

Text typologies and urban phenomena: Apulia in the early modern period

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Abstract

In the Europe of the ancient regime, the identification and classification of urban settlements was problematic everywhere, but was particularly so in those areas characterized by specialized and commercialised rural economies. In large swathes of Puglia, as in Sicily, Sardinia and Castile, urban settlements surprised and alarmed generations of travelers and observers of the 18th and 19th centuries, much as they did later geographers and anthropologists. According to them, these habitats were simply “paradoxical”: conglomerations of settlements appearing as “agrotowns” that were neither cities nor villages, due to their size and to the nature of their economy.

In time, the structure of these settlements and their socio-political profile came to be viewed within the more general context of the chronic malaise that effected the South of Italy. However, without denying these common topoi, more recent interpretative lines of enquiry have revealed the extraordinary wealth of history that can be retrieved from these settlements and the complex dialectics of power that they generated. By shifting the trajectory away from the scrutiny of traditional models, the communes of the centre-north of Italy, towards a more European panorama where the cities must cope with a series of presences, desires, protests and conflicts generated by a pluralist configuration of powers, it becomes possible to re-align the concept of the “quasi-city” of the South, and more specifically, for what concerns us, Puglia.

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This approach allows us to study these sites no longer as places of weakness or the impotence of progressive forces, but as social and territorial spaces in which some of the most crucial nodes of institutional history in the Europe of the ancient regime can be recovered and re-read. It makes no attempt to be an exhaustive catalogue of texts, but selects just a few from the literature on the subject and from field work. Its aim is to explore these written documents, evaluating the levels of formalization of these texts and their role on urban memory - two aspects that appear to be inversely proportional to each other.

Keywords

Apulian urban settlement, Kingdom of Naples, Local written culture, Urban spaces.

Introduction

In the Europe of the *ancient regime*, the identification and classification of urban settlements was problematic everywhere, but was particularly so in those areas characterized by specialized and commercialised rural economies. In large swathes of Puglia, as in Sicily, Sardinia and Castile, urban settlements surprised and alarmed generations of travelers and observers of the 18th and 19th centuries, much as they did later geographers and anthropologists. According to them, these habitats were simply “paradoxical”: conglomerations of settlements appearing as “invertebrate aggregations” (Galasso, 1982, p. 54), as “agrotowns” that were neither cities – as they were deprived of the urban functions and symbols – nor villages, due to their size and to the nature of their economy.

In time, the structure of these settlements and their socio-political profile came to be viewed within the more general context of the chronic malaise that effected the South of Italy – a backwardness regarding development, the ruling classes, civic sense, technology and self-determining local government. However, without denying these common *topoi*, more recent

interpretative lines of enquiry have revealed the extraordinary wealth of history that can be retrieved from these settlements and the complex dialectics of power that they generated. By shifting the trajectory away from the scrutiny of traditional models, the communes of the centre-north of Italy, towards a more European panorama where the cities must cope with a series of presences, desires, protests and conflicts generated by a pluralist configuration of powers, it becomes possible to re-align the concept of the “quasi-city”¹ of the South, and more specifically, for what concerns us, Puglia.

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In the South of Italy in the early modern period, the patterns of settlements, that had been drastically simplified in the 14th and 15th centuries, were overlaid by new networks of power. After the huge feudal estates of the 15th century had been dismembered in favor of single jurisdictional entities that frequently occupied the same space, political and social institutions, lay and ecclesiastical, filled the gap left by the feudal lords. These were more robust, penetrating and demanding entities than the previous operating matrices. Situated at the center of the clash and negotiation among powers of different levels and nature, the southern *universitates* tried in all possible ways to defend their own prerogatives and to achieve their own aims. Paradoxically, in the face of a reduction and limitation of power by external forces, the *universitates* attempted to defend their sphere of influence more vigorously than ever before. Their *modus operandi* included the elaborate production of documents that, reflecting the politico-juridical praxis of the ancient regime, was based on the construction and manipulation of memory as the basis of identity and as a potential source of rights.

In the crucial phase of politico-dynastic reorganization of the Kingdom of Naples, this production accelerated during the most significant historical stages, generating a diversity of text typologies that are not always easy to categorize and that assume

diverse forms. These writings cannot be evaluated simply as a bottom-up response to external powers. Indeed the reactive potential of the Apulian cities cannot be presupposed: external stimulus and local reasons and contingencies overlap with often surprising results. Each text is an attempt to delineate areas and is informed by the specific and clearly identifiable aim to record all fragments of the space of the *polis* and of that which surrounds it. From this point of view, the opposition manuscript/printed book is far less important than the impact of the writings themselves.

This work makes no attempt to be an exhaustive catalogue of texts, but selects just a few from the literature on the subject and from field work. Its aim is to explore these written documents, evaluating the levels of formalization of these texts and their role on urban memory - two aspects that appear to be inversely proportional to each other.

Localities as custodians of rights: the Statute collections and the *Libri Rossi*

These texts represent the lowest formal and ‘literary’ typologies of local written culture and are strictly connected to public commissions and had a clear political function.

