) include descriptions and images of construction and earth-moving machines.

Alberti (1450), Bartoli (1589) Lindgren (2007): 481-482.


Interestingly, Angelo Italia, designer of Avola, worked on commissions for Carlo Maria Carafa during the 1680s, including the chiesa madre and Jesuit College in Mazzarino, the town where Carlo Maria often resided. However, Italia was not chosen for Grammichele. Italia visited Mazzarino, in 1679, 1685, 1688 and 1692. ARSI, vol. 35 ff. 81 and 92. See also Menichella, (2002): 54-55, and Dufour and Raymond (1987): 14. On the Jesuit College in Mazzarino, Vito Amico writes “Il collegio della compagnia di Gesù venne fondato dal 1690 provvedendo largamente Carlo Carafa delle necessarie rendite”. (The college of the company of Jesus was founded in 1690, with Carlo Carafa mainly providing the necessary funds). Amico (1757) Vol. 2: 69.

On the drawing of the ground plan, see the quotation from Centorbi (1694) in Dufour, Huet and Raymond (1977): 14.
mystic body of the state, the small people commanded, and the king obeyed. From such monstrosities
the physical body of a man it would be an insupportable monstrosity if the foot wanted to
destroying the rules of good politics, which for the governance of states is necessary. Besides, as in
and not operate according to t
venerable, i
multitude of vassals, nor the glo
(The prince must learn from this, that neither the size of states nor the amount of riches, nor the
states,
understand the true science of ruling yourselves and ruling the people, the politics of preserving
rules that are required in order to govern well, and in a Christian way.” Carafa (1687): 23.

Maria Giuffrè reports uncritically: “a contemporary source tells us that Carlo Maria Carafa
Branciforte, Prince of Butera ‘excelled in all the arts and sciences, and was admired amongst his
equals, and revered throughout Italy.” Unfortunately she does not give the source of this quotation. On
Grammichele, she writes: “it proclaims the vision of its learned designer, a man of letters and a writer,
who founded a printing works at Mazzarino”. Giuffrè (2007): 28. See also Di Resta (1997): 328 and
Boscarno (1997): 87. Unlike other scholars of the Val di Noto rebuilding, Dufour, Huet and Raymond
note the problem with associating Carlo Maria Carafa too strongly with secular science or utopian

“Theology has the prime position amongst all the sciences, by having as its object the supreme
God, of this must the prince be instructed, in order to know the giver of every good, to admire, and to
imitate with the reading of the sacred scripture the great and infinite virtue, work, applications and
rules that are required in order to govern well, and in a Christian way.” Carafa (1687): 23.

The many examples of old testament quotations include, just in the first pages, Deuteronomy 17 on
page 2, Nathan speaking to David on page 3, a quotation from Psalm 26 on page 4, the fate of King
Sedecia who didn’t listen to prophets on page 5, and Ezekiel, 38 on page 7. Carafa (1687).

“Let the sepulchre be your bedroom, O princes, and the skull your mirror, because in these you will
understand the true science of ruling yourselves and ruling the people, the politics of preserving
states, the way to administer justice, the record of how you should be, and the thought of how you
should live. Adam, the first prince of the world, would lose kingship of the universe because he
believed in the nequaquam moriemini, that he would never die, and the sepulchre, reminding you that
you are mortal, will fix on your shoulders the funereal purple.” Carafa (1687): 8.

“La prima cosa che dovete fare, o Principi, è haver sempre dinanzi agli occhi il timore di Dio, per
ben reggere, e governare, i sudditi, dovendo ricordare che se siete voi superiori a’ popoli, siete
soggetti a Dio; ne a voi ubbidiranno i popoli, se a Dio voi non ubbidite: anzi inferiori sarete ad ogni più
vile plebeio, se sudditi non vi dichiarate del supremo monarca.” (The first thing you must do, O
princes, is to have always the fear of God in front of your eyes, to rule and govern the subjects well,
having to remember that if you are superior to the populace, you are subject to God; the people will
not obey you if you do not obey God. Besides, you will be inferior to every most vile plebeian, if you do
not declare yourselves subject to the supreme monarch). Carlo Maria also writes “Impari di questo il
Principe, che ne l’ampiezze de’ stati ne la copia delle ricchezze, ne la moltipudine de’ vassalli, ne la
gloria delle vittorie, ne la magnificenza de’ trionfi renderlo possono venerabile, se egli non teme Dio.”
(The prince must learn from this, that neither the size of states nor the amount of riches, nor the
multitude of vassals, nor the glory of victories, nor the magnificence of triumphs can render him
venerable, if he does not fear God). Carafa (1687): 2 and 3.

He must, with the authority given to him by God, make the people operate according to his will,
and not operate according to the will of the people, perverting the order of governments, and
destroying the rules of good politics, which for the governance of states is necessary. Besides, as in
the physical body of a man it would be an insupportable monstrosity if the foot wanted to carry out the
office of the head, and the head the functions of the foot, so a worse monstrosity it would be if, in the
mystic body of the state, the small people commanded, and the king obeyed. From such monstrosities
nothing could be born except dangerous inconveniences to the public, and inevitable ruin to states; it being so true that it is a feature of the rabble to always incline to the worst.” Carafa (1687): 15.

156 Carafa (1692): 1.

157 “As a sign that a prince lives rightly, he [God] shows us a clock. A prince could not with a less expressive means think of life than with a sundial; because if that which is regulated by the movement of the sun regulates the actions of mortals, these, if they are not aware of the prime and supreme rule of operating correctly, which is God, will never be able to rule well, nor govern the actions of their subjects.” Carlo Maria also quotes from Isaiah, 38, where God makes the sundial of Ahaz go backwards. Carafa (1687): 4 and 5.

158 Scacciante hypothesises that the statue, which can be seen in Figure 11 above, was of Saint Michael. Scacciante (2012): 61.


160 This decoration is difficult to date as the Palazzo Butera suffered a serious fire in 1759. It is likely that the portraits are restorations of the pre-1759 works, but it is not known if the paintings of the feuds are also restorations, or new commissions made after the fire. Zalapi (2004): 132.

161 Beginning clockwise from the north wall, these are Caterina Branciforte who bought the current palace, Fabrizio Branciforte, Margarita d’Austria, Ercole Branciforte, Giuseppe Branciforte, Pietro Lanza Principe di Trabia, Antonio Branciforte, a second Giuseppe Branciforte, Nicolò Placido, Nicolaus Branciforte, Giuseppe Branciforte, and the cleric Antonio Branciforte.


163 Wood (2010): 33, 34

164 “It will be argued that cartography was primarily a form of political discourse concerned with the acquisition and maintenance of power.” Harley (1988): 57.


168 “Thus we learn that what is absent from maps is as much a proper field of enquiry as that which is present. A second insight derived from the philosophical direction is that silences should be regarded as positive statements and not merely passive gaps in the flow of language.” Harley (1988): 57, 58, 59, 70. Harley acknowledges that “silences”, blank areas in some sixteenth and seventeenth-century maps, may be due to lack of knowledge or to censorship of commercial or military information. His main argument, however, is that these gaps are bound up with power relations, and are the result of choice. In the present essay, however, I am not concerned with those silences which arise from geographical ignorance, lack of data, error, the limitations of scale, deliberate design or other aspects of specification and technical limitation. I am dealing here with political silences.” Harley (1988): 57.

169 The canna siciliana was eight palmi. One palmo was defined as double the length of a man’s outstretched arms. Amico (1750): 83 and fig. 2. One Sicilian canna in Palermo in 1811 was 2.064m. 720 canne made one miglia (1,486m). Martini, (1883): 438. The name canna may derive from the canes used for measuring land. Lindgren (2007): 490. In the painting of Grammichele, the Roman numeral on the scale is an anomaly (fig. 4). ‘CVX’ does not exist in the Roman system. It may be an incorrect form of CXV (115).

170 Harley (1988): 68. John Barrell argues that depictions of eighteenth-century English rural life often present a vision of social harmony, ignoring the conflicts and changes that were taking place: “for the
most part the art of rural life offers us the image of a stable, unified, almost egalitarian society; so that my concern in this book is to suggest that it is possible to look beneath the surface of the painting, and to discover there evidence of the very conflict it seems to deny." Barrell (1980): 5. Whilst it is better to analyse these images in terms of persuasiveness and omissions, rather than as looking beneath Barrell's metaphorical 'surface', Like Harley, Barrell shows how representations of the land, of the aristocrat's territory, are edited to omit the depiction of work.

171 Two failed harvests in succession sparked a popular uprising in Palermo in 1647, and there were food riots in Sciacca, Agrigento and Catania. On cereal monoculture, Mack Smith writes: "The practice of monoculture resulted in there being no alternative food and often no alternative employment. Since the bulk of taxation fell on cereals, not only was the revenue imperilled in a bad year, but food prices might rise to the point beyond which men would risk attacking the grain pits and so perhaps touch off a major revolt." Mack Smith (1968): 212.

172 "Of these four types [the decoration for facades, apartments, gardens, and theatres], that of facades is without exception the one that most taxes art's precepts. Architecture and sculpture compete equally for the [facades'] embellishment, but the latter must be absolutely subordinated to the former." Diderot and D'Alembert (1754) Tome 4: 702.


174 The palace is not orientated on an exact north-south axis. The facade oriented east-south-east I have called the east facade for simplicity's sake. For similar reasons I have labelled the other facades south and west facade.


177 Vredeman de Vries (1565), Dietterlin (1598).


180 Scicli is near the coast, but is part of the Iblean plateau. From 1392 to 1702 this area made up the Contea di Modica, a large, semi-autonomous fief. Morana (2012) 23-24, 102-103, Flaccavento (1997): 31. The main towns are Ragusa, Modica, Palazzolo Acreide and Scicli.

181 Nifosi (1997.e): 9, dates the Chiesa del Carmine and the main facade of the adjoining convent to 1750-c.1775 by Alberto Maria di San Giovanni Battista, but gives no documentary support.


