

Philip's Italy, 1556-1598: A Microcosm of Spain's Empire

by

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Class of 2015

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in History

To my sister Sophie, who's taught me I can always work to be better.

Acknowledgements

This thesis marks the culmination of a passionate love of history that dates back two decades. I was lucky enough to be introduced to Ancient Egypt before solid food. With the love of discovery that only a child can possess, I found an infinitely deep pool in which to immerse myself in history. I never hit a dead end. From knights in shining armor to grain prices in Puglia, I have always found more to interest me in the field of history.

None of this would have been conceivable without my parents. They whet my appetite for learning early on and never ceased to encourage my interests. Without the early bedtime stories of the Trojan War or Howard Carter and his team of Egyptologists, who knows where I could have ended up? Maybe the hard sciences? Perish the thought! From my mom, I developed the ability to obsess and endlessly enjoy a topic, from my dad, my love of the ancients, rationality, and the process of working through a historical problem. I would be remiss to leave out a huge thank you to my dad who has edited hundreds of pages of my college papers, when even I couldn't stand to look at them. Also, to my grandparents, whose constant support has provided me with a source of strength throughout my life.

A huge thank you to Professor Grimmer-Solem, who single-handedly made my Wesleyan education worth it. He taught me how history develops, introduced me to ways of historical thinking totally revolutionary to me at the time, and challenged me to think deeper than anyone else. His understanding, incredible teaching ability, and generosity with his insight in office hours has aided my personal development more than I could ever express.

Professor Nussdorfer took me through three semesters of the Early Modern Age with a tremendously broad knowledge of the topic. Her grasp on so many different facets of the era, from literature, to philosophy, to religion boggled my mind. I always left her office with an overwhelming appreciation of the task at hand, and a million ways to approach the topic. Yet she, more than perhaps any professor, patiently guided me through not only history, but the process of writing history. A skill for which I'm eternally grateful.

Professor Sommerville raised my expectations on the quality of a college class, when I took his terrific 17th Century seminar at the UW my senior year of high school. To him, I can credit my intense interest in the Early Modern Period and the maturation of my appreciation for the European state system.

I could not imagine leaving out the friends I've made at Wesleyan, whose conversations and friendships comprised a tremendous portion of my college education. Being surrounded by such brilliant, unique, and interested minds as yours truly gave me an appreciation for the quality of the Liberal Arts Education. The Barons of 14B: William, Duke of Dubbford, Eliot of House Coffey, Ringo Starrzec, Jake Titus Barack, and, of course, Jessie the Lyonhearted Haestad, I'll treasure the dinners, dance (*ahem* LAN) parties, and general happiness of our abode for the rest of my life. My companions for the most consistently edifying, yet stultifying conversations, John Titan of Ludlow and Peter the Great Chu. Swift-footed Achilles Nassikas, who has never ceased to inspire me to work towards my goals. The boys of AEPi, who were with me from day one. Sunshine Sontag who has never not raised my spirits. Maggie the Magnificent encouraged me more than even my own parents to keep working and think happy thoughts. Tyrion Lannister, the thuggest imp I ever did know. Jake My Guiding Sun-Ray(dell), Good Herb Gup, and D-Rock Sturman, who put up with my mothering and helped me foster weekly history clubs in our living room. Gregorius Boulder Shoulder Hill-pusher and Thomas High Priest of Jah make sure I never skip leg-day. And Julia of Smoldering Eyes and Distant Skies who, with her dazzling, compassionate, and enviable intelligence, never failed to expose me to wonderful new ways of thinking about the world and who helped me work through the far-ranging lessons to be learned from the Spanish Empire during the final months of this project.

Finally, a shoutout to the 16th century royalty who made this all possible: Marcantonio Colonna, for his colorful language, exciting tales of Sicily's fall into anarchy, and, above all else, his easily legible script. On that last point, I'd like to thank Royal Secretaries Vargas and Perez for their beautiful handwriting... and *certainly not* Philip II and his cousin, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II, who, having been perhaps the most spoiled children of the 16th century, were never told their handwriting was completely abominable and in serious need of improvement.

Autumn 1588, the Calabrian highlands:

A cool Tyrrhenian breeze stirred the embers of their dying fire. The sun had long since set on the camp of the five men and their conversation lapsed into drowsy ranting as they sat propped up in a circle. It had been a long day's work for them. Prince's men, they had executed the King's justice that afternoon.

"You think she did it? The one who screamed?" Piero asked his comrades, suddenly reflective.

"*Claro*. They're all associated somehow." Barto replied.

"If it's not a son, it's a neighbor, and you think they're just gonna stop talking to them 'cause they're bandits?" Giovanni was speaking from experience. "Look, these people are starving. What with taxes as they are, they can't even hold on to enough grain to bake their bread. If you had six mouths to feed, would you pass up a free sack of corn and a purse of silver because *El Rey Felipe* says it belongs to some baron?" He drew out his majesty's title sarcastically.

"And now you'll tell us how that was you until you figured a salary and a sword were better than robbing silk traders with the threat of a noose hanging in the back of your mind. *Ya sabemos*."

They'd heard it a million times, but it was true. It was a cruel world out there and a man had better protect himself, if not against hunger, then against other men. But that woman, she still haunted Piero. She had had six children. He could remember their horrified faces at the execution.

The soldiers had been responding to a particularly grave attack in Joppolo where some town magnate, a viscount they'd heard, was murdered in the street and his house looted. Apparently the outlaws were just handing out the man's stores to the locals, which technically implicated everyone.

She had been the worst. Piero's squad had found five pounds of grain marked with the viscount's seal in her house and the king had been very explicit. None of Sciarra's actual bandits had stuck around long enough to be caught, but

there was still an example to be made. Theft is theft and that's a commandment. Bearing the special commission in hand, Piero had ordered a scaffold built.

A gurgle pulled Piero from his thoughts. Looking up, he assumed it was just an aborted snore from one of his drunken comrades. Instead, the man who had been sitting across from him was splayed out with a crossbow quarrel lodged in his neck. *Merda.*

They were on him all at once. As Piero bled out in the scattered ashes of his forgotten fire, one thing was certain; Justice did not belong to the king. Not out here. His majesty, for all his wars and kingdoms and subjects had lost his monopoly on violence, and with it, his sovereignty.

I. Introduction

Charles V, the first truly great Habsburg Emperor, had led an extraordinary life. In 1516, he was the first man to ascend the united throne of Spain. That came with the good news that the island Colon had discovered a couple decades earlier was actually linked to a massive expanse of continents just dripping with gold. He inherited the wealthy provinces of Burgundy from his father, and for his nineteenth birthday, he ascended the most ancient of thrones, that of Holy Roman Emperor. In that election, he had beaten out his rival, Francis, King of France, for the first time, but not the last. Over the course of his lifetime, Charles duked it out against, Francis, popes, and wealthy city-states for the hegemony of Italy. By the time he retired, exhausted, in the mid-1550s, he was passing along to his son Philip, the two richest areas in the West—Italy and the Netherlands—as well as a blossoming Castile. With increasing revenues from American silver mines, Philip was poised to be the most powerful man Europe had seen since the Caesars.

History has followed these men and their conflicts. Books revolve around the build up to great clashes, Lepanto, the Dutch Revolt, and the Spanish Armada. And so they should. The military is the greatest manifestation of political power at this time and to study the effort of fielding an army is to study the organizational, economic, and cultural structures of the time. Perhaps the best exemplification of this is Fernand Braudel's *The Mediterranean in the Time of Philip II*; where, building from geography, anthropology, and history he creates the story of the Turco-Spanish wars in the Mediterranean. The two part series climaxes with the smashing victory of the Spanish at the Battle of Lepanto. However, the afterword makes the important point, which is mostly still true, that no Spanish history of the time records an event in the Mediterranean after 1580.

Philip II has been studied since history began. In 1855, William Prescott, America's first scientific historian, wrote *History of the Reign of Philip II*. There's no dearth of literature on the

king and this tradition has recently culminated in two books by Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* and *The Imprudent King*, which lay out the operations of the Spanish Empire under Philip II.¹ Other works by Henry Kamen or Patrick Williams represent other recent takes on the Prudent King. These all fall into the category delineated by Braudel, one that ignores Italy after 1580.