The statute collections frequently examined the same issues, which they attempted to explore and give a juridical classification to: the definition and regulation of the work of royal or feudal officials, the creation of municipal boundaries, the establishment of norms to regulate acquisitions on the part of citizens, the provisioning system, regulation of markets and fairs, the election or nomination of officials at the Weights and Measures office, the specification and regulation of the function of police and magistrates. From the second half of the 16th century, in parallel with the establishment of urban governing bodies, statutes were written to regulate the composition of the municipal government and the criteria for belonging to the *piazza*, sanctioning in reality the restriction of access to the government of the city and thus beginning the process of “aristocratization”. The hierarchical

structure within these settlements² was increasingly dependent on social class and noble status (Spagnoletti, 2000).

These delicate and precious texts contain a wealth of heterogeneous documentary material which, given the vicissitudes they depict, are often complicated³. One of them includes the *Provisiones de diversis rebus dictantes ad favorem magnifice universitatis civitatis Monopolis*, a collection of acts emanating from the central and peripheric authorities of the town of Monopoli from 1472 to 1727. The text documents the degree of reactivity towards the violation of jurisdiction on the part of royal officials. The text's crucial role in the life of the town is exemplified by its beleaguered history: it was stolen and then recovered thanks to the efforts of the *universitas* that, in 1769, demanded the local Curia to emit a “tremenda scomunica contra detinentes, scientes et non revelantes” of the “various and many writings concerning the privileges and interests of the Università”⁴. The volume was returned. Another similar case occurred in Monopoli in 1627 to a collection of norms dating from the 15th century onwards, established by royal commissioners who came to the city to organize the government and to oversee the hierarchy of orders. The book disappeared in 1699 and the “lords of the government” demanded the “immediate excommunication” of all those who had participated in the theft of the precious volume. In this case too, the book was returned secretly and, to avoid further problems, was recopied⁵. The new copy, however, was so “bad, with every page defaced by hundreds and thousands of corrections”, that its sense and aim were distorted (Centomani, 1742, p. 27).

In some cases statute collections become more sophisticated and were gathered, together with other typologies such as documents referring to privileges and concessions, in the *Libri Rossi*, volumes redacted most commonly in the 15th and 16th centuries (Sasse Tateo, 1993). Hermeneutically, these *Libri* signaled their importance materially, beginning from their sumptuous covers, large fonts on the frontispiece, rich decorations, elaborate titles, elegantly illuminated capitals and effigies of illustrious people who had granted a pardon or a concession.

Not all towns had a *Libro Rosso*, however, and the very fact of possessing one was an index of the city's importance. In the north of Puglia, in the province of Capitanata, only Foggia and Manfredonia possessed such a volume; to the South, in the province of Terra d'Otranto, they were found in Lecce, Taranto, Gallipoli and Ostuni. Terra di Bari, the province with the highest urban density in Puglia, had the most *Libri Rossi*: in Barletta, Trani, Altamura, Bitonto, Molfetta, Giovinazzo, Bari and Monopoli, all of which were *civitates honoratae*, part of the royal demesne or inserted in the fiefdoms of illustrious aristocratic families.

Occasionally these volumes also have a double or aggregate text. Molfetta, for example, has two *Libri Rossi*, copies of a probable, original, third manuscript, the pages of which were re-used to create the two *Libri*⁶. The *Libro Rosso* in Bari was preceded by an earlier text, the *Libro Magno*⁷, that contains transcriptions of notary acts written by two local notaries Nicolangelo and Scipione Cardassi. The two volumes are not however identical: of the 216 documents in the *Libro Magno*, only 58 appear in the *Libro Rosso*. The time period covered by the *Libro Rosso* goes from 1299 to 1667, while the *Libro Magno* covers the period 1562 to 1593. Altamura possesses both a *Libro Rosso* and a *Libro di Grazie*. The *Libro Rosso* is a textual witness to the desire of the local population to uphold their rights; it functions as an instrument in political struggles, in the defense of privileges and in the celebration of status. As a text, it depicts the continual struggle and contractual role of the *universitas* with regard to the powers of the crown, of the royal revenue department, of the Church and the Feudal lords. The decision to create a written record of this type is a political act. Let us look at Monopoli as an example. After the turbulent period of Lautrec's arrival in the South and the Venetian attempt to take the Adriatic ports, including Monopoli, the town finally set out to create its own *Libro Rosso*, which begins significantly with the transcription of the Papal Bull of 1091 that established the episcopal see, the first and most precious defining factor in the establishment of a city of a certain importance and honour. Molfetta's decision to establish a *Libro Rosso* derived from the city's urgent need to define its juridical

profile when it was enfeoffed. In fact, the beginning of the book coincides with the reign of Joanna III. With the advent of the new Lady of Molfetta, tensions between the two *piazze*, the nobility and the commoners (*popolo primario*), rapidly came to the fore and it was the *Libro Rosso*, with its declared aim of recording events “in a clear language to be understood by all” that sought to find an equilibrium between the parties. Not surprisingly, there are numerous documents in the work that refer to this period. Bitonto also had a *Libro Rosso*, known as the *Libro Senzìo*, named after the Mayor who initiated the project in 1551, following the city’s release from feudal dominion⁸. Altamura too began its *Libro* to coincide with its new status in the royal demense, conferred by an act signed by Pedro de Toledo in 1533 and reconfirmed three years later by Imperial Decree⁹.

