

Romeo R. (1969-1984). *Cavour e il suo tempo*. Roma-Bari, Laterza.

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GIORGIO SIMONCINI, *La Grandezza delle Capitali nel Dibattito dei Riformisti Illuministi. Napoli, Parigi, Londra*, Florence, Olschki, 2021. Pp. 150. ISBN: 978-88-222-6756-6.

Leo S. Olschki is publishing this elegant text written by Giorgio Simoncini, an expert of historical matters related to urbanism, architecture and landscape. His expertise meets the history of economic ideas and policies as regards the debate on the dimension of towns among Eighteenth century Enlightenment's reformers. Moreover, the author also compares Naples with similar debates in Paris and London. Naples was one of the most important centres of European Enlightenment and it was the main spring of the *civil economy*, whose authors we find analysed by Simoncini.

The author relates the debate on the size of towns to the Faust of Goethe – the latter met Gaetano Filangeri in his tour of 1787 – particularly the dialogues on the pact between Mephistopheles and Faust: Mephistopheles argues in favour of metropolis and Faust is instead seeing arguments against big towns and their effect on population, exalting country life.

Towns' size was considered a specific sign of the magnificence and prestige of the sovereign. According to the guide of Parrino of 1691 (p. 5) Napoli was "...the right eye of Italy and the most beautiful town of Europe". At the beginning of 1700s, Neapolitan Enlightenment adhered to empiricism, getting inspiration from Locke's (and Galileo) theory of knowledge. From this perspective, scholars as well as policy-makers begun questioning the connection between size and prestige. They looked at experience and concrete facts to judge how valuable is the large town. A further aspect to be considered is the continuous hope that new political regimes would produce social and economic reforms. Naples changed regimes several times: in 1707 it was controlled by Austrians, ending the Spanish domination, in 1734 the new Bourbon kingdom was settled, in 1767 Ferdinand IV became king and in 1793 the revolution established a short-lived regime that ended with 1799 restoration.

Naples has been a fundamental centre for the development of Political Economy and Simoncini underlines how economic scholars were relevant in these debates. Naples had two main streams of studies that concerned the economy. The former can be characterized as dealing with *urban studies*, focusing on the social and economic organisation of territory and expressed some major works with Serra (1613) or, more relevant here, Paolo Mattia Doria. The latter stream, is best expressed by the Chair in *Meccanica e Commercio* (production and trade) assigned to Antonio Genovesi in 1754, which is the first in Political Economy. Moreover, Simoncini proposes two levels of analysis: the study of urban growth and that of urban growth in relation to the countryside.

Many writings had a political aim: studies were geared to inform policy-making. The new Bourbon kingdom enacted many reforms and was very active promoting new production organisations. The *Giunta di Commercio* instituted in 1735 was a committee having the task of suggesting economic reforms and interventions favouring trade and development. However, two views confronted: centralised growth of the capital town and decentralised growth benefiting each centre of the kingdom.

Some further relevant position reported by Simoncini is that of Ferdinando Galiani, who came back to Naples in 1770 from Paris, where he was secretary of the Neapolitan embassy. He had been a student of Genovesi and in 1780 published a second edition of *Della Moneta* in which some reflections on the size of capital cities appear. Having assimilated some of the spirit of physiocracy, he considered the town as a collector of immobile resources, reducing the wealth of the countryside. Gaetano Filangeri was equally important for introducing physiocracy to Naples. He also saw cities draining money from farmlands. The main responsibilities were attributed to aristocracy that was responsible for an excess concentration of wealth, and for the fact that spent its rents in the city instead of feeding the economy of the countryside. He proposed to distribute land given that large estates were not the object of a rise in productivity because of absentee large owners. Giuseppe Palmieri, instead, was not favourable of fragmenting property.

Simoncini analyses also the positions of many scholars as Francesco Milizia, Francesco Longano (who substituted Genovesi on the chair of Economics), Melchiorre Delfico, Vincenzo Ruffo, Giuseppe Maria Galanti, Gregorio Grimaldi, and the revolutionary reformists as Nicola Fiorentino and Vincenzo Russo. The end of Enlightenment is connected to the restoration of the Bourbons in 1799, which constituted an authoritarian turn.

Finally, we find two chapters dedicated to the debates in Paris and London. In the Seventeenth century, Jean-Baptiste Colbert was the protagonist

of the centralisation of the French state. De Boisguilbert (1646-1714) was an opposer of mercantilism, anticipating physiocracy. He considered the fortune of Paris the reason of the crisis of provinces. A similar position was expressed by the marquis De Vauban, an engineer of the army, who proposed a reform of the tax system eliminating internal tolls. On the other side, we find the philosopher Abbé de Saint-Pierre who in 1733 wrote a book titled *Avantages que doit Produire l'Agrandissement Continuel de la Ville Capitale d'un Etat*. Advantages concerned safety, culture and, above all, the expansion of trading activities. Voltaire wrote *Des Embellissements de Paris* in 1749 in which he denounced the bad government of the town, particularly as regards public spaces and services.

Physiocrats as the *marquis* De Mirabeau saw the interdependency of growing capital and the worsening condition of provinces. Big concentration of people lead to the material and moral degradation of inhabitants. Consequently, he was favorable to a repopulation of the countryside. Also Ange Goudar was worried of the worsening condition of agriculture, which was put in relation to the concentration of wealth in the city. Jean-Jaques Rousseau was consequent with his work opposing big towns. The author considers also the project of an ideal town by Ledoux, the criticism of Mercier and Dulaure. De Condorcet elaborated a comparative reflection on the role of the big city in democratic and despotic regimes, the latter were found a non favorable context for growing towns.

As concerns London, the debate begun earlier as a result of the big fire of 1666 and the consequent need of safety regulation. William Petty was a protagonist on the debate on the opportunity to let London grow. He considered that the same greatness of London was attracting people from the countryside. He was favorable to such concentration for the improvement of services it allowed and he pointed out the idea of increasing returns from concentration due to the division of labour and to cultural enhancement. Petty supplied the example of watchmaker laboratories that benefited by the concentration of activities. Nicolas Barbon was also a supporter of town life, looking at the effects on trade. Richard Cantillon was a banker and in his *Essay on the Nature of Trade in General* written in 1730-34 he also discussed the reasons for the growth of towns. He underlined the increasing returns from concentration that helped the development of production. On the other hand, he foresaw a limit to growth in the amount of rents disposable. He also studied the economic organisation of the territory. The debate continued at the beginning of industrialisation when the interdependency of town and farmlands was further explored. In general, Britons are more optimistic on the beneficial effects of concentration.

Simoncini relates the end of this debate with the change of philosophical stream from empiricism and sensationism to idealism or other approaches less based on observation. Actually, in Italy such debate never ended, with major oscillations that in recent times have seen the parable of industrial districts. It would be worth to continue this study to the two next centuries. Concluding, this work is worth reading for the extremely important policy debates, still relevant today. It also highlights some aspect of many economists that usually remains hidden in the studies of historian of economic thought.

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