The study of Italy in the 16th and 17th centuries has recently undergone a resurgence in popularity. While the subject has received broader study in Italian and Spanish historiography, English language books on the Spanish rule of Italy have nevertheless increased in the past decade or so. Thomas Dandeleit and John Marino's *Spain in Italy*, a collection of essays on the topic has perhaps the widest breadth of any of these. However, most of these books and articles are concerned with local matters. H. G. Koenigsberger looks at Sicily's role in the Spanish system in *The Practice of Empire*, and Tommaso Astarita investigates Neapolitan aristocracy in *The Continuity of Feudal Power*. These are just a fraction of the books available, but by and large the extant literature falls into two camps. The first are those concerned with Philip's Empire, which largely ignore Italy and the Mediterranean world after Lepanto, in 1571. The others are concerned with the local events of the Italians, without looking at how they fit in to the larger Spanish system of which they are a part.

What interested me in this topic was the terrific potential at Philip's fingertips. In Italy he had an established and wealthy network of cities. Spain itself was a growing power, and the link between the Iberian and Italian peninsulas provided by the Habsburg monarch foretold tremendous growth and power. Yet somehow the Spanish Empire collapsed about a century after Philip's ascension to the throne. The demise of the Spanish Empire is well known, and I wanted

¹ Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Geoffrey Parker, *The Imprudent King*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); H.G. Koenigsberger, *The Practice of Empire: The Government of Sicily under Philip II of Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969); Tommaso Astarita, *The Continuity of Feudal Power: The Caracciolo di Brienza in Spanish Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

to look at Italy in its role as Spanish hinterland. I was curious as to the function it had within the empire and how Spanish rule affected the vitality of its Italian provinces.

Italy provided the greatest opportunity to study the imperial practices of the world's first global empire in as close to a vacuum as I was going to find. It was, during this time, peaceful, rich, and culturally well established. There were strong ties to Spain, and the Spanish could easily take over the most important functions of government. To me, then, in Italy I could see how the Spanish (or more accurately, Philip) wanted to develop their empire for the effectuation of their foreign policy. For this reason, I most closely examine the period after Lepanto, as the military concentration in Naples and Sicily upset the status quo on which I wanted to focus. This thesis is my attempt to understand how the Spanish used their empire to promote their policies abroad and the effectiveness of that effort.

II. Framework for an Empire

Philip's inheritance from Charles was immense. In 1554, Philip suddenly ascended the thrones of Naples, Milan, Sicily, England, and Ireland. At the behest of his father, the crusader Charles V, Philip stood poised to wed pious Spain and Italy to wavering England with his marriage to Mary I, another stalwart champion of the Catholic faith. Though his rule of the English (and potential claim to France) ended abruptly with Mary's childless death in 1558, this initial investment of titles upon Philip foretold the burden he would eventually bear.

Even with England's erasure from his list of realms, Philip continued to grow in stature. Prince Philip tiptoed into the chambers left empty by Charles' retirement from imperial responsibility. With the bestowal of the newly incorporated, but long-established principalities of Milan, Naples, and Sicily,

Charles placed the most manageable dominions under Philip's jurisdiction first. This could be seen as both a gift and a test. Italy had a long history of political experimentation; since the fall of the Roman Empire, the seismic eruptions of instability had resulted in trials with imperial domination, mercenary-dukes, despots, oligarchies, oligarchic republics, and most of Europe's other forays into diverse regimes before the modern era.² Five years after Philip's official coronation, the Spanish finally smothered the last tremors of the six decades of war with Valois France over the peninsula with the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559). Italy's relative receptivity to foreign rule may be explained by exhaustion with over half a century of war, softening the tightening grip of encroaching Spanish absolutism.

Italy, the crown jewel of Renaissance Europe, had been humbled by the ravages of a series of proxy wars fought between France and Spain (1494-1559). This series of conflicts had snuffed out the light of the Italian Renaissance.³ Though the Italians were the first in Europe to embrace the mercantile strategies that would later develop into capitalism, by the 1550s, their infrastructure had disintegrated under the impact of sixty years of war. If Philip could rehabilitate these ravaged lands, he would have an advanced industrial center connected to his Castilian homeland by the calm waters of the western Mediterranean. Such reconstruction represented a pretty large "if" to the junior king, however. To exacerbate the problems of ruling a newly pacified set of kingdoms, the Italians'

² Eric Cochrane, *Italy 1530-1630* (London: Longman, 1988), 19-20.

³ Tommaso Astarita, *The Continuity of Feudal Power: The Caracciolo di Brienza in Spanish Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 6.

history of frequent regime changes ensured that his Italian subjects could always imagine a better administration to rule them.

Italy offered Philip's greatest opportunity to consolidate a foreign province with Spain into a single, cohesive imperial unit. The Kingdom of Aragon had a long history of trade and communication with the Italian kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, which brought the two cultures closer together than those of almost any other two European states separated by similar barriers of language and distance. Additionally, the voyage between the two territories was long-practiced, having been undertaken since the days of Phoenicia. Further, the distance was rather modest, compared with the many months of sea travel required to reach the New World from Spain. Marriage alliances had connected the two Mediterranean peninsulas for centuries, and Spanish and Italian noble families began intermarrying at a remarkable rate during Charles V's conquest of Italy. The marriage in 1539 of the daughter of Naples' viceroy, Pedro de Toledo, to Cosimo de Medici, Duke of Tuscany, best exemplified this practice of wedding the Iberian and Italian Peninsulas.⁴ Finally, while the religious uniformity of Central and Northern Europe had splintered in Protestant upheaval in the 1500s, both Italy and Spain tenaciously adhered to their traditional Catholicism, marking an important commonality between the two realms. For such reasons, Philip stood a better chance of bringing Italy into a close Spanish embrace than any of his other dominions.

⁴ Carlos Jose Sanchez, *Castilla y Napoles en el Siglo XVI: El Virrey Pedro de Toledo: Linaje, Estado, y Cultura (1532-1553)*, (Valladolid, Spain: Junta de Castilla y Leon, Consejeria de Cultura y Turismo, 1994), 93.

The Emperor Charles soon cut short Philip's focused study on Italian administration. His fatigue with rule hastened his desire to offload his crowns upon his son. In 1551, Charles attempted to bequeath the Austrian Habsburg lands and Imperial title to Philip, instead of to his brother Ferdinand, as he had promised in 1529. This reverse caused an acerbic spat in the Habsburg family over the dissection of Europe. The fraternal quarrel ended with the Habsburg Family Compact, a compromise securing Ferdinand as the rightful heir to the eastern lands of Austria and the Holy Roman Empire, with Philip designated as Ferdinand's heir should Ferdinand die without sons.

Though losing the Holy Roman Empire, Charles managed to secure his birthplace, Burgundy, for his son. Originally bundled with the Habsburg's Austrian lands, in 1549 Charles issued the *Pragmatic Sanction*, which consolidated Burgundy's seventeen polities into the singular Spanish Netherlands, which would eventually pass to Philip. Once Philip had ascended one throne, King Charles wasted little time tendering his resignation and dumping royal responsibility on his son at a staggering rate. Faced by renewed war in Germany and Italy, theaters he had thought pacified, Charles V rapidly grew weary of his crowns. On July 25, 1554, Philip inherited his first four thrones. Only a year and a half later, on October 25, 1555 Charles added the loose confederation of Dutch statelets to his son's growing hoard.⁵

With the Pragmatic Sanction, Philip received the Low Countries, a gift that would soon prove poisoned. In contrast to Italy's fiery descent from cultural

⁵Williams, Patrick, *Philip II* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave, 2000), 3-24.

and commercial glory, the hundreds of cities in the Spanish Netherlands flourished as a result of Europe's shift of geopolitical focus from the waters of the Mediterranean to those of the Atlantic. Their economic prosperity, combined with a diverse cultural history, fascinated Philip, though his interest never overcame his wariness of their religious flexibility.