Once the *Libri Rossi* were established, they were frequently updated with transcriptions of documents pertaining to new concessions or privileges that the *cives* received from central or peripheral authorities. The documents were essentially dynamic by virtue of their ability to conserve and pass on material that gained juridical value in relation to its capacity to constitute time-honored precedents. More than functioning as ‘minutes’, the volumes operated on the principle of selection of texts considered worth conserving for posterity, while other documents were deliberately left out and, by not appearing in the volume, were consigned to oblivion. In 1638 the *universitas* of Bitonto, just freed from the royal demense, was forced to pay 20,000 ducats to the King under threat being enfeoffed. The city paid up but was careful not to record the event in the *Libro Rosso*. At the same time, the *universitas* deliberately avoided recording the disastrous result of litigation with the local Bishop, preferring to transcribe only those documents referring to conventions and pacts with the ecclesiastic authorities that benefitted the city. In the case of Monopoli, the inclusion of transcriptions related to concessions and privileges was suddenly interrupted in 1479 and created a gap in the text that coincides with the whole period of Venetian domination of the city (Muciaccia, 1906). The other Apulian port that was subjected to the domination of the *Serenissima* was Trani. Its *Libro Rosso*¹⁰, like that of Monopoli, also

suspended its records during this period, including just two acts relative to the whole period. Significantly, both acts are relegated to the very end of the volume and occupy a clearly marginal position in the work.

On a formal level, there are frequent differences between the *Libri Rossi*, indeed there appears to be no rules of uniformity and they do not conform to any particular genre of writing, as the *Libri Iurium* do. The Bari *Libro Rosso*¹¹, known as the *Messaletto* for its similarity to the Missal, is interspersed with notary documents (dating from the period 1598-1646) from the office of the local notaries Nicolangelo and Scipione Cardassi¹², father and son, who transcribed acts onto the blank pages of the volume as a form of recycling paper. In this particular case, the disposition of these acts in the volume follows neither a chronological nor thematic order. A similar approach is taken in the Bitonto and the Trani *Libri Rossi*, but the Trani volume, however, is particularly compact, fruit of the re-elaboration of material previously recorded, and it is organized according to a thematic and chronological methodology. This *Libro* also contains indices and a coeval list of contents. The Altamura *Libro* is characterized by a consistent style, while the Monopoli *Libro* follows a chronological order starting from 1091, the date of the inauguration of the episcopal see, one of the most ancient acts to be found in any *Libro Rosso*.

Given the role of the volumes and the historical context surrounding their production, their contents and fortunes vary considerably. In Ostuni, for example, the project was doomed to fail. At the beginning of the 17th century, after a critical period characterized by the domination of the city by one powerful family, a sundry group of opposition leaders tried to seize power and exert their influence in the absence of any legitimate power, by initiating work on a *Libro Rosso* (Pepe, 1888). The project failed: not only was the book begun late (1627) and proved to be incomplete, but it failed in its wider aims to become a bastion of local autonomy and to define the spaces of local politics through the introduction of a constitutional order that could be long lasting and efficient, taking into consideration the dialectics between different groups and orders. This failure was felt by the

community as nothing short of a catastrophe. In the collective memory of the city of Ostuni, Juan de Zevallos the new lord, represented all that was evil in the land: domineering, violent and Spanish. He had a low social status but, as a court *assentista*, became extremely wealthy, second only to Bartolomeo d'Aquino (Carrino, 2006). The *universitas* of Altamura, having initiated its *Libro Rosso* as a monument to its domanial status, was then enfeoffed. Rather than organize resistance by supplicating the king or attempting to buy its autonomy, the town accepted its feudal status and abandoned the *Libro Rosso*. It began a new work, the *Libro di Grazie*, to record and document all privileges and prerogatives, to be used as the juridical bases of its future life with the new lord. This sudden change in behavior was motivated by the historical context: the new feudal lords of Altamura were not the usual, obscure family of newly rich merchants, but members of the great Farnese lineage, and were seen by most of the leading families in Altamura as preferable to a future of domanial status. The prestige of the Farnese was transferred onto the town itself; their political influence protected the town from external threats, including the pretensions of the Orsini family who were the feudal lords of neighbouring Gravina. Another reason for the city's acceptance of fiefdom was that the Farnese were resident in Parma, a comfortable distance from Altamura itself. Unlike the compact, organic *Libro Rosso*, which was begun in a precise historical moment and ended with the achievement of domanial status, the *Libro di Grazie* is a dynamic document – reflecting the nature of the *Libri Rossi* – designed to collect and conserve all new acts as they were emitted related to the relationship between the town and the Farnese (Delille, 2003), recounting its status through the concessions bestowed by the lords, the privileges gained by the town¹³.

The limits of citizenry: urban spaces as collections of lineage

Official local written cultures designed to defend the autonomy of urban centres reacted to the attempt by external forces to

contain and control these spaces, but were not able to prevent it. Between the 16th and 17th century, the institutions, language and values disseminated by the Counter-Reformation, on one hand, and processes of “aristocratization” and monarchical territorialization on the other, combined to produce organizations, social orders and norms that the written cultures sought to recount, control and discipline. In the religious field, parish records, “lists of souls” (*stati delle anime*) that had to comply with the Easter communion sacrament, pastoral visits and the *relationes ad limina*; in the civic field, records of households, land registers and *visitas*. They all attempted to describe the space of the citizenry in terms of family groups:

- respectful of sacraments,
- connected by agnatic lineage,
- collocated within an honorary social stratification,
- divided between the few who had access to government office and the mass who were excluded.