183 A photograph in Nifosi (1985): 107 shows the east facade of the Palazzo Beneventano with steps where the road now is.

184 On balcony decoration, Nifosi writes: "Il timpano ad omega, ad esempio, lo riscontriamo nei portali laterali della facciata della chiesa di San Giorgio a Modica, la cui datazione, per il primo ordine, è da riferire agli anni sessanta del Settecento; I capitelli delle paraste del cantonale si avvicinano a quelli delle paraste del Palazzo della Cancelleria a Ragusa, da riferire sempre agli anni sessanta del Settecento." (The tympanum in the form of an omega, for example, can be found in the side portals of the facade of the church of San Giorgio in Modica, whose date, for the first order, can be connected to the sixties of the eighteenth century. The corner pilaster capitals come close to those of the Palazzo
Pietro [Cultraro], who also designed some other palaces (Palazzo Salonia, now demolished) and the church of Santa Maria la Piazza (demolished) could be the author of these beautiful sculptures. Avranno potuto partecipare all’opera anche il capomastro Mario Mormina e il capomastro Girolamo Iacinto.” (Pietro, who also designed some other palaces (Palazzo Salonia, now demolished) and the church of Santa Maria la Piazza (demolished) could be the author of these beautiful sculptures. The master masons Mario Mormina and Girolamo Iacinto could also have participated in the work). Nifosi (1997. a): 159. Nifosi reiterates this argument in Nifosi 1997.d): 39.

“Potrebbero ad alcuni parere impossibili alcune cose stravaganti, che si trovano per entro a questa fatica; e di primo slancio si muoveranno a condannarle, o favolose o superstiziose. Ma a chi ben considera le forze ammirabili della Natura, o per meglio dire, l’opere prodigiose dell’Autore della Natura, e rifletterà seriamente col lume della Filosofia, che l’approva, non correrà frettolosamente ad arruolarle tra i farfalloni.” (Some of the strange things that are found in this work may seem impossible to some people, and they may rush to condemn them as fabulous or superstitious. But anyone who considers the admirable forces of nature or, to put it better, the prodigious works of the author of nature, and who reflects seriously with the light of Philosophy, which supports it, will not run hurriedly to include them among fanciful notions). Mongitore (1981): 6.

Il Mongitore si sofferma di illustrare questa realtà del meraviglioso e dell’insolito. Descrive i parti ‘mostruosi’, sia umani che bestiali, le prerogative eccezionali di certi individui capaci di saltare ostacoli che altri esseri umani mai riuscirebbero a superare o di mangiare enormi quantità di cibo.” (Mongitore spends time on illustrating this reality of the marvellous and the unexpected. He describes ‘monstrous’ aspects, whether human or bestial, the exceptional abilities of certain individuals capable of overcoming obstacles that other human beings would never manage to do, or the ability to eat enormous quantities of food). Introduction by Massimo Ganci in Mongitore (1981): vii.

(Mongitore's Della Sicilia Ricercata, together with the Villa Palagonia, can be read as Sicilian examples of that thread of the irrational that winds from the high medieval era to Romanticism. The thread was not interrupted by the Renaissance, and neither will it be interrupted by the Age of Enlightenment). Ganci in Mongitore (1981): xiv.

See note on the Villa Palagonia in Noto chapter above. Rosario L’Avocato worked on the palace between 1751 and 1772 and may be the statues’ sculptor. Zalapi (2004): 152.


For example, rivalry between families was important in the rebuilding of Noto. Conflict between religious confraternities marked Modica, Ragusa and Palazzolo Acreide, but menacing decoration is less common in these towns. On the risk of invasion, and the conflicts within Scicli, see Barone (1998): 56-58, 92-104 and Cataudella (1970): 87-88.


(There were fist and stick fights every time, in a procession with the saint’s statue for Christmas or Easter or the Immaculate Conception, the reliquary float’s bearers infringed by one palmo their agreed limits and invaded the territory assigned to the rival church). Cataudella (1970): 250.

The will of the benefactor Giuseppe Miccichè ruled that the Jesuits had to donate towards constructing the Capuchin monastery. The Jesuits refused to pay. Cataudella reports a Jesuit saying that the Capuchins would easier receive “a punch in the face than money for building”, but gives no documentary support. Cataudella (1970): 250.

Balsamo (1809): 129.


On Carioti’s map, see Militello (1997): 307.

Barone refers to these families in 1828 as “il grande trittico della ricchezza marianista” (the great trio of Marian wealth). Barone (1998): 220.

Pluchinotta (1936), MS. Nifosi (1985): 19 summarises the story. Paolo Nifosi related in a message to this author that the story of the conflict between Carmelo Beneventano and Francesco Penna is in a note that Pluchinotta added to his transcription of an undated manuscript entitled Notizie su alcune comunità religiose di Sicili, possibly written in the late nineteenth century by an author named Valdigne. The locations of the Valdigne and Pluchinotta manuscripts are unknown. The Pluchinotta manuscript may be in the collection of the heirs of the Pluchinotta-La Rocca referred to in Militello (2008): 19-20.

The long-standing Beneventano claim was based on the marriage between Francesca Beneventano and Girolamo Grimaldi in 1682. ASM, Archivio Grimaldi, Vol. 17, Causa Calamezza-Grimaldi 1768-1798. f. 27.


Wright Vaughan (1811): lx and lxiv.

In his will of 1565, the merchant Pietro di Lorenzo, also known as Busacca, bequeathed annual sums for charitable purposes such as freeing slaves, alms for the poor and dowries for poor women. Barone, (1998): 13, 14,168.

“The fate of prisoners in Muslim countries was the subject of books, sermons, and even *tableaux vivants* that visualised the conditions of slavery in North African countries in the most vivid manner possible.” Elizabeth McGrath in McGrath and Massing, eds. (2012): ix.


Nifosi, (1997): 159, briefly mentions a connection between this festival and the Palazzo Beneventano sculpture.


A fish seller named Tommaso Aniello, or Masaniello, led the uprising. Masaniello controlled Naples for a month before being murdered, but the total uprising lasted four months and sparked revolts in other towns. Astarita (2005): 112-118.

Spadola (1982): 122. Spadola’s is the only published work that includes the *ringhiere*.


The earthquake killed one in four of Noto’s population. By April 1693, the plague that followed meant that more than 5,000 of the 12,000 pre-earthquake population were lost. See Giuseppe Asmundo’s report in ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2468, 28 August 1698, f. 8. See also Bonaiuto (1693): 10, Madonna and Trigilia, eds. (1992): 169, Tobriner (1982): 207. The earliest history is from August 1712 by Padre Filippo Tortora. The original manuscript’s location is unknown. Francesco Balsamo used a nineteenth-century copy for his edition, see Balsamo (1972). Part of Balsamo’s edition is in Di Blasi (1981): 83, and Dufour and Raymond (1990): 122-123. See also Tobriner (1982): 208 n. There are two anonymous histories from later in the eighteenth century. One is an undated history of the 1693 and 1727 earthquakes. Text in Gallo, (1964): 116-126. Original manuscript location unknown. The other is entitled *San Corrado*. Manuscript in the collection of Netinese historian Francesco Genovesi. See also Tobriner (1982): 208 n.


“Here then rises Noto in wide and straight streets, magnificent in its buildings and second to few in Sicily.” From Giocchino di Marzo’s Italian translation of Amico’s text. Amico (1855): 216. Amico’s work is a compendium on Sicily’s geography, history and produce. Much of its two volumes consists of descriptions of all of the principal towns. Giocchino di Marzo gives some biographical information on Amico in Amico (1855): 7-9.

“Noto è ricchissimo sopra gli altri paesi della Sicilia pel territorio e pei campi; comprende nel suo agro 78 ampi feudi e 22 fondi e si ha 70 miglia di circuito” (Noto is much richer than the other towns of Sicily in its territory and number of fields. Its agricultural area consists of 78 large feuds and 22 allodial properties, and is 70 miglia round). Amico (1757) Vol.2: 220.

Around Noto ‘[l]e campagne sono assai fertili, e grasse, onde è copiosa di grano, di vino, di mele, e molto più di bestiame…’ (The fields are very fertile, and rich, where there is an abundance of wheat, wine, honey, and much livestock). Leanti, (1761): 117.

“*Its streets run perfectly directly from east to west, and from north to south […] The buildings, besides the solidity that they retain, are of a perfect architecture. They harmonise majestically due to their delicate white stone, suitable for the most delicate small architectural members, with which they are dressed and ornamented.*” *Del nuovo risorgimento e costruzione della città di Noto*. Anonymous


The principle studies of the events are Dufour, Huet and Raymond (1977), Tobriner (1982), Raymond (1983), and Dufour and Raymond (1990).


Ide (1958): 11.

The quotation from Douglas Sladen on the age of Mozart and Tiepolo is given in Ide (1958): 15. This quotation is also cited in Tobriner (1982): 11.


In 1748 there were 20 monasteries and convents in Noto. Many of these buildings, such as the convent of Santa Chiara and the monastery of the Padri Crociferi, included concealed passageways to allow monks or nuns to move around the building separately from the rest of the population. Tobriner (1982): 110, 113-114.


Tobriner’s section on ornament consists of several pages of photographs and the equivalent of approximately seven pages of text. Tobriner (1982): 124-140.

Tobriner quotes the French architect and traveller Léon Dufourny’s view that the buildings of Noto are “all in the same style and built by someone who had studied Palladio, Inigo Jones and especially Vignola.” Tobriner also refers to copies of Serlio and Vignola made by Gagliardi and Labisi. Tobriner (1982): 124, 125, n 218, n 219.

On localities of power, Foucault writes: “we cannot therefore speak of power, if we want to do an analysis of power, but we must speak of powers and try to localize them in their historical and geographical specificity.” Foucault in Crampton and Elden, eds. (2007): 156.

Foucault in Crampton and Elden, eds. (2007): 156.