The Spanish Netherlands had begun to develop an economy that exploited human talent and intellect to grow faster than the standard agricultural economies of Europe. Spurred by a flourishing textile industry, the Dutch moved into mercantilism, servicing Northern European trade with their *fluytships* and transport firms. With the highest urban population in Europe and the wealthy ports of Antwerp and Amsterdam, the Netherlands contrasted sharply with the vast Castilian dominions in the Americas. Though both brought the Castilian Crown ample revenue, the taxes drawn from the Netherlands were products of their developing human capital.

The extirpation of the Aztec and Incan Empires in the 1520s by Spanish plagues and conquest had helped to convey to Charles and his advisors the vulnerability and grand scale of the American territories. With Spain's claim to these lands sanctioned by the Pope's seal on the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), Charles began the exploitation of American natural wealth. Apocryphally, Cortes had told Montezuma, "We Spanish have a terrible sickness called greed, and the only cure is gold."⁶ The cure, in this case, only served to further inflame Spanish greed, and soon their treasure galleons, engorged with gold and silver bullion, left

⁶ Francisco Lopez de Gomara, *La Vida de Hernán Cortés*, ed. by Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 133.

the New World for Seville. Unlike the wealth generated by Dutch and Italian trade and commerce, American profit was derived from the exploitation of both human and natural resources. The forced levy of Native American labor, the *mita*, provided the slave labor required to extract precious ores from the rich mines of Potosí, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas. Like Philip's acquisition of the Netherlands, however, the enormous initial profit derived from this dominion slaked Spanish thirst with poison. For while Spanish silver greased the wheels of a globalizing market, it devastated Spain's own economy with inflation on an unprecedented scale.

Finally, Philip inherited the hub of his imperial power. In January 1556, Charles V relinquished the throne of Spain and the Americas in an opulent ceremony in Brussels.⁷ Charles had been the first European monarch since the Caesars to inherit a unified Spain, and this final abdication marked the completion of Philip's ascension to royal power. Unlike his Flemish father, Philip was born in Castile and spent the overwhelming majority of his youth there, while Charles, ever on the move, migrated from realm to realm. Philip returned to Castile from his tours abroad in 1559 when he was thirty two. He was never to leave his homeland again.

Philip reacted strongly to this example set by his itinerant father, swinging sharply in the opposite direction. After the succession of reverses in the final years of Charles' reign (the resurgence of Valois aggression in Italy and widespread German revolt), Philip understood that his father's grand conquests

⁷ Williams, 26.

ought not be replicated. Thus, the young king embarked on a policy of maintenance and consolidation.⁸ Such a policy favored the king's desire for routine and carefully planned administration. Moreover, in addition to being centrally located in relation to his far-flung provinces, Castile at that time was the economic and spiritual heart of the empire. Its economy flourished from European and American trade, while its universities, seminaries, and cultural centers were producing some of the finest minds in Spanish history; this was Spain's Golden Century.⁹ Philip's preference for Castile grew increasingly more pronounced as he exploited his other domains in the pursuit of Castilian profit. Philip's inability to speak any other language save Castilian exemplified his favor, in contrast to his father's easy mastery of all the languages of his subject kingdoms.

Incorporating the now unified Crowns of Castile, Leon, Aragon, and Navarre, Philip's Iberia stretched from the Canary to the Balearic Islands, excepting the peripheral nation of Portugal, an acquisition that would come in 1583. Though sparsely populated compared to its neighbor France, Spanish royal coffers drew on a deep tax base. Spain's imperial possessions provided Spain with privileged access to raw materials, conscripts, and tax revenue. With such an empire, everyone expected only good things to come from Philip's decision to elevate it to the head of his empire. Philip's favoritism of Spain would also encourage loyalty in the feudal hierarchy undergirding his administration. Soon, the lower ranks of the Spanish nobility, the increasingly university-educated

⁸ Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

hidalgos, would spread throughout the empire as missionaries, emissaries, lawyers, and administrators.

However, Philip's Spanish income was precarious. Certain revenue came only from royal property, while Philip depended on the individual cortes of each realm to grant him additional taxes. While the Castilian Cortes was relatively pliable, those of his other Spanish kingdoms were anything but. On the other hand, the three principalities of the Crown of Aragon (Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia) were fiercely independent and fought every attempt at increased taxation to the bitter end. The taxes that were levied were highly regressive. The *alcabala*, a 10% sales tax, fell hardest on the poor, as did the *millones*, a tax on food. The other biggest tax came on trade goods, usually with other imperial dominions, thus cancelling out the commercial advantages of empire and grinding down mercantile efficiency.¹⁰ While Spain responded well to Philip's grooming, it faced a great deal of entrenched hardships, which did not assist its position as the empire's economic foundation.

By 1556, the Habsburg monarchy ruled the greatest empire Europe had known since Ancient Rome. Unlike the Roman Empire however, which had gradually coalesced over nine hundred years before reaching its greatest territorial breadth, Philip's Habsburg predecessors had only recently brought the myriad constituent provinces under a single ruler. Thus, instead of a long history of slow political evolution with mistakes made, lessons learned, and victories appreciated, the history of the Spanish empire totaled sixty years, from the end of the

¹⁰ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), 52.

Reconquista and discovery of the New World in 1492 to Philip's succession of coronations in the 1550s. The empire had, over the course of six decades, gone from separate nations still purging their peninsula of the centuries-old Moorish presence to a set of kingdoms, unified by a single king, which included all of modern-day Spain, the majority of the Italian peninsula, the Low Countries, and all lands so far discovered in the Americas.

Imperial Governance

Philip's preferred immobility turned out to be a handicap. His father had been sure to spend as much time as he could afford in each of his domains before moving his court to the next theater of interest. This allowed Charles to react quickly and decisively with the tremendous resources at his disposal to any concerns within his immediate purview. However, this policy necessarily agglomerated the political power of his empire to a marginal radius around the king. While the king could, and did, accomplish incredible feats in the areas in which he was located, the unattended corners of his empire, like Germany during the Reformation, were often left to relatively untethered underlings. Charles' style of rule was not ill-suited to such a large empire, but it necessitated bold and capable servants whom Charles could trust with the lives of millions. The downsides of such a system, however, were revealed by the insurgent whirlwind of Protestantism. What would have happened had Germany been ruled by a centrally located and powerful monarch in the years after 1519? Charles, at this time a novice ruler, allowed Francis I, King of France, to goad him into war on the Italian mainland. His attention diverted, Charles headed to Italy so as to

grandly lead his soldiers from horseback. Swept up in the excitement and magnitude of such an undertaking, the king had little time to attend to an insignificant spark lit by the clerical apostate named Martin Luther. Under these circumstances, the staunchly Catholic King Charles was forced to consent to the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, granting equal status to German Protestants.

Philip ascended the throne with an apprehension understandable for a young man succeeding someone as mighty and revered as his father.¹¹ Charles had intended to lighten Philip's responsibilities by staggering his inheritances and splitting off the Holy Roman Empire by granting it to the Austrian Habsburgs. Nevertheless, in a letter from 1556 reminiscent of a child's first foray to sleep-away camp, Philip wrote to Charles begging him to return and resume his royal position for just a little longer.¹² The load Philip shouldered by his final coronation was heavier than that of anyone since the Caesars. All previous empires of similar size had been confederations of contiguous satrapies. In 1556 however, across every sea, the sun always shone upon the Spanish: *sol semper lucet Hispanis*.¹³ And while the feudal system of Europe had developed considerably since its recognized birth in the eighth century under Charlemagne, Philip's state apparatus far more heavily represented the Middle Ages than a prototype of the modern age he helped to usher in.

Like many of the European monarchs who had preceded him, Philip viewed his empire as a descendant of Rome's.¹⁴ Though many of these previous

¹¹ Ibid., 42.

¹² Parker, 42.