These text typologies conformed to the space they represented, their roles changing accordingly, sometimes mediating and sometimes conflictual, and each one should be analyzed carefully. However, and more interestingly for this study, this written production created a dialogue between each local written text, of different qualities, types and formats and, like those supra-local ones, generate an image of urban society as a composite of lineage and social orders.

With regard to texts produced in the religious sphere, there are at least two important examples in Puglia that relate to the “konfessionalisierung” of the city. In Manduria, in the context of the Counter-Reformation, processes of “konfessionalisierung” pursued by the catholic hierarchies, added to the traditional parish registers the *Libro Magno delle famiglie*, which, with the aim of tracing consanguinity in the community, recorded the genealogies of all the families in the town from the end of the 15th to the beginning of the 18th century. The redaction of this text was the responsibility of the successive parish priests and was begun in 1572, commissioned most probably by Charles Borromeo who was the feudal lord of area. Parentage is traced according to agnatic descent; each genealogical reconstruction is

indicated by a number and each marriage is annotated by a code that corresponds to the bride's family (Delille, 2003).

The example of Manduria is not unique. The *Libro delle famiglie di Mesagne* appears to follow the same logic, although there is no known commissioner. Drawn up by a local scholar, Epifanio Ferdinando junior, it is divided into four volumes and reconstructs the genealogies of all the families from the town from the mid-16th century up until the death of the author in 1717. The genealogical tables follow the agnatic descent of individuals and include information regarding the bride's relatives, allowing in this way a record of cognatic relations in the family group. The author reports his sources (land registers, notary acts and "personal knowledge"), recording information regarding individuals and groups. The whole work shows the author's great capacity to sift through enormous amounts of material and abstract essential information (Carrino, 1995).

Only a small part of the urban population admitted to the sphere of *cittadinanza sacramentale* (Brambilla, 1997) were able to pass to the next level that gave them access to urban power. Joining this dimension was solemnized by a complex and formal semantics that expressed itself in the presentation of self, both physically in public ceremonies, and symbolically in the facades of buildings, crests, sumptuous chapels and decorated tombs and in time-honored genealogies. It was also expressed in local writing cultures that consecrated the dichotomies inclusion/exclusion¹⁴.

The *Libri d'Oro* formalize the results of the crucial processes that define roles and hierarchies in urban society. Seen as the ideal continuation of the *Libri Rossi* with their collections of statutes and privileges, they present the city as a stratified entity, divided according to social orders – nobles or commoners – organized in turn by their lineage. These two groups represent the 'included' citizenry, those who decide for the city and legitimately exclude the rest of the population from the public sphere and from honorary roles within the urban space¹⁵.

These documents are almost always born from conflict. In 1569, during a period characterized by chaos and uncertainty, a royal commissioner arrived in Monopoli. Bernadino Santacroce was

none other than the President of the *Regia Camera della Sommaria* and he came to reform the civic rules, adding new clauses. Having finished his work in the Cathedral, Santacroce retired to the home of an influential noble citizen of Monopoli of Spanish origin, where he set about to supervise the drafting of a *Libro d'Oro* in the presence of the annual local authorities (*decurioni*). The project was destined to fail. The *Libro* was immediately eliminated from the repository of statutes and cancelled from official sources. It was replaced in 1583 by a new version, redacted this time *coram populo*. What this example reveals is that the first *Libro* was written according to what was considered an unreasonable logic, it listed not the noble families but the individual members of each family creating in this way a disequilibrium between members of the two most powerful houses, which could have led to violent clashes. Thus while the first *Libro* was hastily consigned to oblivion, the second *Libro d'Oro* became the city's solemn and shared heritage, functioning as a guarantee of peace and stability between the internal forces of the city (Carrino, 2006).

On the other hand however, the rhetoric, graphic materiality and mode of conservation of these documents all attest to the aim of such works to hide such conflictual origins, to represent the urban spaces as peaceful, defined by a legitimating hierarchical order that projects into an indefinite future. The *Libro d'Oro* thus tries to present an image of a static city, stratified, watched over by certain families whose genealogy and honorary roles legitimize their power.

But the urban scenario was involved in an ineluctable process of change. This dynamics was stimulated by the requests for inclusion in the local power on the part of those who wanted to transform their new economic status into honorary positions in society; by the fall of many traditional noble families into the condition of the "shameful nobility" (*nobili vergognosi*); by the disappearance of some other families and lineages as they ended in the trap of primogeniture, that is in the lack of male descendants able to fulfill institutional roles. The local written cultures were able to map this changing scenario: the *Libri di famiglia* (*Annales HSS*, 2004) and genealogical reconstructions

were the expression of the way in which families and lineage functioned, they describe not only processes of succession over the generations, but in the public sphere too, as a form of self-promotion, vindication and defense.

The inherent instability of social stratification and the urban space more generally is expressed in local written cultures that reconstruct, in different tones and styles, according to the social standing of the authors, the history of lineage, underlining the legitimacy and honorary and political position of the individual in the social sphere¹⁶. Although sometimes characterized by a polemical stance towards the existing and consolidated power structures, they continued to reproduce, as the *Libri d'Oro*, an image of society constructed around the central dichotomy inclusion/exclusion.