Marco Nobile points out that the Sicilian nobility were not a unified class: “Se si vuole sfuggire da una scivolosa dimensione fantastica, classista o vagamente antropologica non basta neanche un bagno di filologia, che di per sé dovrebbe già spazzare via l’idea di una società nobiliare monolitica e compatta che attraversa indenne qualche secolo.” (If we wish to escape from a slippery, fantastic dimension, classist or vaguely anthropological, not even a wash of philology is enough, which on its

249 Corradino Nicolaci acquired the fief of Bonfalà in 1701. ASN, notaio Francesco Maria Costa, vol. 7347, 8 September 1701, f. 869.


253 In order to oversee all of the Val di Noto rebuilding, Camasta could probably not devote all of his attention just to Noto. On Asmundo’s appointment, Tobriner writes: “Because the Netinesi were not unanimous in their endorsement of re-sitting on the feudo of the Meti, government authorities had to prod them to leave the old site of Noto Antica. The Duke of Camasta, perhaps foreseeing oncoming complications, wisely left at this point, leaving the deteriorating situation to Judge Giuseppe Asmundo, Commissary General, who implemented the evacuation of the old site.” Tobriner (1982): 43. Tobriner n.1 footnotes Tortora (1891): 36, Gallo (1964): 118, Gallo (1970): 79.

254 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 28 August 1698, f. 4.


259 Gallo (1964): 68-90. Tobriner (1982): 45. An anonymous historian of Noto reports that the transfer was carried out to mark the permanent abandoning of the old town. A procession carried the relics from the old town to the site of the new. Anonymous Author (after 1727) in Gallo (1964): 118.

260 Tobriner, (1982): 44. Stefano Piazza believes that Asmundo’s decision to halt the procession of the relics on the lower area may be interpreted as a weakness, where Asmundo gave in to the wishes of the majority of the inhabitants, or of his recognition that it was necessary to compromise and follow the majority. Piazza in Muti, ed. (2008): 166.

261 This figure is from the Anonymous Author (after 1727) in Gallo (1964): 116-117. On the lack of planning, Tobriner writes: “[s]ite preparation and planning were haphazard at best because Asmundo and Camasta had misjudged the difficulty of laying out a city on the Meti […] The unhealthiness of the slope and the diseases that were threatening, combined with disastrous planning on the part of Asmundo and Camasta, precipitated an epidemic which killed as many as 3,000 of Noto’s citizens, understandably dampening enthusiasm for the new site.” Tobriner, (1982): 45.


263 See the figures in Gallo, (1970): 9. Tobriner writes: “the preponderance of votes favouring a return to the old city came from the lowest classes of the population. Small landowners and day labourers, identifying themselves as uomini di campagna (farmers) or popoli minuti (the low-wage earners) voted 249 to 44 to return to the old site. A majority of the workers and artisans also endorsed the old site.
But the clergy, nobles, doctors, lawyers, notaries and pharmacists voted as a solid block for the new site." Tobriner (1982): 47.

ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462. 24 May 1699.

ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462. 24 May 1699, ff. 5-7. The report uses the word ‘indifferent’ for the positions of 3 of the clergy: “Il Sre Priore de Padri Domenicani si come è indifferenti de restarsi o partirsi, così la necessità lo stringe a volere restare. Il Sre Rettore de Gesuiti disse esser indifferenti e pronto di restare, o di andare ove fosse stabilita la permanenza della città. Il Sre Priore de PP di S Giovanni di Dio disse esser indifferenti a restarsi or partirsi.” (The prior of the Dominican Fathers is indifferent to staying or leaving, depending on how necessity forces him. The Rector of the Jesuits said he was indifferent and ready to stay, or to go wherever the permanent city was established. The Prior of the Holy Fathers of St John of God said he was indifferent to staying or leaving).

266 ‘Il trasporto della nuova città all’antico sito, supposto le seguenti condizioni, essere l’accerto del Real servitor e pubblico bene.” (The transport of the new city to the old site, under the following conditions, is the assurance of the royal servant and the public good). ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462. 24 May 1699, f.23. The conditions are that the road to the old site is repaired and the water supply is re-established first, the rubble in the town cleared, and financial help is given for transport of materials and buildings. See also Tobriner (1982): 49-50.

ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 24 May 1699, ff.15-20.


“Therefore one has written to your Majesty (may God save him) and your Excellency [the viceroy] that the people regret having to remain here more months, and want to return immediately, that they never wanted to come here and so this is not a change of mind because they did not come voluntarily but forced, as I said above, and like this it must be reported. Now what I have understood from the public is that Signor Asmundo and his relatives that are here want to continue the work done so far, and want to keep the new town that they have brought about.” ASN, Consigli Civici, Vol. 616. 11 October 1698. Quotation from Dufour and Raymond (1990): 97.

Impellizzeri in Dufour and Raymond (1990): 97.

Impellizzeri in Dufour and Raymond (1990): 96.


On Giovanni Battista Landolina’s threat to move to Avola, Tobriner speculates: “Finally, it is even possible that the Duke of Camastra was trying to weaken Noto in favour of Avola: Giuseppe
Asmundo’s relatives, the strong Landolina family who had taken part in suggesting the [new] site, made a petition to settle in the new Avola, completely deserting Noto." Tobriner (1982): 39. The document containing Landolina’s threat is ASNap, Archivio Pignatelli, Scaffo IV, Part 2, LVI, 4050, f. 205.


280 Luminati gives Costanza’s surname as Deodato, although she is from the Landolina-Deodato line.

281 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, ff. 5-6.

282 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, ff. 5-6.

283 [N]ell’istesso anno 1693 dal mese di luglio principiò un’epidemia di pestifera febbre, colla morte circa di tre mila persone tra quali in brevi giorni si morì il nobile e virtuoso giovane D. Giambattista Landolina e Salonia, figlio di Don Francesco. Egli fu il principale disegnatore di questa città ed a morire in essa de’ nobili il primo.” (In the same year of 1693, in the month of June, there was an outbreak of plague, with the death of around 3 thousand people, among them died, in a few days, the noble and virtuous young Don Giambattista Landolina, son of Don Francesco. He was the principal designer of this city and the first person of noble birth to die in it). Tortora, (1972): 52. This passage is also mentioned in Boscarino (1997): 58 and quoted in Tobriner (1982): 212.


285 Noto is one of the post-earthquake towns that shifted from a fortified hill site to a lower location with better transport connections. Avola and Grammichele also moved to lower, flat sites. In Scicli, Militello and Vizzini the town centre moved to an adjacent lower area. In Ragusa, a new area was built on site higher than the original site, but flatter and allowing greater access to the Iblean plateau. See Huet in Nocera, ed. (1983): 16.

286 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 28 August 1698.

287 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 28 August 1698, f.3.

288 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 28 August 1698, ff.3-4.

289 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 28 August 1698, f.6. Asmundo does not specify this enemy, but there was a fear of attack from the Ottoman Empire or from North African pirates.

290 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 28 August 1698, f.5.


292 ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 28 August 1698, f.7.

293 ASN, Consigli Civici, Vol. 616. Text in Dufour and Raymond (1990), 96-98.

294 “L’essere in un posto girato di mura bastioni, castello, fortificata ad uso di guerra di Don Ferdinando Gonzaga con solo due entrate, con due porte tanto si come sempre non patì mai ne scorrerie ne contagi, e sempre fu ben guardata, e fu fatta Piazze di Arme per soccorrere sempre Siracusa con soldatesca e munitione di guerra e di bocca.” (Being in a place surrounded by bastioned walls, a castle, fortified for war by Don Ferdinando Gonzaga with only two entrances, with two gates which never suffered invasion or plague, and was always well guarded, and was made garrison to always
Impellizzeri in Dufour and Raymond (1990): 96.


Asmundo’s letter mainly covers the 2 years and 2 months that he lived in Noto. He reports: “s’elessero quattro deputati nobili ed ecclesiastici per la designazione della città e delle strade che seguì secondo il disegno fatto del fratello Angelo Italia gesuit ingegniere.” (Four deputies were elected, noble and clerical, for the construction of the town according to the design by Brother Angelo Italia, Jesuit and engineer). ASP, Real Segretaria, Incartamenti 2462, 28 August 1698, f. 4. The anonymous author of Del nuovo risorgimento e costruzione della città di Noto, nel sito dove al presente si trova, dopo l’orribile tremuoto dell’anno 1693, accaduto in tutta Sicilia, a history of Noto written after 1727 writes: “quietaronsi alla fin fine i nobili e plebei, e si diedero a maggiormente insistere alla nuova costruzione, avendo fatto disegnare le strade con più ordine e proprietà da un fratello gesuit nominato fra [text missing] Italia, che ne cavò il disegno da un libro di piante di città.” (At the very end, when the nobles and non-nobles had calmed down, and the majority insisted on the new location, the streets were designed with more order and correctness by a Jesuit brother called [...] Italia, who took the design from a book of city plans). Anonymous Historian in Dufour and Raymond (1990): 125. This text is reproduced in Puglisi (1871-1901): 3-14, Gallo (1964): 116-124 and Dufour and Raymond (1990): 123-127.

The Palazzo Nicolaci is also known as the Palazzo Villadorata because the Nicolaci acquired the title of Prince of Villadorata in 1774. For all of the Noto palaces I will use the family name.

Maria Landolina inherited Bonfalà after her husband Carlo Landolina died in the 1694 plague following the earthquake. Maria Landolina remarried Adamo Asmundo and moved to Catania. Eleanora Nicolaci suggests that the Noto fiefs became less important, and then financial difficulties led to Bonfalà sale. Nicolaci (2013): 65.

Bonfalà was bought for Corradino in his mother’s name as he was under 18. The document is ASN, Atti dell’Università, vol. 616, ff. 355r-355v. See also Luminati (2009): 33. The main sources on the post-earthquake history of the Nicolaci family are the volumes of the notai in the Archivio di Stato di Noto. These are: notaio Marcello Argento (for the period 1693-1698), Francesco Maria Costa (period 1695-1708), Gaspare Leone (1705-1719), Ignatius Pintaldo (1704-1725), Nicolò Astuto (1720-1762), Vincenzo Labisi (1760-1774). This information is from Savarino (1994-1995): 2.