¹³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁴ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 11.

imperial pretensions had been spurious, Philip had a very legitimate claim to Augustus' mantle. The Latin word *imperium* had evolved from denoting the executive military power of Roman generals to describing a political state which bound together multiple individual domains. The power of the ruler had decayed after the end of the Roman Empire, but in the sixteenth-century, kings began wielding greater power due to their increasingly sophisticated administrative bureaucracies. Rather than relying on a tenuous array of vassals spread across one's dominions, bureaucrats directly supported and effected the royal program. This bureaucratization by Philip and his contemporary monarchs gradually stripped away the legal constraints on their power until his will became law.¹⁵

The increased royal staff enabled the king to further his agenda into spheres which had previously remained under relatively autonomous barons. Backed up by an increasing monopolization of violence, Philip made lengthy strides towards absolutism. While he remained conscious of the legal customs of each of his domains, if necessary he could ignore them. Nevertheless, Philip strove to compensate any extensions of his power, providing ample recompense to the provincial nobility whose power he grafted to his own. Within his empire, it was widely understood that no matter how softly he spoke, he carried the biggest stick in the world.¹⁶ Inheriting a western tradition of sovereignty stemming from the Roman notion of *imperium*, Philip reigned at the nexus of absolutism and the medieval conception of the king's expansive rights over his subjects.¹⁷A

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-5.

¹⁶ Aurelio Musi, "The Kingdom of Naples in the Spanish Imperial System", in *Spain in Italy*, ed. Thomas Dandeleit and John Marino (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 74.

¹⁷ Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, trans. M. J. Dooley (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967).

contemporary to Jean Bodin, the philosophical progenitor of the absolutist tradition, the benefits of a single entity invested with full rein of his kingdom was becoming *de rigueur*. Thus, while Philip was theoretically bound by the legislation of his myriad provinces, he constantly operated at the edges of his constitutional rights, testing the local limits on his power.

Philip's advance towards absolutism stemmed from his determination to rule in the manner he saw appropriate. While his father had exercised complete control over the region local to his person, Philip wanted the same access to all corners of his imperium simultaneously. As the juncture between his various provinces, he saw himself as the sole entity capable of ruling and administering his empire. His underlings would serve to execute his will, but their decisions were expected to be as faithful to the king's wishes as was possible at the time. Philip would even hide pertinent information from his councilors if he believed it would empower them too greatly. Even the Council of State, the council with the greatest breadth of jurisdiction directly below the king, was condescendingly prohibited from certain crucial information about the Netherlands, because they "would not understand."¹⁸ He jealously withheld his power, and made sure that only he could act as the ultimate legislative and executive body (and often the supreme judicial body as well).¹⁹

It would be accurate to call Philip's style of rule "ego-centric." Operating through arguably the most powerful and elaborate hierarchy of councils and bureaucrats in the sixteenth century, Philip nevertheless spurned all but the most

¹⁸ Parker, 37.

¹⁹ Ibid.

necessary advice reaped from this incredible pool of human expertise. Each day, the work he was responsible for amounted to scores of petitions, hundreds of signatures, and “to read for himself all the incoming and outgoing correspondence of all areas, from all the ambassadors and ministers of his vast dominions.”²⁰ He demanded to know absolutely everything about the running of his empire. As his thirst for singular power over his realms quickened, the volume of correspondence either coming or going to him increased sharply; in 1584, over 16,000 petitions required his signature.²¹ From the slightest typographical error to the planning of the largest invasion force ever assembled, Philip pored over every sliver of minutia in his personal rule over the Spanish Empire. He designed an international operation that funneled every crucial decision to his desk. His penchant for micromanagement chained him to his work in an odd juxtaposition of emperor and slave.

The size and population of Philip’s empire compounded the difficulty of central administration. Such proportions demanded certain conditions which were unavailable to him in the pre-modern age in order to be effectively and centrally managed. For instance, his insistence on personally managing nearly every situation was extremely deleterious to his rule given that communication with the provinces took anywhere from several weeks to nearly a year to travel from Madrid.²² Necessarily, the time was then doubled to account for the response. The insufficient level of technology and infrastructure inherent to the sixteenth-

²⁰ Ibid., 28.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II vol. I*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harpers & Row, 1972), 367.

century was exacerbated by governance that was still struggling to free itself from the decentralized feudalism that had preceded it.

While feudal kings had relied on a hierarchy of vassalage to ensure that their rulings were enacted, this dependence hampered their ability to enforce their edicts more broadly. Philip's monarchy added the imperial bureaucracy to the noble ruling class of society. With its army of bureaucrats in both Spain and abroad, this secular administration helped to establish the jurisdiction of an early modern absolute ruler at the expense of his subordinates. However, his government remained decidedly unfit for the Herculean task of acceding to Philip's every demand. Perhaps encouraged by the comparatively advanced communications at his disposal, including the world's best postal system (aided by the industrious Tassi, later Taxi, family), he insisted on making decisions to an exceptionally minute level, from having final say on the appointment of local magistrates hundreds of miles away to the precise tactics of his armies in battle.²³ Stretched across all six continents of his influence, Philip implemented the idea of a centralized administration to a greater degree than anyone before him.²⁴

In an attempt to strengthen his position as the locus of power, Philip selected the centrally located backwater of Madrid as his new imperial capital in 1561. In addition to its central location in Spain specifically, it represented a median between all his far-flung provinces. The plentiful water and ample room for expansion made it the perfect location to establish his administration, which, in 1561 already numbered 4,000 civil servants immediately serving him, a

²³ Ibid., 72.

²⁴ Parker, 48.

number which only continued to grow.²⁵ His decision to commission his palace, the Escorial, in the city's far suburbs only two years after this adoption of Madrid presaged the king's commitment to the permanency of his court and central government in this location.

Revealing Philip's keen desire to know, and thus shape, everything possible about his domains, the king commissioned the most exceptional and complete atlas of its time.²⁶ Mathematics professor Pedro de Esquivel started surveying the Spanish mainland in the early 1560s, from which he later expanded to incorporate the entire Iberian Peninsula after Philip's acquisition of Portugal in 1581.²⁷ The name of this work, *The Escorial Atlas*, also elegantly expresses Philip's philosophy of rule. Like the titan Atlas, Philip supported an enormous weight, attempting to govern what was at the time ungovernable.

The Councils

The conciliar system inherited from Philip's Spanish predecessors was the first circle of government under the king. The three highest councils, those of War, State, and Inquisition, had general jurisdiction over the entirety of the empire, while the rest each had more a specific focus.²⁸ The councils served mainly as advisory bodies. They were privy to the incoming information about their sphere of interest and drafted suggestions for imperial policy moving forward. However, all executive actions were ultimately in the king's hands.

²⁵ Ibid., 17.

²⁶ Patrick Williams, *Philip II* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 11.

²⁷ Parker, 60.

²⁸ Koenigsberger, 16-7.

Directly below the king were the Councils of Castile and its subsequent branches into Councils of Camara, State, the Indies, War, Finance, and Works and Forests. There were also Councils of the Inquisition, Military Orders, Crusades, Portugal (after 1583), Flanders (1588), and Aragon with its new off-shoot, the Council of Italy.²⁹ This separation of Italy from Aragon in 1559 was one of Philip's first administrative reorganizations. That year, during his tour of the newly pacified Italian peninsula, Philip had deemed his Italian possessions too substantial to continue as subordinate to the Crown of Aragon.³⁰

The Council of Italy, like the rest of Spain's imperial structures, answered to both Philip and the Council of State, the council which oversaw the entirety of the empire's foreign policy.³¹ Of the regents on the Council of Italy, half hailed from Italy, one each from Naples, Milan, and Sicily.³² Sitting across from the Italians were three other imperial administrators, often from Castile but potentially from any of Philip's territories.³³ These men were all professional lawyers, drawn from a growing class of university educated *letrados*, or lettered ones.³⁴ Being a *letrado* was the highest position available to the substantial pool of *hidalgos*, or poor Spanish nobles, who chose to pursue an education in order to work in the burgeoning administration of the Spanish Empire.³⁵ As their

²⁹ Graph from Parker 22

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

³² *Ibid.*, 60.