Historians have begun to examine these documents without necessarily attempting to find in them the criteria of definition of the city, underlining instead how the stratification of urban society is complicated by a vertically operating dynamic too; that is how the borders between included and excluded in power roles are crossed by asymmetric forces connected to the nominal holders of power capable of assuming high positions in the institutional field. In particular, the written cultures of law and notaries complicate the urban sphere and offer a more complex vision of social organization. Generally these documents are not collated in homogenous texts, apart from some very rare and thus very precious examples. They tend to be unique documentary material surviving in archives. Their very existence, however, testifies to a whole universe of loquacious communicative expression and point to another dimension of the urban reality.

The organization of *Decisiones* into single textual bodies (Miletti, 1988), when applied to a precise urban space, functions as a way to recount the city and to reveal its inherent 'instability'. The collection and publication by Giovan Battista de Toro of the written verdicts he issued as royal Judge in the Monopoli Court is one such example. In the two volumes of the *Vota decisiva* (de Toro, 1634), the voice of the local population of the town at the

beginning of the 17th century can be distinguished: defending their rights and interests as individuals or as groups, demanding justice for a crime committed or violence suffered. Along with private citizens, other voices can be heard: the Bishop, in both his official role and private capacity, the patriciate, as a body and as a group of individuals pursuing their own interests, both material and immaterial; exponents of civil power and the municipal government.

In Monopoli, the repository of notary acts organized into a single extraordinarily valuable work, again reconstructs a similarly dynamic image of urban society. Work began on the *Selva d'oro* in the mid 17th century by the priest Leonardo Cirulli and for a quarter of a century was updated with documents until it became a 32 volume work. Inside, "all the names of the citizens of Monopoli going back 200 years can easily be found". Along with transcriptions of notary acts, there are also ancient land registers, proceedings from the ecclesiastical court, inventories of goods and loans of religious orders and records of pious works. There are also miscellaneous texts as "annotations, records and letters for research." Basically, it is a huge archive of news about the whole community, selected according to a precise yet completely subjective methodology. Don Leonardo, blessed with the skill of writing and possessed of the leisure to read the quantity of acts, both public and private, at his disposal, began his work first as a pastime and then later as a paid functionary. He researched and transcribed documents appertaining to the town, on the precise request of individuals, families and ecclesiastical bodies, with the aim of documenting and eventually resolving questions regarding the law. As the quantity of material to sift through grew exponentially, he devised a system of classification and produced a colossal repository of documents regarding physical and juridical entities, he carefully referenced each name alongside the volume number and page in which they were nominated.

In any way, any description of the modes of representation of class and lineage, and its criteria for access to the *agora*, can never recount the city completely. Other local writings underline the shortcomings of schematic representations and depict individuals

and family groups according to alternative logical schemes. The horizontal stratification of classes collides with transversal relationships forming networks: family groups and lineages breakdown in a single individual who then meets others, forming new reciprocal relationships according to the most varied reasons, opportunities and interests. The whole city, nobles and commoners as well as the *fuori piazza*, the included and the excluded, come into continuous relations controlled by the most rigid and sometimes the most fluid contractual mechanisms: the exchange of women, houses, land, the borrowing and lending of money (Carrino, 2000). The same logic of patrimony passed on through agnatic lineage, tends to dissolve in the face of a written culture that recounts the central role of women in Puglia in the circulation and transmission of wealth (Delille, 1985).

This does not, however, negate the presence of an underlying order. Most of the norms, ordinances, sacramental protocols and civil laws recorded, attest to the fundamental stratification of society and access to power maintaining its essential cogency. But within it, elements of elasticity, margins for maneuver and discourses that cross-over and implicate the whole social sphere manage to survive, to safeguard harmony, to protect urban concord.

Places as protagonists: an urban story

While the city is projected as a public space, ordered and solemnized by its segmentation in family groups and its levels of access to power, another image of the city is projected that intertwines with this first: the city as a body, as a subject that emerges from the bodies and jurisdictions of royal power, capable of expressing itself as a protagonist, with a history and an identity that goes beyond that of the individual families that compose it.

Clearly, the groups and lineages in the urban centre produce different forms of writing that are collocated within the general panorama of conflict between the various groups and factions. What we are interested in here, is the way in which the city as a

unique body emerges from the rhetoric of the local writing cultures. Firstly, the texts produced by jurisdictional disputes between the seigneurial landowners and the public apparatus. In the context of Puglia, a particularly lively production of texts can be traced in several domains.