Michele Luminati reports that in the seventeenth century the Nicolaci paid a total of 1,200 onze annually to operate the tuna plants. Luminati (2009): 32.


Corradino’s investiture is recorded in ASP, Protonotaro del Regno, Processo d’Investitura vol. 7237, busta 1640.
In Sicily, *principe* (prince) was the highest noble title. This was followed by *duca* (duke), *marchese* (marquis), *conte* (count), and *barone* (baron).


The ruler's need for money and political support were the main reasons for the increasing sale of Sicilian titles. D’Avenia (2006): 267.


Mukerji (1997): 18. In Sicily, the problem over the changing significance of the title ‘Don’ exemplifies these complications of defining rank. The title originally indicated noble status, but it devalued as it became possible for non-aristocrats to buy the right to use the title. Between 1562 and 1678 almost 200 titles of ‘Don’ were granted in Sicily. The use of ‘Don’ by people who hadn’t bought the title added to its devaluation. D’Avenia (2006): 273- 274.

The letter’s authors are Bartolomeo Deodato, Giuseppe Maria di Lorenzo, Tommaso Impellizzeri and Vincenzo Giarratana. ASN, Atti dell’Università vol. 616, ff. 355r-355v. 25 March 1710. A brief description of the *Protonotaro del Regno’s* role is on the *Sistema archivistico nazionali* website. [san.beniculturali.it/web/san/dettaglio-soggetto-produttore?id=55222](http://san.beniculturali.it/web/san/dettaglio-soggetto-produttore?id=55222)

ASN, Atti dell’Università vol. 616: f. 355r. 25 March 1710.

The full passage reads: “non esser stato né il detto Don Corradino Nicolaci ne il quondam suo padre, e suoi antenati di nascita nobile, e pero mai essere stati nella Mastra Giuratoria; si ritrova bensì il detto Don Corradino primo Barone, con haver comprato il fego di Bonfalà, delli feghi nobili di questo territorio, et haversi trattenuto col decoro conveniente, e per altro l'officij nobili di questa predetta città, sono stati sempre amministrati, e conferiti a persone nobili in conformità di privilegij osservati per inveterata consuetudine, e però stimiamo non concorrere nel detto Don Corradino tutti li requisiti necessarij, pe abilitarlo nella Mastra Giuratoria di questa città.” (Because neither D. Corradino Nicolaci nor his late father or ancestors were of noble birth, and had never served as giurati, we find that the said Don Corradino primo barone, having bought the fief of Bonfalà, the noble fiefs of this territory, treated with the proper decorum, as well as the noble offices of this city, have always been administered and conferred in noble persons in conformity with privileges observed through inveterate custom, and we believe the said Don Corradino does not have the necessary requisites to be conferred as a *giurato* of this city). ASN, Atti dell'Università vol. 616, ff. 355r-355v. 25 March 1710.

The Giunta di Sicilia was instituted by Charles of Bourbon. It comprised mainly of Sicilian nobles and advised the Bourbon monarch on Sicilian affairs. Stefano Piazza notes that its powers balanced those of the Sicilian viceroy. Piazza (2009): 309. See also Da San Gaetano (1761): 1.
320 (Where justly employed in bringing it [the academy] to beautiful study by a clear light, to come together from all sides, should praise him as a hero, whose merits have made famous this his native city, which they consecrate obsequiously to him, who is celebrated for the ancient nobility of his ancestors, and through who the city now fortunately receives singular glory and splendour). Da San Gaetano (1761): 4.

321 (He is nourished in piety by both his famous parent Don Corradino Nicolaci, whose singular bright virtue and lively nature must be what we remember, and by the noble mother Donna Dorotea Bellia, who was the example of the honourable matrons of this noble land). Da San Gaetano (1761): 10.

322 Michele Luminati notes that the Nicolaci’s acquisition of titles, and land for a palace, go hand in hand: “D’altronde questo processo di espansione ‘territoriale’, culminate nella costruzione dell’attuale palazzo, va di pari passo con l’ascesa e il consolidamento della posizione sociale della famiglia Nicolaci, che con Giacomo Nicolaci esprime il suo più importante rappresentante.” (This process of ‘territorial’ expansion, culminating in the building of the present palace, occurs in step with the rise and social consolidation of the Nicolaci family, who express their most important representation with Giacomo Nicolaci). Luminati (2009): 36.

323 In a message to this author, Francesco Benigno posited that the law of Toledo and Maqueda was from two different laws issued by the viceroys Garcia Alvarez de Toledo y Osorio, viceroy 1565-68, and Antonio Cardenas, Duke of Maqueda, viceroy 1598-1601. See Pragmaticarum Regni Siciliae Novissima Collectio (1635-1658). On the law’s application in Palermo, Antonio Cottone and Silvia Pennisi report: “Il privilegio si qualificò come una legge eccezionale, dettata dalla pubblica necessità ed utilità, e per favorire sempre l’ornamento ed il decoro della città di Palermo e rese possibili espropri su larga scala, permettendo di pagare le aree espropriate con una equa rendita calcolata come l’8% dell’affitto. Inoltre conteneva clausole a vantaggio dei privati che avrebbero acquistato e ricostruito in brevi tempi.” (The privilege qualified as an exceptional law dictated by public necessity and utility, and permanently favouring the ornament and decorum of Palermo and allowing large scale expropriations, where the expropriated area can be paid with an amount calculated at 8% of the rental value. It also contained clauses rewarding those who bought and constructed quickly). Cottone and Pennisi (2001): 19.


326 The caption in the top left of the complete map gives Paolo Labisi, 1749, as the author and date.
As well as those [religious buildings] described [in a second part of the key] below, there are 20 houses of nobles, these being Principe di Villadorata, 2. Marchese di Talzana. 3. Marchese di Cannicarao…).

334 See endnote 42 and my discussion in the introduction pages 17-19 on the reception of Val di Noto ornament.


336 “The themes carved on misericords are generally taken from romances, burlesques, everyday life, with much satire especially of the clergy, and a great number of monstrous hybrids based on the Bestiary. Thus, misericords, although an intrinsic part of church decoration, represent profane, rather than religious subject matter; many of the scenes do, however, have moral implications, and the temptations of the devil are forever present”. Grössinger (1997): 13. On scatological themes see pages 109-114.

337 “It is thought that the reasons for dividing the religious community from the laity by screens was to protect them from distraction during services. Grössinger (1997): 13. In the footnote Grössinger references Peter Draper “Architecture and Liturgy” in Alexander, J. and Binski, P. eds. Age of Chivalry (London, 1987): 84.


344 “I favour an impure or mixed centre combining with the serious and the delightful on the edge”. On the way that the centre might also produce subversive forms, Binski writes: “The marginal is held to be a space of subversive utopian sign play in which oral, vernacular or folk tradition play a large role […] But there is a counter-argument that precisely looks at origins and which necessarily sets aside the idea that marginal art is essentially the sole domain of ‘low’ culture”. Binski (2014): 286.

345 Binski critiques modernism and “the counterculturism of the 1960s – that produced that apparently postmodern phenomenon of the last thirty years or so, the thrillingly dirty subversive margin and the cleansed, lofty ‘dead’ centre. In order that high culture and the centre should be subverted or actually toppled, the nature and extent of their power had first to be established”. Binski (2014): 286.

346 Fraser (1990) 6-7, 145-149 and 153.


349 Sureda (2008): 35. On the same page Sureda cites Raphael’s pupil Giovanni da Udine as the main painter of the Stufetta and Loggetta. She also lists Bartolomé Ordoñez, Diego Siloé, Pedro Machuca and Alonso Berruguete among the Spanish painters who studied in Italy. The Codex Escurialensis is a collection of architectural drawings by an anonymous Florentine artist, possibly executed in 1509 and then brought to Spain. See Scaglia (2004): 375.
Discussions of hybridity and resistance in Spanish American art include Bailey (2012): 363-378, Zamora and Kaup (2010): 20-23 and Salgado (1999): 316-317 and 323. These go beyond the scope of this dissertation, but one of the problems in connecting Latin America and Sicily is that analyses of hybrid works from the American colonies, such as Bailey’s discussion of the Virgen del cerro rico (Bailey, 2012: 374-375), often read the work in terms of two different, independently-developed iconographic systems, Inca and Spanish, operating in the same artwork. The Latin American artworks therefore allow for a reading that matches images to either Inca or Spanish traditions. The Sicilian situation is much more complex. I argue that the aporetic elements in the Val di Noto decoration cannot be assigned to any textual, iconographical system.


In the preface, Grössinger states one of her aims as giving the misericords an iconographical context, and mentions similarities with Camille’s approach. Grössinger (1997): 7.

Grössinger (1997) gives examples of sayings and popular tales such as Reynard the Fox and the riddle of the clever daughter (pages 15-17, 68, 103). The sections in Part Two on Christian iconology, the bestiary and courtly romances are on pages 126-130, 135-143 and 148-153.


Tobriner (1982): 126. On page 127, fig. 72, Tobriner reproduces an anonymous and undated drawing from the Mazza collection, Syracuse that copies parts of Vignola’s Regola del Cinque Ordini (1635 edition): plates XVIII and XX. The contrast between the portal decoration and the ornate mensole of the balconies leads Tobriner to read the facade as an ensemble of international and local architectural elements, co-existing but not mixing: “The most boisterous decoration in Noto, the balconies of the Nicolaci palace, fit into a pristinely plain facade. Below the prancing horses, floating maidens and angry lions which support the balcony one finds a portal which is taken directly from Vignola’s Regola delle cinque ordini d’Architettura. This unlikely combination of provincial and classical ornaments explains some of the fresh quality of Noto’s architecture: two very different styles appear to fit the same severe building”.


The information on Ferdinand II and the two smaller facades in the south-western part of the Palazzo Landolina isolato is from a message to the author from Mercedes Bares of Palermo University. Mercedes Bares was involved in the restoration of the palace.