³³ Koenigsberger, 60-1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

advancement stemmed directly from his pleasure, their loyalty was secured to Philip.³⁶

Supervising the councilors were the president of the Council and the council's secretary. Though without a vote, the secretary and the president both privately conferred on what business would be discussed and when, actively manipulating the council's agenda.³⁷ They also reported directly to the king on the council's decisions and advice. The king rarely visited council meetings, ostensibly to protect the councilors' decisions from his influence, although he projected his wishes through the secretary.³⁸ The relative importance of the secretary is apparent from his salary, which was double that of the regents.³⁹ The president worked as a conduit between the Council of Italy and the superior Council of State, the only council routinely visited by the king.⁴⁰ Council positions were almost exclusively reserved for the nobility, with the Council of State open only to *Grandees*, i.e., the highest rung of Castilian aristocracy.⁴¹ A seat on a council often came as a reward for dutiful service abroad. It was sensible practice for a bureaucrat serving at the top of the Italian administration to serve subsequently on the Council of Italy, as his firsthand experience would be invaluable to decisions made in Madrid.

The council originally functioned as the highest appeals court in Italy, and retained this role despite the growing number of administrative assignments it

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 64; Parker, 23.

³⁸ Parker., 23.

³⁹ Koenigsberger, 66.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 70; Parker, 23.

⁴¹ Koenigsberger, 28.

undertook. The Council of Italy thus evolved to deal with the day to day management of Italian affairs, such as handling grants of titles and lands, diplomacy with other Italian states, and revenue collection. Though they could not independently shape state policy, the councilors would discuss and advise Philip on issues within their jurisdiction. However, just as their paperwork increased over Philip's reign, so too did the king's fastidious micromanagement, royal tinkering which cost them much of their autonomy.⁴² With their backlog of issues exacerbated by Philip's prevaricating and scrutiny, innovation or reform in administering Italy was usually discarded as a fantasy.

The Italian Domains

Spain's ability to effect any radical change in the basic operation of Italian political organization was handicapped by the disunity of Spain's Italian provinces. While Spain controlled the vast majority of the Italian peninsula and exerted strong influence over the adjacent areas not directly under its control, Philip never pursued a policy of consolidating the kingdoms into a single political unit. Instead, he elected simply to fill the position at the top of each province's political structure. Thus, Philip was King of Naples, Duke of Milan, and, through his Aragonese Crown, he ruled Sicily as King of Spain. With Philip sequestered in the Escorial, however, it fell to his alter egos in the localities to govern his Italian dominions. The three Italian provinces had similar imperial structures, though each differed slightly due to historical differences in their political administrations and sixteenth-century geopolitical considerations.

⁴² Ibid., 63.

Three offices occupied the pinnacle of this structure. The positions of viceroy and governor were approximately the same role Philip would have held, had he ruled *in situ*, though their separation from the locus of royal power lessened their ability to rule their subjects unilaterally. The capstones of the Spanish imperial structure were the Viceroy (or Governor in Milan), the *Gran Cancelliere* (Grand Chamberlain), and the *Castellano* (Castellan).⁴³ These three officials acted as the yoke with which Philip bound his Italian states to his empire. Beneath these officials, the Spanish empire largely retained the governments inherited from its predecessors. This meant that the actual administration of these states, while supervised and guided by the Spanish, was executed by oligarchies or imperial bureaus run by Italian nobles.⁴⁴ Due to the constant conflicts throughout the empire, especially the Dutch revolt that ignited in 1567, Philip was too concerned with immediate stability to effect sweeping reorganizations of his domains. Philip's short term focus came at the expense of his empire's long term efficiency. His underlings in the various provinces had to mediate between the autocratic rulings from Madrid and the local balance of power. Each encroachment into the domains of the Italian elite met stiff institutional resistance, leading the Spanish to work within the status quo more often than against it. Spain's division of its portion of Italy into three separate governments, each with only a leash of direct Spanish control, hindered Spain's ability to assume absolute authority over its Italian dominions.

⁴³ Stefano D'Amico, *Spanish Milan: A City within the Empire, 1535-1706*, (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 130.

⁴⁴ *Spain in Italy*, 290.

Of Spain's three principalities, Milan had the greatest autonomy, due to its significance in the Spanish imperial system. In Milan, the Spanish most needed the cooperation of its venerable aristocracy and so afforded them the greatest freedom in preserving and even augmenting their status and assets.⁴⁵ Milan, positioned as a Spanish bastion in northern Italy, had long served as the lynchpin of the Italian peninsula.⁴⁶ Charles V had fought desperately with the French for the city, and it proved central to the main contests of the Italian Wars. In 1567, when the Netherlands rebelled, Milan provided the launching point for Spanish retaliation. It was the origin of the Spanish Road, the overland route over which the Spanish funneled troops and materiel to the Netherlands. In the protected shadow of the Alps, the city stood at the junction between Spain, its Mediterranean territories, Italy, the Netherlands, and the Austrian Habsburgs' vast lands in the east, cementing its importance to the Habsburg cause.⁴⁷

Beginning construction on impressive fortifications in the *trace italienne* style in 1548, Milan became a fortress and staging ground for military movements north. Given its importance in wider matters of the empire, the stability of Milan was paramount. Milanese nobles had greatly boosted their political power in the early 1500s, when a succession of toppled regimes created a vacuum which they readily occupied. In 1541, Charles V had issued his New Constitutions, a

⁴⁵ D'Amico, 129.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 124. For instance, in 286, recognizing its strategic position in relation to Europe at large, the capital of the Western Roman Empire was moved to Milan.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

document to govern Milan which essentially equated the emperor with the previous Sforza Duke and preserved most of the earlier ducal institutions.⁴⁸

Charles then attached the three Spanish administrators (governor, grand chamberlain, and castellan) to the old Sforza government. Given Charles' distant preoccupations, the governors worked with a great deal of autonomy. The governor acted like a duke who merely paid homage to a feudal superior, rather than as a bureaucrat working within a vast imperial machine. When Philip and his meticulous administration took over in 1554, he ended this autonomy. All major decisions, down to the appointments of specific officials, came from the king. Governors and viceroys were to act as the king desired, and in the event that they did not have specific instructions from him on a given matter, they should interpret his wishes as best they could. Nevertheless, Philip desired that any conflict that arose between the Spanish chancellors and the local government be resolved through compromise rather than by authority.⁴⁹

The castellan was the commander of the Milanese garrison, one of the foremost armies in the world at the time.⁵⁰ He worked closely with the governor, consulting him on military and political matters and operating the Milanese castle in its capacity as an important fortress. The grand chamberlain oversaw the correspondence between Milan and Madrid, often singlehandedly responding to the king and carrying out the royal instructions.⁵¹ This man was often a lawyer, as his main purpose was to reconcile Philip's wishes with local law and to supervise

⁴⁸ Ibid., 129.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 140.

⁵¹ Ibid., 130.

the various organs of government. The grand chamberlain worked closely with the governor and would replace him when war necessitated that military matters occupy the governor's attention. The grand chamberlain also chaired the Consiglio Secreto, an advisory body made up of the state's top Italian officials. The consiglio had to be consulted by the governor on all major issues while additionally acting as Milan's highest appeals court for any fiscal cases.

Finally, the Consiglio Secreto oversaw the three main administrative organs populated by local elites: the Magistrato Ordinario, Magistrato Straordinario, and the Senate.⁵² The first administered economic matters of state: the budget, markets, currencies, duties, and taxes. The second exercised responsibility over the king's personal possessions, the sale of royal fiefs, the grain trade, and extraordinary incomes exacted by the Crown. Additionally, it controlled the state treasury and directed how the treasury was to dispense public funds. Consisting of a president and fourteen senators (only three of whom were Spanish), this body was the main institution through which the Lombard nobility pursued their interests. Finally, the senate acted very much like the United States Supreme Court. It served as the ultimate appeals court for all civil and criminal litigation and interpreted how royal edicts were to be carried out in its jurisdiction. Indeed, the senate could even suspend Philip's decrees on the grounds that it violated local law, though in practice the effect of this power was insignificant.