On one hand, conflicts were frequently the result of tension between the apparatus of the institutions, the prerogatives, privileges and intricate norms and jurisprudence of the *Dogana della mena delle pecore*, and the urban districts. For example, in Barletta (Polignano, 2006) an enormous quantity of texts were produced in the form of supplications, memorandums¹⁷ and allegations (Costantini, 1731). On the other hand, the uncertain attribution of rights to the land and its resources to the *cives* was another area of conflict. Establishing boundaries and bestowing rights on those individuals in the community who advanced claims was a process that was made even more complicated by the existence of royal lands, feudal rights and ecclesiastical claims. Such overlappings and connections do not permit an image of space to emerge as a series of neighbouring areas, adjacent and mappable, each one assigned to an individual or body (Grendi, 1986; *Quaderni Storici*, 2012). In the hills between Monopoli, Cisternino, Martina, Locorodondo, Fasano and Castellana, divergent claims to ownership on the part of the local communities proved too much for the local authorities themselves to resolve. In an attempt to regulate the situation, the president of the *Sommaria*, Bernadino Santacrose, was interpolated in September 1566. (He was to be called on again, some years later, to supervise the writing of the first, failed, *Libro d'Oro*). He began to “assign the land of the Selva [the hilly region] to the city of Monopoli and to the districts of Cisternino, Martina, Locorodondo, Fasano and Castellana.” (Indelli, 1776-79, p.444-445). The *universitates* then reached an agreement about the management of the royallands. The *Libro volgarmente chiamato Santa Croce*¹⁸ was the textual reproduction of these complex operations. Not all the disputes were, however, settled. The controversy became endemic in Fasano, *baliaggio* of Santo Stefano, enfeoffed to the Knights of Malta (Carrino, 2000, p. 38-44). At the same time a dispute between Cisternino and the Episcopal Mensae of

Monopoli¹⁹ began, generating a wealth of local, defensive texts. The writings that emerged from these controversies are predominantly legal allegations, partisan in nature and modelled on argumentative logic. While they are more technical than other documents examined here, both thematically and linguistically, they are not closed textual forms comprehensible only to experts; they serve to project the disputes into that ambiguous area of public space that individuals and entities inhabit daily, somewhere between the solemnity of rights and the brutality of interests. The choice of writing a legal allegation down, either as a handwritten or a printed document, is a decision to take the complaint out of the law court, the legal domain, and into the public arena, the public domain; to circulate the document is to incite 'public opinion', to encourage reactions and positions, in short, to influence the outcome. The purely legal subject thus mixes with the reconstruction of the symbolic and material identity of past and place. These texts show how the city tends to give the best possible image of itself, one which displays the rightness of the reason it wishes to claim.

Allegations thus constitute a point of contact between writings generated directly from conflict and the processes of mediation, implicitly reconstructing the past as one of glory, rich in the symbols the urban centre projects.

In the climate of the Counter-Reformation, writings emerging from the religious domain are particularly relevant, especially because hagiographical claims could contribute to the requests from the episcopal see and to improvements in the condition of the *civitas* or to its defense. In fact these documents emerge both from places already enjoying the status of *civitas* and from aspiring urban spaces²⁰. This is not, however, a strictly religious genre of writing: the cult of a particular saint and the prestige of the city combine to produce "a patriotic instrument for the orders and families", and imply "the development of the citizens' self-awareness" (Musi, 2004, p. 23).

In the texts published in Bari, a driving force was the cult of Saint Nicholas well represented by the work of the Jesuit Antonio Beatillo. His *Historia* taking up the rich traditions of medieval

hagiography regarding the cult and translation of the bones of the saint (Beatillo, 1620), exalted the status of the city through its privileged relations with the bishop of Myra. His narrative, describing the life of the saint, mixes with stories about the lives of the citizens, glorifying the importance of the city. But Bari does not have just one saint and in some cases hagiography, a potent means to depict urban identity, can end up by expressing divided loyalties and the conflicts that operate both in the city and in the sacred sphere. In Bari itself, the rivalry between the cult of Saint Sabine, the saint of the Cathedral and its chapter, and Saint Nicholas, whose symbolic and material importance is displayed in the Basilica and by monks (Cioffari, 1985), is a case in point. Beatillo wrote also a work dedicated to Saint Sabine, utilizing the same mode and approach he had taken for his hagiography of Saint Nicholas. This second volume was, however, to be less successful than the first (Beatillo, 1629).

The fact that Beatillo did not ‘take sides’ in the arguments concerning the two saints, and wrote hagiographies for each of them, is evidence of the rise of a new figure, the professional writer working in the local, urban culture. This new figure was to determine the style, the form and the subject matter of writings to come. The professionally written text moved into an ambiguous space in which local writing cultures met with works of wide circulation.

This tendency becomes more marked in the urban story *par excellence*: the city chronicles (Lerra, 2004; Iurilli, 2011).

As manuscripts or in printed form, these texts joined more literary ambitions with the notion of celebrating place, a town’s status, its material and symbolic wealth, its honorary position. The essential model for this typology of text was the chronicles of Naples that functioned as a representative exemplum for the whole Kingdom. Forming a specific genre of writing, these “national” stories established the canons and themes for a whole body of local writings that explore the origins, the fidelity, the aristocratic models, hagiography and politico-institutional dynamics of a place (Musi, 2004). The chronicles subsume

different genres and emerge as truly hybrid literary forms, “contaminated” in and by their very variety (Cirillo, 2004), mixing different registers with varying degrees of reliability. They tend to begin with a description of the ancient and glorious origins of the city, then praise the topography – *intra* and *extramoenia* – of the city, the life and miracles of the patron saint and social unity (Campenni, 2004). Their implicit aim is to underline the city’s status as an “honoured city” (*civitas honorata*) distinct from the county (*contado*): they recount the beauty of the architecture, the majesty of public buildings such as the castle, the *sedile* or town hall, the cathedral, noble palaces, as well as hospitals, monasteries, churches and chapels. The aim of the chronicle can also be seen in coeval maps designed to highlight the *mirabilia* and *admiranda* of places, extolling the spires, towers, city walls, crests, and all those details that indicate honour and that become part of the rhetoric of the city. The maps blend with the local written cultures of the city, to celebrate and defend its image²¹.