The Palazzo Landolina is also known as the Palazzo Sant’Alfano. In 1949 the palace was given to the Bishopric of Noto. Balsamo (2013): 196.


The date of 1752 is on the arch inside the entrance hall. The Palazzo Impellizzeri is one of the largest in Noto, with 48 rooms. Balsamo (2013): 196. Most of the palace is now the Noto branch of the Archivio di Stato di Siracusa.

Sulla base degli atti relativi alla costruzione dei notai Nicolò Labisi, padre e figlio, del 1749 e 1791/92, pubblicati nel 1972 e 1976, si deve ritenere che tutto il complesso sia alla fine il prodotto di almeno tre fasi costruttive contenute entro un periodo di oltre 40 anni. (On the basis of documents related to the construction by the notaries Nicolò Labisi, father and son, from 1749 and 1791/92, one must conclude that all of the complex is the product of at least 3 construction phases carried out over a period of more than 40 years). Hofer (2015): 91.

Stephen Tobriner believes Labisi’s drawing to date from 1750-1760. See discussion earlier in this chapter.

“Voglio, ordino e commando che di mio erede universale debba a sue proprie spese finire e terminare per intiero il divisato appaltato con tutti li suoi annessi e connessi e comodità dentro l’improrogabili termini di 3 anni, da corrire dal giorno della mia morte…” (I wish, order and command that my universal heir must, at his own expense, finish and terminate completely the divided building project with all its annexes and connections and facilities within the unextendable term of 3 years, to begin from the day of my death…). ASN, notaio Nicolò Astuto junior. Vol. 8371, 23 March 1791, ff. 297v-298r.

“tempo [illegible] prefisso a poter terminare di mio erede universale il quarto medio di essa mia casa nuova a sue proprie spese ed ammobiliarlo ancora secondo la propria condizione di mia moglie, e figli secondogeniti, ed a poter pure terminare, e finire tutte le officine di sotto di esso con la sua stalla, e carrettaria come sopra ho disposto ed ordinato.” (The time [illegible] fixed for my universal heir to finish the middle apartment of my new house at his own expense and to also furnish it according to the right conditions for my wife and second son, and to complete it and finish all of the storehouses below with their stables and entrance as I have laid out and ordered above). ASN, notaio Nicolò Astuto junior. Vol. 8371, 23 March 1791, ff. 287r-304v.

The contract with Giuseppe Musco and Francesco di Tommaso is ASN. Notaio Nicolò Astuto junior. Volume 8371, 15 August 1791, ff. 527r and v. The contract with Aloisio Morello is ASN. Notaio Nicolò Astuto junior. Volume 8371, 16 April 1791, ff. 349r -350r.

The sale of the land to the diocese is ASN, notaio Felice Valvo, Atto 8 February 1855. Cited in Balsamo (2013): 197.

The Villa Palagonia was commissioned c.1715 and built in several phases throughout the eighteenth century. Tommaso Maria Napoli designed the villa but Agostino Daidone implemented the construction. Between 1751 and 1772 Rosario L’Avocato worked on the palace. He may be the sculptor of the garden statues. Zalapì (2004): 152. See also the Villa Palagonia official website www.villapalagonia.it/storia/storia.html. Tommaso Maria Napoli began the Villa Valguarnera in 1714, but Salvatore Boscarino suggests Giovanni Battista Cascione Vaccarini and Vittorio Fiorelli built the curved arcade between 1761 and 1785. Boscarino (1997): 228.


This hybrid decoration can be seen on facades such as the Palazzo Massa and Convento dei Benedettini in Catania, the Palazzo Cosentini in Ragusa, and the Villa Palagonia in Palermo, and many others.


“Especially for sovereigns, who must reform by example their vassals’ excesses, it is necessary to kick away superfluity, because the intolerable luxury of rulers is perhaps one of the principal causes of the people’s grievances.” Carafa (1692). Book One: 87. Book One of Opere Politiche Cristiane is a reprint of Carlo Maria Carafa’s earlier Istruttione Cristiana per i Principi e Regnanti (Mazzarino, 1687).

“The prince must therefore restrain the pomp and luxuries of his subjects, these were enough to ruin the first kings of the world, while magnificence of the table, splendour of dress and arrogance in building, surpassing their real power, come in consequence to ruin the foundations for the preservation of states.” Carafa (1692): 88.

“The prince must have virtuous actions as an object of marvel, not pompous clothes, it being more beautiful and worthy of a king to have a composed and ornate soul, than the clothes of the body. By his own hand God gave to Adam a clothing of skin, without any ornament, to show that the prince, who is God's successor in command, must dress without any pomp, nor change matter into many forms invented for mere vanity or caprice.” Carafa (1692): 87-88.


On beauty and ornament, Alberti writes: “Beauty is some inherent property, to be found suffused all through the body of that which may be called beautiful; whereas ornament, rather than being inherent, has the character of something attached or additional.” Alberti (1988): 156.

“The feminine materiality of the building is given a masculine order and then masked off by a white skin. The skin effaces the transformation from masculine to feminine and maintains a division, a visible line, between structure and decoration as a gender division.” Wigley adds: “Alberti is again closely following Xenophon, who condemns feminine makeup in favor of masculine transparency which discloses 'our belongings just as they are, without boasting of imaginary possessions or concealing any part of what we have, or by trying to trick you with an exaggerated account'.” Wigley in Colomina, ed. (1992): 354-356.


Accounts by eighteenth and early nineteenth-century visitors to the palace include Von Riedesel (1771), Brydone (1773), Vivant Denon (1780), Houel (1782-1787), Balsamo (1811), Wright-Vaughan (1811), and Goethe (1816-1817).


Stefano Piazza has written on the palaces of Palermo. See Piazza, (2005.a and b, and 2010).


"L’architettura civile della città nobiliare del Settecento catanese è caratterizzata dalla presenza di tre tipi edilizi: il palazzo a forma di blocco, il palazzo con giardino pensile e la villa suburbana." (The civil architecture of the aristocratic city of eighteenth-century Catania is characterized by the presence of three building types: the palace in the form of a block, the palace with hanging garden, and the suburban villa).


Blunt (1968): note next to plate 41. Pages not numbered.


“The interventions in the internal transformation, the work of Battaglia (in particular the ballroom and the musicians’ staircase) can be considered the highest points reached by the rococo taste in Catania.” Boscarino (1997): 236.


The original manuscripts are in the Biblioteca Ursino-Recupero, Catania, U.R. Mss. B.22. Ligresti speculates that Domenico Sestini, librarian at the palace 1774-1777, supervised the catalogue but the handwriting of the document itself is not Sestini’s. Ligresti (1976 and 1977): 276-277.


Leanti does not specify the differences between these Spanish and French styles. Seventeenth-century Spanish fashions did continued in Sicily into the eighteenth century. Doreen Yarwood observes that in the seventeenth century: “Spanish dress was characterized by its elegance, austerity, rigidity and superb decoration. Black was the dominant colour for normal wear; gayer colours for special, festive occasions. Fabrics were rich and heavy; decoration was in gold and silver thread, with jewels and pearls.” Yarwood (1975): 112. Yarwood also notes that by the middle of the seventeenth
century, Spanish dress seemed more rigid than French dress: "It was in 1660, on the occasion of the marriage of Maria Theresa, daughter of Philip IV of Spain, to Louis XIV of France, that the two courts met and the contrast between the be-ribboned, petticoat-breeched French and the corseted, farthingaled Spanish became so apparent. It was after this meeting that Spanish dress gradually came into line and followed French fashions for the rest of the century." Yarwood (1975): 167.

419 On dress, Leanti writes: "per fino al trascorso Secolo vestivano alla Spagnuola; vanno ora dietro alle varie mode di Francia: benché alcune poche Matrone, Regji Ministri, e quasi tutte le Donne civili, et di minor condizione, proseguono a vestire alla Spagnuola." (Up to the last century they dressed in the Spanish way. Now they follow the various fashions of France, although a few matrons, the royal ministers, and almost all of the townswomen and women of minor rank continue to dress in the Spanish way). Leanti (1761): 24-25. On food: "negli ultimi tempi mangiavano alla moda Spagnuola, ora la maggior parte de’Nobili si accomoda alla Franzese." (In recent times they ate in the Spanish style, now the majority of nobles shift to the French way). Leanti (1761): 28.

420 "Every occasion was good for organizing dances that not only favoured amorous intrigues, but also the century’s mania for speaking French." Policastro (1950): 214.


422 “They show the greatest refinement, and are well educated. They speak French extremely well, and are full of talent for music and other diverse arts.” Von Riedesel (1821): 83.

423 “But the fastidiousness of certain French people is so arrogant that, on arrival in Italy, at the first taste of one of our dishes cooked in a different way from how they do it beyond the Alps, even though they’re poor men such as dance teachers or language teachers, they declare it a detestable dish.” Roberti (1772): 187. In their history of Italian food, Capetti and Montanari (2005): 138 refer to this passage from Roberti.

424 Giovio (1789): 23-121 discusses Roberti’s poems, treatises and letters. See also the Treccani Enciclopedia Italiana di scienze, lettere ed arti online edition http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/roberti-giovanni-battista-conte/

425 Vivant Denon in Mozzillo, Vallet, and Mascoli, eds. (1979): 236. (I thought I saw our noisy French ‘petits maîtres’, all occupied with livery, dogs and horses, still amazed by the luxury and the uproar they were allowed).

426 After the 1693 earthquake, Catania was completely rebuilt. It was one of the cities that suffered the highest number of casualties and the greatest destruction. Stephen Tobriner estimates the total fatalities as 16,000 in a population of 18,914, almost 90% of the inhabitants. (Tobriner, 1982): 207. On the destruction of the city, a report to the King of Spain on the day of the second earthquake reads: “la ciudad de Catania a quedado como la palma de la mano, menos las murallas que miran a la mar, habiendo soterrado sus ruínas más de 16 almas.” (The city of Catania is left like the palm of a hand, without the walls that look out to sea, having buried beneath its ruined 16 souls). Archivo General de Simancas, Estado 3507, no. 4, 11 January 1693. The text is reproduced in Tobriner (1982): 226, doc. 1.