Below these three bodies, Milan's civic administration was wholly exercised by Milanese elites.⁵³ With such power over local affairs, the nobility

⁵² Ibid., 131.

⁵³ Ibid., 134.

could usually match Philip's representatives on minor issues of contention. Nevertheless, truly grave matters concerning Philip's broad strategies could easily be enacted without oligarchic support. The Spanish provided two incentives for the Italians to carry out their overlords' wishes: bountiful lands, honors, and pensions on the one hand, and the bristling Milanese garrison on the other. The latter was rarely, if ever, openly presented as a threat; Milan's castle, buzzing with soldiers, provided a tacit enough warning. Spain's good-natured relationship with the strategically crucial city manifested itself through profligate generosity, personally compensating the nobility for any sacrifices they made to the state.⁵⁴ Sweetened by these considerable benefits, the Milanese nobility maintained their peaceful subordination to the Spanish, and later Austrian, Crown until Napoleon's conquest in 1797. Philip's administration over Milan was the laxest of any of his provinces. Aside from the greater local autonomy Madrid granted to Milan's elite, however, its administration differed little from that of Naples and Sicily.

In Naples, the Viceroy Pedro de Toledo (r. 1532-1553) firmly wrested administrative power from the local nobility for his liege, King Charles, power that Philip further increased. Once again, King Philip allowed for local autonomy on issues such as the appointment of low-level bureaucrats or the use of small amounts of public land. However, he exerted more control over Naples than Milan. On these matters, the viceroy would work with the local councils to hammer out policy.⁵⁵ Understanding the absolute force conveyed by Philip's explicit orders, Italian appeals to Madrid took the form of complaints against the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵⁵ Musi, 81.

actions of the viceroy, rather than directly questioning Philip's decrees. The cooperation between Crown and aristocracy actually fed the growth of Spain's absolutist state, as the aristocracy understood that Philip was responsible for their prosperity under the *Pax Hispanica* and thus made sure to further Philip's agenda in return.⁵⁶

A massive, concentrated population ensured that Naples contributed the second highest tax revenues to the Spanish Crown, behind only Castile itself.⁵⁷ Though the population was largely agricultural, rural proto-industrial production of textiles boosted the economic productivity of the countryside.⁵⁸ The Neapolitan feudal nobility occupied the role of tax-farmers and local overseers of Spain's Italian subjects. This collaboration with the local aristocracy was to the economic advantage of both parties and helped to compensate the nobility for the power they forfeited to the Spanish government.⁵⁹ Their historic privileges secure, the aristocrats willingly provided additional funds to the monarch, either through extraordinary taxes or loans, on top of the marginal sum they paid on assets not covered by their noble exemptions.⁶⁰ Spain's tactic of raising money from the sale of low- and middle-tier offices exemplified this partnership. Nobles gained local administrative power, lucrative salaries, and sources of prestige, while transferring significant sums to Madrid's imperial coffers.

⁵⁶ Astarita, 6.

⁵⁷ Musi, 86.

⁵⁸ John A. Marino, "The Rural World in Italy under Spanish Rule", in *Spain in Italy*, ed. Thomas Dandeleit and John Marino (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 410-2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶⁰ Astarita, 230.

Similar to the system in place in Milan, with the exception of the highest posts in the government, the majority remained to the Neapolitan nobility. The judiciary, political, military, and economic administrations were staffed by local aristocrats who circulated through the various state offices.⁶¹ Though venality was increasingly rampant in Philip's Italian administrations, this circulation of personnel through the state bureaucracy helped to ensure a certain degree of capability on the part of the office-holders. Given that the Kingdom of Naples was, apart from the burgeoning metropolis of the eponymous city itself, largely rural, provincial councils were set up in order to oversee justice and the execution of laws.⁶² In this way, provincial matters had an extra buffer separating them from royal interference.

This policy of lateral autonomy ensured that the Neapolitan aristocracy still had avenues of self-aggrandizement to occupy their ambitions. Nobles continued to vie for greater power, but against each other and contained within the enclosure of Philip's jurisdiction. Coalitions of families and their feudal retinues developed to influence local affairs. Once again, Philip used this to his advantage and encouraged the various factions to compete economically, which benefitted both parties as a result.⁶³

The Crown's authority was felt most intensely in Sicily. Though strategically important, the good will and cooperation of the Sicilians had less to do with Sicily's utility to the empire unlike in Milan. Fulfilling its ancient role as

⁶¹ Musi, 92;

⁶² Ibid., These councils include Naples' *Udienza alla Vicaria* and the *Sacro Regio Consiglio*.

⁶³ Musi, 96.

a breadbasket, Sicily provided huge quantities of grain to the Habsburg Empire. It was imperative to Spain that Sicily meet the food requirements of the other provinces. As a result, Sicily's quota of grain would often be taken from its agrarian peasants by force.⁶⁴ In order to stave off the greatest potential source of public dissent—famine—in the more populous regions of Castile and Naples, the Spanish administration exerted a tighter grip over the Sicilian government than it did in the other two Italian provinces. The viceroy acted much more autocratically on the island, and his powers extended well beyond those of his peers on the mainland. He could call and disband parliament, impose new taxes, veto any law or administrative action. He also acted as captain-general of all military forces in Sicily.⁶⁵ Indeed, his office's efficiency suffered because the number of matters that required his consultation was so large. The office staff of the Sicilian viceroy increased over the course of Philip's reign to deal with both the growing complexity of providing grain to Spanish lands and the rising discontent prompted by Spanish exploitation.⁶⁶

Before Philip, the Sicilian government had been largely controlled by seven officials, each a scion of a prestigious noble family. Philip stripped these offices of all but ceremonial power, allowing the most prominent of the Sicilian nobility to maintain some semblance of honor, while shifting the actual powers of each office to a Spanish bureaucrat.⁶⁷ Encouraging the use of Spanish staff was a

⁶⁴ Koenigsberger, 76-8, 111, 113.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 98. The parliament of Sicily ostensibly voted new taxes, though this role was largely taken over by the Spanish governors. Additionally, it acted as a judicial body that worked to reconcile Spanish decrees with Sicilian laws, though once again, this power was largely overruled by the Spanish when they felt it expedient to do so.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 102, 115.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

dearth of venues for professional training in Sicily than in either Italy or Spain, leading to a shortage of native human capital among the lower elite. There were few people with a university degree and, according to the Spanish, even fewer without a penchant for corruption.⁶⁸ Due to the Spanish perception of the low quality of Sicilian officials, the Spanish did everything they could to appoint Spaniards or other provincials to every available Sicilian administrative post.⁶⁹

However, once the running of the Sicilian administration had been secured, Philip accepted a wide variety of aristocratic freedoms and privileges. In typical fashion, he recognized the importance of baronial support and kept noble lands, pensions, and nominal honors largely intact.⁷⁰ In Sicilian society, the lords of vast estates often wielded near-absolute power over their own fiefs, with Spanish officials largely unable to oppose them at the local level. As long as Sicily complied with the general plans and needs of Philip, the king was content to let local matters remain in the hands of the landed elite.⁷¹ As in Milan and Naples, Philip was able to dominate the largest political decisions, and, although on the island his power extended to a deeper level than in his other provinces, it still only penetrated the uppermost executive and judicial level of government. The historic feudal structure that had existed for centuries remained mostly intact, controlling developments in its immediate jurisdictions.

III. The Inefficiencies of Spanish Administration

⁶⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁷¹ Ibid., 110.

Departing his post of Neapolitan viceroy in 1595, Juan de Zuñiga wrote to his successor that a viceroy needed to care for four key issues in order to safeguard the realm. As the apex of local Spanish authority, the official was responsible for the provisioning of food to the population, the administration of justice, the management of the state's finances, and the prudent billeting of royal soldiers.⁷² In theory, the viceroy was the absolute executive of his kingdom with the power to swiftly and capably care for each of these concerns. However, his ability to act was hemmed in on two sides.