Within the local chronicle, urban memory is re-elaborated according to the canons of those literary forms circulating in the *république des lettres*, often written or commissioned by people who themselves took part in these circles and who functioned as cultural mediators, with results that are not always banal. In centers like Monopoli, whose chronicles reflect its status of “episcopal royal city”²², the influence of a magistrate, Prospero Rendella, author of a *Storia di Monopoli*²³ and of juridical work in which the local customs figure prominently²⁴ is evident. On the other hand, other cities, for example Bari, which was a pluri-ethnic nodal point for the region, a great mercantile port (Salvemini, Visceglia, 1992) and metropolitan archdiocese²⁵, had a more limited output of chronicles (Tateo, 1992, p.146-152; Quarto, 1993). Here, the work of two main writers can be identified, both very different in approach and material: the *Commentari* on the local customs of the town was written by Vincenzo Massilla (1551), focusing on the nobility and informed by the “awareness of historical traditions as being separate from ecclesiastic traditions” (Tateo, 1992, p.147); and the *Historia di Bari Principal Città della Puglia nel Regno di Napoli* (Naples, 1637) by Antonio Beatillo that reconstructs the civic history of the town.

There are other examples in which the quantity of chronicles or local urban memoirs produced, in no way corresponds to the size or prestige of the city, its position in the hierarchy of places in the ancient regime. Ostuni, an episcopal city that alternated periods of feudal domination with annexation to the royal demense, and possessed of a prestigious noble order, produced neither a chronicle nor a collection of statutes, it had no significant local writing culture with the exception of an incomplete, late and essentially useless *Libro Rosso*. Further south, in Mesagne, a small centre with few pretensions to honorary status, an imperfect division of social stratification and no noble titles, a town that passed, in the 16th and 17th centuries from one feudal lord to another, usually newly rich merchants looking for honour through the acquisition of Feudal lands, produced a surprising quantity of chronicles. This is possibly explained by the illustrious writer resident in Mesagne in the late 16th century, Cataldo Mannarino²⁶, who was, among other things, the author of a splendid manuscript of the history of the town complete with a map²⁷. Mesagne was also home to another illustrious gentleman of letters, Epifano Ferdinando senior (Mesagne, 1569-1638), physician and philosopher, who dedicated numerous works to his town. The so-called *messapografie* (Mannarino, 1592; Ferdinando senior, 1616, 1637, 1650; Ferdinando D., 165; Mavaro, 1753; Profilo A., 1870) constituted a complete sub-genre of writings that focused on the earliest populations, the antique denominations of the place, the local cults and religious rites as well as offering fascinating insights into the political life of the town, its internal equilibrium, social dynamics and modes of representation.

Epilogue

Throughout the 18th century the climate changed and with it, local writing cultures. The emergence within the cities of the *cevo civile*, that is of groups of officials and jurists in important administrative roles, effectively remodelled the political equilibrium, shifting power relations to the extent that the

traditional equation nobility of place =nobility of the eminent citizens, no longer rationally explained space.

The idea of the 'immobile city' disappeared too. These alterations in the social sphere are illustrated by the welter of legal allegations that tell of the clash between social groups for management of the public sphere²⁸. The political architectures of the city of the ancient regime also began to disappear, in theory and in practice.

At the same time, the perception of space began to assume a more specifically geographical matrix, one connected to the centralized powers. In the Kingdom of Naples, a series of initiatives to increase awareness of the territory began: the seaside paintings of Hackert, the *Descrizione* by Giuseppe Maria Galanti, the Atlas by Rizzi Zannoni, the result of the first great public census. The traditional chorographies were supplanted by dictionaries²⁹ and the descriptions of humanized space gradually moved away from testimonies characterized by the entities or individuals who wrote them, towards a more neutral, alphabetic, encyclopedic body of work with a wider distribution and production than ever before (Salvemini, 2006, p.557).

A new tendency in chronicles and local writings began, informed by different literary and political tendencies. But these form part of a very different (hi)story.

¹ Giorgio Chittolini (1990) describes spatial and temporal contexts different from our own in this way.

² Position in space in the ancient regime corresponds to the notion of collocation within the honor's hierarchy in society which the citizenry of the time were able to recognize and decode. In the highest position was the royal archiepiscopal city, royal episcopal city, royal city, down to the village without walls and thus without dignity for the place and its inhabitants.

³ Statutes became the object of historiographical studies at the end of the 19th century, frequently annotated and published by economic and juridical historians. Volpicella (1875, 1880), Bonazzi (1876), Carabellese (1897), Gadaleta (1902), Muciaccia (1902).

⁴ Archivio Comunale di Monopoli, *Miscellanea Petraroli*, 1787.

⁵ Archivio di Stato di Bari, *notarile di Monopoli, notaio Francesco Paolo Pizzaiingroia*, 23.06.1699, post c. 303 (Lanera, 1991).

⁶ These two *Libri* are housed in the *Biblioteca Dioecesana* (the oldest) and the *Biblioteca Comunale* (the most recent). The first volume has 405 pages, 33 in vellum, and is subdivided into four books. The second volume has 324 paper pages and is subdivided into four books. See Magrone (1899-1905).

⁷ Biblioteca Nazionale, Bari. See Melchiorre (1995).