427 The Paternò traced their ancestry in Sicily to a knight who arrived with king Roger in the eleventh century. The Castello are first recorded owning fiefs in Sicily in the fifteenth century. There were several branches of the extended family. Cadet branches owned at least two other palaces. The Paternò Castello acquired the title of Princes of Biscari in 1633. Mango di Casalgerardo (1912). Entry on the Paternò family. Available online regione.sicilia.it/beniculturali/bibliotecacentrale/mango/casas/htm. See also Calabrese (2012): 1-9.

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For example, in 1670 the senate of Catania chose Vincenzo Paternò Castello to travel to the court in Madrid to plead tax exemption and financial aid for Catania after the 1669 eruption of Etna. This was an important role as Vincenzo Paternò Castello needed to secure the most favourable financial terms from the Spanish king in order to rebuild the city and aid economic recovery after the eruption. Ligresti (2006): 112.

8 officials governed Catania. The patrizio was the most senior role in the government. The capitano di giustizia was responsible for the legal system and law and order. There were also 6 senatori.


Between 1729-1739. Prince Vincenzo Paternò Castello commissioned Ignazio Martinez, described on one of the paintings as “regius mathematicus, to measure all of the Biscari fiefs. The paintings of the fiefs were produced from these measurements. Martinez’s maps of the fourteen fiefs are in ASC, Archivio Biscari, vols. 748/P, 755-756/P, 760-763/P, 768-771/P, 795/P, 798-799/P. See also Calabrese (2012): 127-130.

His house, which is not of small appearance, was a great temple of hospitality, and of generosity. Here came gentlemen and literati from almost all of the world; and it was the object of their admiration, and their pens.” Ardizzone (1787): 19.

Guzzetta, footnoting Libertini, cites Ignazio Paternò Castello’s annual income as 300,000 scudi. Guzzetta (2001): 12, Libertini (1930): ix. Ignazio Paternò Castello tax record for 1751 gives a net total income of 1,232 onze 3 tari. ASC, Archivio Biscari, 1255/P, f. 246r. 1 scudo equals 12 tari, 1 onza equals 30 tari. Luminati (1988): viii. The online Treccani Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani reports that Ignazio Paternò Castello spent much of the family’s wealth: “Mori il 1° sett. 1786, lasciando un patrimonio irrimediabilmente rovinato dalle sue grandi spese.” (He died on the 1st September 1786,
leaving an irredeemably ruined inheritance due to his great expenses).

443 The volume ASC, Archivio Biscari, Corrispondenza Diversa, Vol. 1074/P contains many letters written to Ignazio Paternò Castello. These include letters of recommendation from the British ambassador to Naples William Hamilton for English visitors to Sicily. ASC, Archivio Biscari, Corrispondenza Diversa, Vol. 1074/P, f. 5. r and v. There are also letters to Ignazio Paternò Castello in vol. 1098/P Lettere del Vicerè. Gran Maestro e cospicue persone and in vol.1104 bis/P Corrispondenze antiche, scientifiche. Calabrese (2010): 517-521 lists all of these letters’ writers.


446 See Agnello, G. in Various Authors (1787): 72-74.

447 Goethe (1970), Houel (1785), Saint Non (1781), Dryden (1999), Swinburne (1783-1785), Wright Vaughan (1811).

448 “That day was a day of public sadness. Almost all of the people, together in companies or congregations, the religious from all of the monasteries, the two chapters of the cathedral and from the collegiata, the roads department, the silk guild, and finally the senate in all its pomp accompanied the corpse through the streets to the Carmelite church, which imposed on all the duty to shed tears over the memory of a hero of the homeland, great friend of humanity, literary figure and patron of the learned.” Ferrara (1829): 257.

449 The lying in state of a Sicilian nobleman could continue for many days. Arcangelo Leanti, writing on Sicilian funerals in 1761, reports that the relatives of a deceased woman remain at home to take condolences for three days, but the time is thirty days for the relatives of a deceased man. Leanti (1761): 47.

454 “The ballroom should be one of the largest rooms, with an elevated balcony for the orchestra, and with staircases around it to hold a greater number of spectators. Its most convenient form is circular, elliptical or polygonal.” Milizia (1785) Vol.2: 108.


456 “I migliori ornamenti per questa sala sono i cristalli a specchi, a placche, a lampadari tra gli ordini d’architettura nel marmo più bello. Stabili una volta questi ornati non si ha più da scombussolare la casa in occasione di tali spettacoli.” (The best decoration for this room is crystal glass in mirrors,
sheets, or chandeliers between architectural orders of the most beautiful marble. Once these ornaments are installed, there is no need to disorder the house on the occasion of any spectacle.


Vincenzo Paternò Castello married in June 1772, but the ‘festino’ celebrating this was held in the following year. Librando cites ASC, Archivio Biscari, Libro Maestro VIII f. 265 for a payment in February 1773 for Vincenzo Paternò Castello’s “festino”. Librando (1971): 79.n.104. See also Calabrese (2012): 699.

Librando (1971): 80.n. 106 describes the alcove as “-‘L’alcova nobile’, dove, in occasione delle nascite, veniva apparecchiato il ‘letto di parata’.” (The alcova nobile, where, on the occasion of births, the ‘letto di parata’ [display bed] was set up”. The alcove and the Biscari arms are also referred to in Bennett (2010): 16 and 21-22. On the *letto di parata* in eighteenth-century Palermitan palaces, Stefano Piazza writes: “in realtà la camera del letto di parata si era già da tempo imposta come un ulteriore indicazione dello status sociale e quindi la ritroviamo anche nelle grandi dimore in aggiunta ai ‘camerone’ delle feste”. (In reality the room with the *letto di parata* was already established as an ulterior indication of social status and therefore we also find it adjacent to the ballroom in important residences). Piazza does not substantiate how the *letto di parata* furthered social status. Piazza (2005.b.): 192.

Van Rensselaer (1879): 295.

Librando posits that the stucco is by Gioacchino Gianforma and Ignazio Mazzeo due to their documented presence in Catania at the Abbazia dei Benedettini. Librando (1971): 80.


“Gold is said to be the sun of chemicals. It is found in subterranean mines, in the grit of springs, in rivers, in sand and in rocks. It is a true metal, completely perfect. It does not decay, nor can it be corrupted by fire, neither can any part become burnt, as Fallopio says, neither can it be tainted by rust. When rubbed it does not leave any black or yellow mark as almost all metals do, as affirms Berenguccio. It has no odour, or taste, nor is it poisonous to eat, like some others, but is often a medicine to some illnesses, also by its great perfection and beauty, it is a universal opinion that gold gives great jovial virtue to men.” Gimma (1730) Vol. 2: 98. Gabriele Fallopio was a sixteenth-century writer on medicine and anatomy. Vannoccio Biringuccio was the author of *De la pirotechnia* (Venice, 1540), a treatise on metalworking.


In his *Natural History* Pliny describes its malleability. “Nor is any other material more malleable or able to be divided into more portions, seeing that an ounce of gold can be beaten out into 750 or more leaves 4 inches square.” Pliny (1949-54). Book 33. Section XIX.

For gold leaf, Angelo Guidotti’s *Nuovo trattato di qualsivoglia sorte di vernice* (Bologna, 1764), a manual written at the same time as the creation of the Palazzo Biscari ballroom, describes how ammoniac was used to fix gold to any surface. Guidotti (1764): 26-27.

Swinburne (1790) Vol.4: 199 and 200. Writing on the Sicilian economy in 1818, the economist Salvatore Scuderi notes the continued preference for foreign luxury items: “In Sicilia havvi il costume di pregarsi più le manifatture straniere, che le nazionali, e soprattutto quelle di lusso. Questo costume, che non da altro proviene se non dalla vanità di far pompa di ciò ch’è peregrine, dalla fraivolezza di trovar raro ciò ch’è marcatò col conio dell’industria straniera, oppone un forte ostacolo allo smercio delle nostre manifatture.” (In Sicily there has been the custom of pricing foreign manufactures than the national [products], especially luxurious ones. This custom, which comes from nowhere else but the vanity to show off what is foreign, and from the frivolity of finding precious what is marked with the
manufacturing stamp of foreign industry, sets a great obstacle to the trade of our manufactures). 
Scuderi (1818): 89.

468 Swinburne describes Sicily as “still the never-failing granary of Europe.” Swinburne (1790) Vol.4: 198,199,200.

469 Gimma uses “India” to refer to the Spanish Americas: “Questa grande abbondanza di oro, che nell’India si trovava, è stata certamente meravigliosa. In Colao, Provincia, si trovò il Tempio del Sole tutto coperto ne’ muri di piastre d’oro, e simili tempi erano in altri luoghi del Perù.” (This great abundance of gold, which is found in India, has certainly been marvellous, and in Colao, a province, we find the walls of the Temple of the Sun completely covered with gold plates, and there were similar temples in other places in Peru). “La maggiore abbondanza dell’oro pare, che nell’India si ritrovi, donde altri metalli, ed altre ricchezze ne vengono.” (The greatest abundance of gold seems to be found in India, whence other metals and riches come). Gimma (1730) Vol.2: 107 and 117. “Le miniere del Potosì e del Perù ci fan brillare agli sguardi quei lucidi fregi, onde il nostro lusso acquista vivo splendore.” (The mines of Potosi and Peru make these lucid signs shine when seen, where our luxury acquires bright splendour). Scuderi (1818): 63.

470 Leanti (1761): 220. Leanti gives no further information on the Bourbon government’s project to mine minerals in Sicily. It is possible that the size of the deposits meant that most metals were still imported.

471 Leanti includes “Contarie di cristallo da Venezia e da Boemia” in his list of Sicilian imports. Leanti (1761): 220.

472 For example, Frederik IV of Denmark was given “several hundred pieces” of glass when he visited Venice between 1708 and 1709. He created a special display room for the glass in Rosenborg Castle. Liefkes, ed. (1997): 48.