The viceroy's office, as the locus of Spanish control, fielded every complaint, petition, suggestion, or concern by the population. Either in an effort to provide good government to their subjects, or simply from naive oversight, there was no system for screening the business directed to the viceroy and his secretary for consideration.⁷³ As time passed, the viceroy's office became more and more burdened by paperwork. The ensuing backlog was so large that the office could scarcely recover enough to preemptively try to stanch the flood of issues.

Adding to this overload was the viceroy's position as chief judicial officer of the province.⁷⁴ Inheriting this position from the role of feudal monarch from which his office descended, the viceroy was expected to hear and ultimately decide judicial appeals. Compounding the burden associated with this judicial role was Philip's desire that all judicial action take into account the opinions of local magistrates. Though well-intentioned, in practice this policy fell victim to the

⁷² Rosario Villari, *The Revolt of Naples* trans. James Newell (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 229.

⁷³ Koenigsberger, 99.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

vices of provincial judges. In Sicily, for instance, the viceroys found that the Sicilian judges took every care to manipulate the legal system in their favor.⁷⁵ If not watchful, the viceroy's office could easily find themselves complicit in the extenuation or exacerbation of local feuds and corruption.

Even though the viceroy supposedly administered the highest appellate court in the land, important petitioners could direct their case to King Philip himself. This circumnavigation further served to lengthen the judicial process and obstruct the speedy delivery of justice. It also exemplified the depth to which the Crown inserted itself into local happenings.

Royal oversight demanded that many of the viceroy's actions be rubber stamped by Madrid before taking effect, drastically delaying their execution.⁷⁶ For matters such as the payment of troops or the provisioning of grain, such delays could prove lethal. Additionally, Philip desired to shape any major policies undertaken by the viceroys, restricting the ability of the local executive to take matters into his own hands when he saw the opportunity to solve problems or prevent new ones from arising.

Underlying both of these problems was one inherent to the viceroy's office. The attractions of a post within the imperial administration varied between Milan, Naples, and Sicily. In Milan, into which thousands of ducats were poured every year, a post as a Spanish bureaucrat was an alluring position with many opportunities for advancement and the building of personal relations. Naples hosted an urban middle class with a substantial number of trained lawyers.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

However, they proved themselves inefficient administrators, and were never able to consolidate into a stable bureaucratic class able to oppose the high nobility in the political sphere.⁷⁷ In Sicily, however, with less funding and an administration more at odds with the local population, the available jobs failed to appeal to the best and brightest of the university-trained *letrados*.⁷⁸ Instead, Sicily's secular administration was staffed by low quality bureaucrats whose loyalty to the Spanish system was markedly less than their loyalty to coin or particular political factions.⁷⁹ In all, though Spain boasted a relatively robust education system, the dispersal of talented graduates was not uniform throughout the empire, greatly hampering the efficacy of its bureaucracy.

Money's influence on public positions exploded in the latter half of Philip's reign through the increasing sale of venal offices. In the first three years of his reign (1577-1580) viceroy Marcantonio Colonna sold more than 50,000 scudi worth of offices, as compared to 1,500 scudi over the preceding decade.⁸⁰ By the mid-1580s, the total price of all offices for sale in Sicily reached 300,000 scudi.⁸¹ This burgeoning market in ministerial positions greatly increased the occupancy rate by the uninspired and inept. Though the Sicilian government had undergone a period of reform in the 1560s and 1570s in order to secure grain

⁷⁷ Giovanni Muto, "Noble Presence and Stratification in the Territories of Spanish Italy", in *Spain in Italy*, ed. Thomas Dandeleit and John Marino (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 290.

⁷⁸ Koenigsberger, 118; R. A. Stradling, *Europe and the Decline of Spain* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), 29.

⁷⁹ Koenigsberger, 27, 114. Throughout all of the kingdoms, the anti-semitism inherent in the Spanish system of government barred conversos, Jews, and their descendants from holding any public office. # This policy had the effect of alienating one of the best- educated segments of the population from the sector in which they could have had some of the greatest impact.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

shipments, the steep rise in venality after 1580 dashed whatever efficiencies had earlier been won.

Because of the relatively small size of the imperial administration (for comparison, the entire empire's bureaucratic personnel numbered 2,000, less than that which runs modern-day Wales), the individual bureaucrats wielded a significant amount of influence.⁸² It was thus easy for interested parties such as nobles or guilds to influence these public servants with a tidy sum. Similar problems were seen in the irregular police force that the viceroys maintained. Not only would criminals be ignored in exchange for cash, but recruits for this civil militia usually signed up in order to procure weapons. After their contract was over (often no more than a year), they would run off in order to join bands of outlaws to prey upon the people they had once "protected."⁸³

Philip thus inherited a fairly wieldy imperial apparatus with which to conduct the course of his individual dominions in concert. Italy had an especially easy handle for Philip to grip in that he simply occupied customary titles which all had long-standing political precedent. After Lepanto, the Mediterranean ceased to be an eventful military theater, allowing for a restorative *Pax Hispanica* to descend over the provinces. While the Netherlands descended into Protestant revolution and America shook from disease and economic exploitation, the Italian peninsula remained a steadfast, productive, and fraternal counterpart to the Iberian.

⁸² Stradling, 29.

⁸³ Christopher F. Black, *Early Modern Italy: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 2001), 195.

However, this administration depended on the slow speed of travel and even slower speed of Philip's dithering for executive decisions to be made. Within the provinces, the apparatus of empire was small and overburdened and depended on the local nobility for its rule to pervade the land. These nobles in turn made for poor and corrupt bureaucrats whose loyalties could not always be trusted to align with the empire's. As Italy was relatively peaceful for Philip, these inefficiencies received little attention or reform. In the following chapters, we will more deeply probe the situation extant in Philip's Italian realms and how this influenced the efficiency and health of the Spanish Empire.

IV. Spain and the Aristocracy

The manner in which the Spanish empire dealt with the population of Italy was fraught with inefficacy. In an era still mired in the feudal system, the monarchy had no choice but to cultivate relationships with the most influential estate. Not only did the potency of imperial rule depend on how the Spanish treated the nobility and commoners, but also on how those estates interacted with one another. The monopoly of violence held by the Spanish proved more effective in simply subduing its three Italian provinces than in overseeing an effective system of government. Contentment with Spanish oversight, at least to a certain extent, proved necessary for the everyday running of society. Without a degree of approval from the people, the Italian populace could express their protest through legal obstruction, civil disobedience, or, more drastically, outright revolt and armed insurrection. To solidify their hold over their Italian provinces, the Spanish monarchy took up the mantle of patron to the Italian aristocracy. For hundreds of years, Aragonese and Catalan aristocrats had married into

grand Italian families, establishing a framework for increased intercourse between the two peninsulas. Building on this long standing relationship, Philip found that the aristocracy provided a ready platform upon which the Spanish could control their Italian domains.

After centuries of internecine warfare on the Italian peninsula, the sudden appearance of a military hegemon stole the *raison d'être* of the aristocracy, leaving them to new pursuits.⁸⁴ Having stamped out feuds among the nobility, the state hired them to pursue their previous role of ensuring domestic tranquility among the population. The nobility, without their societal function of military service, thereby became officials of the state.⁸⁵

In 1569, the Italian nobility forfeited their right to engage in their province's central administration in return for the exclusion of the Spanish from local government.⁸⁶ However, because the viceroy also served as the chief justice of the land, his office was swamped by any legal case whose overly insistent litigant had refused to accept the previous rulings.⁸⁷ Local administrative matters, such as demarcating city limits or regulating public hygiene, were largely left to the local ministers. Unless the issue reached levels of open fighting, or involved plague or starvation, the viceroy usually had too much on his plate to become involved in settling such disputes. In light of this administrative overload, the elites helped fill in the gaps.

⁸⁴ Tommaso Astarita, *The Continuity of Feudal Power: The Caracciolo di Brienza in Spanish Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992),70-1.

⁸⁵ Astarita, 70.

⁸⁶ Koenigsberger, 87.

⁸⁷ Koenigsberger, 99; AGS-SP 3, 1576.