⁸ The *Libro* is composed of 430 sheets in which 187 documents are transcribed along with another 100 inserts organized thematically. Muciaccia (1970), De Capua (1987).

⁹ Known as the *Libro Magno o vulgariter il Transunto*, the Altamura *Libro* is housed in the local Archivio Comunale. See Lospalluto (1938)

¹⁰ Housed in the local town library. It is formed by 466 documents each one numbered. The oldest act dates from 1196. See Beltrani (1993).

¹¹ The *Libro Rosso* of Bari is housed in the local Archivio di Stato. See Melchiorre (1993).

¹² On the first page of the *Libro*, before the “Tavola delle cose contenute in questo libro”, an inscription can be read. “Calo Carducci is the owner of this book that he bought from D. Ignazio Calo Carducci from Cardassi for 240 ducats.”

¹³ The case of Altamura is no way unique. Giovinazzo accepted being enfeoffed to the Gonzago family (see Paglia, 1700), and Molfetta and Bisceglie both put a brave face on their feudal destiny, extolling the noble lineage of their seigneurs.

¹⁴ In the background there is the spread of a new ideology of nobility, expressed in baroque tracts. In the Kingdom of Naples, the work by Scipione Ammirato (1630) is paradigmatic.

¹⁵ An image that historians have not always found to be true. In Monopoli, for example, the rigid class and lineage distinctions that the *Libro d'Oro* formalizes and that the municipal government controls, is called into question by vertical dynamics of fidelity that can be seen to operate across the entire social spectrum. At the vertices, two eminent families appear, creating mechanisms for inclusion and exclusion in the public sphere far more dynamic than the horizontal division of class would suppose (Carrino, 2000).

¹⁶ In Bari we can underline the manuscripts by the commoner Francesco Lombardi (Biblioteca Provinciale di Bari, Archivio De Gemmis, cart. XV/4, “*Commento*” alla *Cronaca delle famiglie nobili baresi di Vincenzo Massilla*, Biblioteca Nazionale di Bari, Fondo D’Addosio, ms. II/14, *Delle famiglie patrizie che godono del sedile nobile nella Città di Bari*; *Ib.*, ms. 78/I, *Raccolta di matrimoni tra le famiglie dell’uno e dell’altro seggio della città di Bari*; *Ritratto del Regimento barese sborzato in difesa del titolo di Patrizio come spettante alle famiglie della Piazza del Popolo primario della medesima città in prova di parità*, now in *Nicolaus. Studi storici* (1996), 2, pp. 495-599. See Quarto (1996, a), (1996, b).

¹⁷ Archivio di Stato di Foggia, *Dogana*, s. I, b. 87, ff. 1321-1322.

¹⁸ Archivio Comunale, Monopoli, *Copia dell'originale libro volgarmente chiamato Santa Croce, in cui si vede la concessione delle mezzane serrate fatta nel territorio della città di Monopoli e terre di Martina, Castellana, Luogorotondo, Cisternino e Fasano, ordinata per il qm presidente d. Bernardino Santa Croce... accomodato per opera, cura e diligenza del signor Benedetto Palmitessa sindaco generale in questo anno corrente 1727.*

¹⁹ *Per il Comune di Cisternino contra la Mensa Vescovile della città di Monopoli*, Naples 1788

²⁰ The cult of a patron saint was frequently connected with the chronotaxis of Bishops. For example, for Bisceglie, Sarnelli (1693); for Molfetta, Bovio (1635), Damiano (1703); for Barletta, Grimaldi (1607); for Trani, Paoli (1611); for Bitonto, di San Gaetano (1693); for Monopoli, Glianès (1643); for Lecce, *Vita de' Santi* (1592), Bozzi C. (1672), Ferrari (1609). For Lecce, see Fonseca (1993).

²¹ See Nuti (1996), also for bibliographical references.

²² Glianès (1643), Iurlaro (1994), Nardelli (1773), Indelli (1776-79).

²³ No trace remains of this work. The work was probably part of a much longer work in 12 volumes, referred to by the Abbot Giuseppe Indelli (1776-79) in his chronicle of the city.

²⁴ The 18th century jurist Oronzo Fighera refers to "having possessed a book about the local habits and traditions of Monopoli from the 17th century, belonging to the jurist from Monopoli Prospero Rendella". Most of Rendella's works were manuscripts and many of them are missing. Of his printed works, Rendella (1609), (1614), (1629), (1630). See Maffei (1988).

²⁵ Bari was however inferior to Altamura for demographics and to Trani on the level of institutional honors.

²⁶ Mannarino was born in Taranto in 1568 and spent most of his youth in Mesagne, where he married a local lady. Poet, playwright, physician and, after taking Holy Orders late in life, theologian. See Distaso (1990), (1995).

²⁷ Biblioteca Nazionale, Naples, Sezione Manoscritti, XIV G 18/2, C. A. Mannarino, *Memorie di Mesagne*, 1592. His printed history of Taranto (1596) written in verse, celebrates the town's glorious defense against the marauding Turks.

²⁸ Of the many examples available, see: for Monopoli, Centomani (1742,1746), Carrino (2000). For Bari, Pedrinelli (1746), Celentani (1762) and Spagnoletti (1992).

²⁹ These works open up a vast and fascinating field that falls outside of the area of our study.

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