473 “Towards the end of the seventeenth century the supremacy of Venetian glass came to an end. European taste had changed, and much heavier English lead glass and Central European chalk glass were much better suited to the new taste for robust shapes and engraved decoration.” Liefkes, ed. (1997): 58. Venice continued to supply an Italian market however. Graham Child writes: “Glass making in Venice during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries turned to a domestic market which catered for the ruling and bourgeois classes and satisfied the growing tourist trade.” Child (1990): 29.


475 Pliny the Elder comments on this connection between luxury and fragility. He describes how cups of gold and silver were discarded in favour of crystal: “Afterwards these were flung aside and began to be held of no account, when there was an excess of gold and silver. Out of the same earth we dug supplies of fluorspar and crystal, things which their mere fragility rendered costly. It came to be deemed the proof of wealth, the true glory of luxury, to possess something that might be absolutely destroyed in a moment.” Pliny the Elder (1949-1954): Book 23. Section II.


478 Hadicquer de Blancourt (Paris, 1697). English translation of 1699: Page 3 of preface. On pp. 7-8, Hadicquer de Blancourt cites John: 20. 18 on the Heavenly City made of gold as clear as glass, and Job: 28.17 where God’s wisdom is greater than gold or crystal.


On the older, polished metal mirrors, Hadicquer de Blancourt writes: “we already noted in the first chapter, that ‘tis about two hundred years since the invention of looking-glasses, and also how they were found out. Before these the ladies made use of steel, or copper, or well polished marble mirrors, these have been in use for many ages.” Hadicquer de Blancourt (Paris, 1697). English translation (1699): 339. The quotation from Gimma is Gimma (1730): 322.


On Sebastiano Lo Monaco and the Palazzo Biscari, see Librando (1971): 80-81.

Kathleen Bennett, quoting Francesco Fichera, suggests that the sprigs represent the grain that Ignazio Paternò Castello gave to the people of Catania during the 1763 grain shortage. Fichera (1925): 52. Bennett (2010): 18.

Ovid’s story of Ceres and Persephone is located in Sicily. After Persephone’s abduction, Ceres searches for her around the mouth of Etna: “Thus, while thro’ all the Earth, and all the main, her daughter mournful Ceres sought in vain; Aurora, when with dewy looks she rose, nor burnish’d Vesper found her in repose, at Aetna’s flaming mouth two pitchy pines to light her in her search at length she tines.” Garth (1998) Book 5: 154.

Thucydides (1982): 358. Later Sicilian writers such as Tommaso Fazello and Arcangelo Leanti referred to Sicily as the island of the Cyclopes. Fazello writes: “Beroso, ed Omero, e molti altri scrittori di cose antiche affermano che i Ciclopi furono i primi ch’abitassero la Sicilia.” (Beroso and Homer, and many other writers on ancient matters affirm that the Cyclopes were the first to inhabit Sicily). Fazello (1817, originally 1558): 63. Leanti affirms: “E perciò la Sicilia, per testimonianza dell’antichissimo Omero, venne in prìa nominata Isola de Ciclopi.” (And therefore Sicily, from the testimony of the most ancient Homer, came at first to be called ‘Island of the Cyclopes’). Leanti (1761): 5.

Sestini (1787): 103-104.

“Unfurl, mean helmsman, the bold sails, trust your eager hope to the sea, to the winds, and Neptune displeased, and Eolius too: As long as the wave is faithful, with the passengers content with rich merchandise, have faith: but if the sea is turbulent, pallid is the face, through thousands of risks one feels pain, breathless and moaning; and the peril grows, afflicted, exhausted one regrets ever leaving port. To second each one the innate disdain of the King one becomes anger’s minister, Mars remains bloody, and fierce.” Text in Sestini (1787): 103-104.


“The ideology of natural taste owes its plausibility and its efficacy to the fact that, like all the ideological strategies generated in the everyday class struggle, it naturalizes real differences, converting differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature; it only recognizes as legitimate the relation to culture (or language) which least bears the visible marks of its genesis, which has nothing ‘academic’, ‘scholastic’, ‘bookish’, ‘affected’ or ‘studied’ about it, but manifests by its ease and naturalness that true culture is nature - a new mystery of immaculate conception.” Bourdieu (1990): 54.

“...The division into classes performed by sociology leads to the common root of the classifiable practices which agents produce and of the classificatory judgments they make of other agents’ practices and their own. The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgments and the system of classification (principium divisionis) of these practices. It is the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e. the space of life-styles, is constituted.” Bourdieu (2010): 165-166.
Bourdieu (2010): 61. On page 64, Bourdieu quotes the Chevalier de Méré’s *De la conversation* (Paris, 1677). “I would have a man know everything and yet, by his manner of speaking, not be convicted of having studied.”

Wright Vaughan (1811): xlviii.


Mickaël Bouffard notes: “European portraitists, in fact, made such extensive use of these five positions that, by the eighteenth century, they had become as much a commonplace of swagger portraiture as the column and drapery we almost systematically find in the background of this type of portrait.” Bouffard’s article discusses many of these portraits. Bouffard (2012): 170.

“The extremely sophisticated postures of seventeenth and eighteenth-century portraiture reflect painters’ preoccupation with lending distinction to persons of quality through the language of all parts of the body. These preoccupations were also those of a culture of civility and politeness that looked to exterior signs for sound testimonies of a person’s soul and birth. These signs could only be provided by one’s appearance, and thus the body was the vehicle of distinction *par excellence*.” Bouffard (2012): 167.


Chandra Mukerji writes: “Aristocratic men fill their days with physical activities that would render them good soldiers, graceful courtiers and elegant dancers. These physical attributes were taken as marks of their “natural” virtue and social superiority. These codified forms of body control helped to produce a distinctive posture, movement, and set of gestures identified with the French aristocracy.” Mukerji (1997): 241. Roy Strong argues: “the ballet emerged as the epitome in microcosm of a correctly ordered body politic.” Strong (1981): 14 quoted in Zorach (2005): 224.

“And in truth there is nothing in this more magnificent, and which gives more delight, than the festival of the ball, in which those who can dance perfectly make themselves admired, and distinguished from the rest. This noble pursuit, not being so violent, but moderate, as well as being necessary for people of distinction, serves equally to those who need it, to remain in good health and to exercise the body.” Dufort (1728): Unnumbered pages 5-6 of *Avviso a chi Legge* section.

“Not only delight, as some others believe, is the objective of this pleasurable faculty; but the utility that can be gained is more than sweet; I dare to say that it makes itself necessary and important for a gentleman. The way to present oneself in a conversation, to receive people at home with politeness, how to control oneself in a discussion, and recognise people with greetings and respect, are all things that one learns from dance.” Magri (1779) Vol.1: 13.

Dufort (1728): Unnumbered pages 5-6 of *Avviso a chi Legge* section.

“It is dance which gives grace to the advantages we receive from nature, in regulating all of the movements of the body, and affirming them in their correct positions: and if dance does not efface completely the defects we carry from birth, it reduces them, or hides them. This sole definition is enough to show its usefulness, and to excite the desire to master it.” Rameau (1725): ix. Later in the eighteenth century, Charles Compan in his *Dictionnaire de Danse* (Paris, 1787) repeats Rameau’s sentences, unattributed and with small changes of wording. Compan (1787): viii. On Rameau and the Spanish court, see Allanbrook and Hilton (1992): 144.

“This dance is one of the three noble exercises taught in all of the academies and colleges of Europe, which are riding, fencing and dancing. The last of which gives grace to people who are well made, and hides the defects of those to whom nature has been less liberal with her gifts. This, then, is
the most noble and graceful entertainment, both at the sovereign courts and other important cities.”
Dufort (1728): Unnumbered pages 5-6 of the *Avviso a chi Legge* section.

507 “Not only this, it also gives to the body parts a beautiful disposition, which from dance is given to our body to provide it with a new symmetry: but it only makes more disposed and well placed that thing itself which the human body had from nature.” Magri (1779) Vol.1: 13.

508 Rameau (1725), Magri (1779).

509 Louis XIV (1661). On the importance of dance for Louis XIV, Chandra Mukerji writes: “The importance of ballet to this culture of the courtier under Louis XIV cannot be overestimated. The king appointed a court ballet-master to ensure that the nobles had dancing lessons, and he elevated the dance as an art form by setting up an Academy of dance.” Mukerji (1997): 241.

510 “Know that the art of dance has always been recognised as one of the most respectable and necessary to train the body, and gives it the best and most natural posture in all sorts of exercises, among others that of arms, and is therefore the most advantageous and useful for our nobility, and for others who have the honour to approach us, not only in times of war in our armies, but also in times of peace in the entertainments of our dances: However, during the disorder and confusion of the last wars, there was introduced in the said art, as in all the others, such a great number of abuses capable of leading them to irreparable ruin, that many people through the ignorance and inability that they had installed in this art of dance, managed to show this publicly.” Louis XIV, (1661): 3-4.


512 Mukerji includes illustrations from Mallet but does not discuss the text. Mukerji (1997): 12,44,47,53, 54,57,58,90, 243, 246.

513 Mallet (1684) Vol. 3: 17.

514 Mallet (1684) Vol. 3: 16.

515 “For a battalion to be well trained, it must have parallel lines between the files as well as the ranks. This is something that the commanding officer must be very particular in making observed, as well as keeping the ranks and files straight; the sergeants who he will place between the aisles will assist greatly in this.” Mallet (1684) Vol. 3: 16.

516 Mallet (1684) Vol.3: 28-47.

517 Mallet (1684) Vol.3: 22.

518 “For ease of manoeuvres and the beauty of the exercise, it is necessary, as far as possible, that the ranks and files are in even numbers.” Mallet (1684) Vol. 3:16.


520 “Turn right, turn left, form into ranks, double them, redouble them, observe distances, align themselves, march forward, or divide into quarters, these are simple and purely mechanical movements, which each soldier needs to be trained into.” De Bosroger (1779) Vol 1: 79-80.


522 “Having enjoyed the harmony of that serenade, the celebration was crowned with a concert ball, and other imaginative dances done by the ladies, and gentlemen, each one making sure to pursue with joy the communal happiness in the present of the most excellent Viceroy, who with his joyous and generous hospitality provided spirit to the vivacity of the nobility.” La Placa (1736): 31.

Now that singing the abovementioned serenata was finished, there followed the instruments which gave spirit to a concert ball by 4 ladies, and 4 gentlemen, which alluded to the royal wedding. In the meantime the choir repeated with festive echo the finale of the serenata, upon which music the movements of the dance were based; so the nobles were entertained until six at night, served by unceasing refreshments of water, and pyramids of sugared ice, in other continuous dances alternating with ladies and gentlemen, admiring themselves for all the vivacity, festivity and ingenuity with which they celebrated with beautiful solemnity. In the other rooms of the palace there were various musical choirs, that served to delight those who wanted to stay. La Placa (1736): 68.

Venuta la sera s’adunò tutta la nobiltà nel Palagio Senatorio, che in tutte le sue stanze era splendidamente adorno di rare tappezzarie, e illuminato, con massicce chioce di argento, e moltiplicate lumiere. (When the evening arrived, all of the nobility gathered in the senate palace, where all its rooms were splendidly adorned with rare tapestries, and illuminated with enormous pieces of silver and many lights). La Placa (1736): 57.

The body being posed following the rules prescribed above, if you want to greet someone, lift the right arm to the height of the shoulder, as shown in the first figure 1, with the hand open, 2. Then bend the elbow to take your hat, which makes a semi-circle, following the words [in the diagram], bend the elbow, the hat follows the movement from the elbow itself. Rameau (1725): 24-25.

She will have the head straight, the shoulders low and the arms held back accompanying well the body, but bent, and holding the hands one behind the other and holding a fan, but above all without affectation. Rameau (1725): 42.

It is necessary that the movements of the soul [emotions] are moderated in conversation: and as one does well to keep away as much as one can everything that makes us sad or sombre, it seems to me also that excessive laughter is out of place; and that in the majority of conversations one should not raise or lower the voice except within a certain average which depends on the subject and the circumstances. Pleasantry is strongly in fashion, but one avoids laughter when talking about pleasant things. Chevalier de Méré (1692): 57.

The languid eye demonstrates humility, which must be maintained in the minuet; because if the eye is fixed too much on its object, with this it will seem that you are distracted by concentration, if the eyes seem smiling there could fall the suspicion that there is some secret amorous intelligence.
between the dancers, having the eyes melancholic would be against the nature of the dance; therefore it is best to keep them languid, upon which no suspicion can fall.” Magri (1779) Vol. 2: 27.

540 “The innocent hands, with which one shows the simplicity of the dance, come from natural itself: but their natural behaviour must be accompanied by a movement which although artificial, must be such that the artifice appears natural, and nature becomes mixed and fused with art.” Magri (1779) Vol. 2: 28.

541 Bourdieu (470-471).


544 The poem below the image reads: “Maître habile en cet art qui plaît tant au bel âge. N’es-tu point gage par l’amour, pour que la jeune Iris ait la puissance un jour, de mettre tous les coeurs dans un doux esclavage? Ah pour un tel dessein tes soins sont superflus, sans l’ornier de grâces nouvelles, par les seules beautés qui lui sont naturelles, tous ceux qui la verront, seront bientost vaincur – Moraine.” (Able master of this art, so beloved of youth, Are you not in love’s employ, Such that young Iris will have the power one day To submit all hearts to sweet slavery? Ah, but your talents are superfluous to fulfilling this aim: Unadorned by this supplementary grace, By the sole beauty of her natural self All those who see her will soon be subdued. Moraine).

545 “Insegnar quest’atto di pulitezza cavalieresca appartiene al maestro di ballo, cui deve dare al suo discepolo le regole, e non aspettar, che il giovinetto l’apprendesse dalla prattica, e dall’esempio de’ genitori.” (Teaching this act of knightly politeness falls to the dance master, who must give rules to his disciple, and not wait until the young person learns the ability, for example from his parents). Magri (1779) Vol. 2: 46. The first volume of Magri’s treatise discusses ballet, or dance performed for aristocratic spectators. The second volume discusses ballroom dancing.

546 “Trovandosi in una festa pubblica di ballo in maschera, deve il Maestro, essendo ordinato per distribuir le piazza, disponer tutto secondo la grandezza della sala, e la quantità delle persone, che intervengono alla festa.” (Finding himself in a public masked ball, the master must, being prepared to distribute the positions, lay out everything according to the size of the room and the number of people taking part in the festivity). Magri (1779) Vol. 2: 43.

547 ASC, Archivio Biscari, vol. 1179/P: ff. 517r -544v. These volumes are records of all monthly expenses for the prince of Biscari. The payments to the maestro di cappella and maestro di casa are listed as 1 onza. 1 onza was 30 tari. From 1786, however, the wages for the maestro di cappella are halved from 1 onza (30 tari) to 15 tari. ASC, Archivio Biscari, vol. 1179/P: f. 581r. For Sicilian currency, see Luminati (1988): viii. Ignazio Paternò Castello employed Vincenzo Tobia Bellini, grandfather of the composer Vincenzo Bellini, as music teacher for his grandchildren. ASC Archivio Biscari, vol. 1179, fasc. 15, c 175r, c 235v for payments to Vincenzo Tobia Bellini. The Treccani Dizionario Biografico degli Italian reports: “Egli [Ignazio Paternò Castello] scelse il B. come maestro di cappella della propria casa e gli affidò l’istruzione musicale del nipotino Roberto, compensandolo con un vitalizio.” (He chose Bellini as chapel master of his house and entrusted him with the musical education of his grandson Roberto, compensating him with an allowance). treccani.it/encyclopedia/vincenzo-tobia-nicola-bellini_(Dizionario-Biografico)/ See also De Luca (2012): 67 and 68.

548 Mereau (1760). On page 127 Mereau coins the term Tourne Pieds.

549 “The term maintien, with regard to the art of dance, embraces everything concerning the composure of the body and the movements derived from its different parts. It is an essential point that people charged with the education of the youth must never lose from view.” Mereau (1760): 1-2.


551 Mereau (1760): 132-133.
Bouffard (2012): 177. The quotation from Diderot and D'Alembert is from Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (Paris, 1751-1782) vol.10: 35. On the same page, Bouffard reiterates the importance of French masters: “French dancing masters, having colonized the cities and courts of Europe, were in great part responsible for making good manners in Europe uniform.”

If, however, it is a ball for ladies and knights, and even if a masked ball, the Maestro di Ballo does not have to decide the places of the dances and manage the correct ruling. Firstly, because it won't be necessary as all nobles know how to organise themselves: secondly, if the Maestro takes up this inspection, he could cause some affront.” Magri (1779) Vol. 2: 45.

Meredith Ellis Little in The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians notes: “Minuets in various styles remained among the most popular dance forms of aristocratic Europe throughout the eighteenth century, exerting a continuing influence on stylized dance music”. Sadie (ed) Vol. 16: 744. On its origins, she writes: “though the origin of the minuet is unknown, it was danced in the court of Louis XIV at least by the 1660s.” Sadie, ed. (2001) Vol. 16: 740.


“Because the ballroom floor was not crowded with many dancers, the beautiful and usually symmetrical spatial patterns could be seen to advantage by all. Equally visible to the audience was the quality of the dancers.” Hilton (1981): 11.

Sadie ed. (2001) Vol. 16: 741. On the importance of the Z figure, Gianbattista Dufour notes that extra steps could be added to the minuets in his treatise, but the Z figure must always be preserved. Dufour (1728): 150.

Meredith Ellis Little writes: “One reason for the minuet’s remarkable longevity may have been the considerable variety of steps it could absorb into the basic pattern.” Sadie, ed. (2001) Vol. 16: 742.

Sadie ed. (2001) Vol. 16: 740. On the same page Ellis Little notes that “the name ‘menuet’ may have derived from the French ‘menu’ (slender, small), referring to the extremely small steps of the dance”.


Allanbrook and Hilton (1992): 144. See also McKee (2005): 420, on dancing the minuet in order of precedence at the Viennese court.

Raoul-Auger Feuillet, author of a widely circulated dance manual Recueil de Contredances mises en Choréographie (Paris, 1706), describes the dances he will demonstrate as the most beautiful, and the most commonly danced in England: “Les Anglois en sont les premiers inventeurs, toutes les contredanses d'Angleterre que l'on trouvera dans ce recuei sortant autant de pièces originales choisies entre les plus belles, et les plus suivies et gravées comme elles ont été dansées dans le pais.” (The English are its first inventors, all of the English contredances found in this collection are original pieces chosen as among the most beautiful, and the most followed and established of those that are danced in that country). Feuillet (1706): First page of preface. “Minuet steps were adapted into the contredanse, for example, creating a set of dances for two or four couples using repetitive step patterns and a variety of floor designs.” Sadie, ed. (2001) Vol. 16: 742.


(At the festivals on the very happy part of our most clement sovereign, it has been my honour to direct and invent contraddanze). Magri (1779): Vol. 2: 4.


“This sort of contraddanze is composed of a few regulated figures, and not of regulated and precise steps. But not for this, that the steps are not regulated, are all permitted to dance, but only those who can, and must, know what dance is.” Magri (1779) Vol. 2: 36.

“La contradanza si può fare, o con determinato numero di dame e di cavalieri, overo indeterminato, cioè di quante, e quanti mai ne possono entro quella stanza, ove si balla, capire.” (One can do the contradanza either with a determinate number of ladies and gentlemen, or indeterminate, that is how many women and men can fit into the room where one dances). Dufort (1728): 150.

Many of the contredances were for 4 couples, based on the French square dance called the Cotillon. “The contredanse (as a cotillon for four couples) reached its most highly developed form in the mid-eighteenth century.” Sadie, ed. (2001): 374.

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**Dissertations.**