The Spanish used the compromise of 1569 to fortify their client base and staff their provincial government. The lower rungs of the administration were held by the lesser nobility and influential members of the commons.⁸⁸ These salaried positions could be clerical or secretarial, a military office, an ecclesiastical position, or a job in the bureaus of finance and justice. Perhaps the most important regalian right conceded to the nobility was that of civil and criminal jurisdiction over their own fiefs. Acknowledging the difficulty they had administering justice in the entirety of their provinces, the Spanish allowed barons to control the country courts and to appoint the ministers of justice to preside over their lands.⁸⁹ The most important of these rural appointments was that of governor. Like a local viceroy, the governor's court was the main court of the fief, in which the baron served as the appellate judge. While Spanish courts could supersede the baronial rulings, they rarely did so, more often serving only to enforce the decision. The governor also oversaw the daily administration of his superior's fiefs and helped to shape the manner in which vassals were taxed. With the governor's strong control of the estates, the nobility were free to leave the countryside and take up royal appointments.

In total, Spain spent 3,000,000 ducats per annum paying the salaries of Italian bureaucrats.⁹⁰ Drawn by the allure of salaried positions under the Spanish government, aristocrats flocked to cities from their rural estates. However, the landowners continued to charge rents from peasants for the privilege of farming their land. They also demanded a certain percentage of the final yield to fund their lives of noblesse.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Thomas J. Dandeleit, *Early Modern Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21.

⁸⁹ Astarita, 74.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Astarita, 68.

With a governor presiding over their feudal affairs, the nobility's income from their vassals increased considerably above the rate at which they themselves were taxed by the Crown. Especially in Naples and Sicily, the nobility still dominated vast country latifundia worked by peasants, who were only nominally free from serfdom.⁹²

Cushioned by their feudal incomes, the rentiers moved to urban offices and townhouses to enjoy their new bureaucratic revenues and the resulting life of luxury.⁹³

It would be disingenuous, however, to continue to address the nobility as a cohesive class. Though the Spanish had ended the violent feuds between nobles, they failed to completely soothe the perpetual tensions between ambitious barons. Indeed, there were three strata of nobility that developed under Spanish rule.⁹⁴ The first were the long established feudal elite who had held lands and titles from time immemorial. These were the patricians to whom were granted the highest positions in the Spanish government. They served on the Milanese senate, as archbishops, and in the other top organs of the state bureaucracy. A second class comprised the lesser nobility, who aggrandized themselves at Spanish expense. This was the class of civil servants who worked in the legal and administrative system, ensuring the smooth functioning of society. Finally, there were those who had most recently attained noble status. These families had acquired their wealth through some commercial manner, either by means of finance, trade, or some other industrial pursuit. The porousness of the Spanish aristocracy encouraged those with wealth to purchase a package of land and title to

⁹² John A. Marino edit., *Early Modern Italy 1550-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 88.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7; Marino, 88.

⁹⁴ Muto, 269.

promote their position to that of the upper class. With such a promotion came the attendant privileges reserved for members of the aristocracy.

Of course these nobles, the *noblesse de robe*, were viewed as upstarts by those with ancient titles. In an attempt to close the path to power below them, the patricians imposed genealogical restrictions to enter the city councils and highest public offices. Because feudal privilege over rural lands ended at the city limits, this *serrate oligarchiche*, or policy of entrenching privilege, helped to solidify the *nobilita originaria* in their command of both city and rural life.⁹⁵

The Spanish Crown wooed the Italian nobility with money and prestigious titles in order to placate them in light of their subordination. In the Kingdom of Naples alone, the Spanish government doled out hefty pensions totaling 100,000 escudos in direct, annual cash transfers.⁹⁶ This was roughly equivalent to one tenth of the total Spanish expenditures in the realm.⁹⁷ These pensions were bundled with the new titles announced each year from Madrid. The number of princes, dukes, and marquises increased rapidly under Philip, while the lesser nobility secured illustrious titles at an even greater rate.⁹⁸ With each title came a certain income, either from associated lands or directly from the treasury. Additionally, once one's income hit a certain threshold, one could expect a titular promotion to the next rank of nobility. Reflecting the Spanish propensity for a large, permeable noble class, these titles brought substantial

⁹⁵ Ibid., 271.

⁹⁶ R.A. Stradling, *Europe and the Decline of Spain* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 45.

⁹⁷ Marino, 21. Indeed, when sifting through the Simancas archives, many legajos (folders containing all missives sent from one location to Madrid during a particular length of time) consist of upwards of 60% documents asking the king's permission for grants of lands, titles, or money for individual Italians.

⁹⁸ Koenigsberger, 89.

material benefits and with them, a loyalty to the entity from which the honors stemmed.

The monarchy was encouraged to promote the wealth of the upper classes, as they constituted the main body of lenders to the Crown. The richer they got, the more money the Crown could glean from them to sponsor their imperial projects. Those who lent to the monarch were especially likely to be promoted, as was the case in 1575 with Don Juan de Guevara, a rich lord whose generosity towards the Crown resulted in a specific request by the Neapolitan viceroy for Philip to award him an elevated titles and a parcel of royal land.⁹⁹

Such honors were not confined to the realms directly under Spanish control. By the late 1500s, Spain's generosity had bought it the loyalty of nearly the whole of Italy's aristocracy. From Cosimo de Medici, the royally minted "Grand Duke of Tuscany," to nobles in Genoa, Ferrara, and Mantua, Philip lavished honors generously and widely.¹⁰⁰

Such a grand elevation exemplified Spain's "trickle-down" policy. To accomplish its aims with the greatest rapidity, the Spanish prioritized the highest rung of society as the beneficiaries of its most substantial awards. The highest military and political posts available to non-Spaniards went to the cream of the aristocracy. Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma and a Habsburg bastard, was appointed commander-in-chief of Spanish forces in the Netherlands. Though certainly buoyed by

⁹⁹ AGS-SP 3, 1575.

¹⁰⁰ Michael J. Levin, *Agents of Empire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 5. It should be noted that Venice and the Papal states were the only two principalities whose nobility maintained relative freedom from Spanish sway.

his blood, the Duke of Parma's career is indicative of the heights to which the grandest Italian nobles could rise, both in Italy and around the empire.

This trickle-down policy entrenched the channels through which the prizes ran. Receiving lands, grants, and pensions in large lump sums, the most elevated patricians could distribute these among their vassals to cultivate loyalty to themselves and to the ultimate progenitor of this favor, the Spanish king. Utilizing that most ancient political relationship, that of the patron and client, the monarchy was thus able to create an ever-expanding political machine, kept well oiled by a liberal application of silver.

The Spanish usurpation of higher governmental and judicial positions, along with their cultivation of materialism in the aristocracy, helped to align the two forces in the pursuit of cash. Enlisting these cultured provincial elites, Spain strengthened its relationship with the Italian aristocracy from a desire for a streamlined and efficacious collection of taxes. Though the privilege of nobles exempted them from direct taxation, their position of lording over the common folk, who were subject to direct taxation, made the aristocracy perfect intermediaries in the upward flow of wealth from the peasantry to the monarchy.

Spain's annual revenue benefitted from the fixed taxation of royal fiefs, vacant ecclesiastical benefices, town charters, venal offices, and taxes on sales and exports. Of equal, if not greater, importance were the extraordinary taxes derived from local parliaments. The parliaments were comprised of three estates. The first was the clergy and church lands. Second, the aristocracy, their vassals, and towns under their control. And, third, there was a mix of cities and districts under royal dominion.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Koenigsberger, 152.

The method of extracting taxes varied by province. In Sicily, the king would send the parliament an annual bill with the expectation that the quota would be filled by a vote of the estates. While the first and third estates battled for compromise over the sum (as they had to pay it directly), the nobility usually cooperated with the king's demands, since they could expect their subjects to cover the entirety of their share.¹⁰² In any case, annual tax collection began before the parliament could organize its opposition or deliver its demands to the king. Even if parliamentary demands reached Philip, his authority left him largely immune to any dissent from his subjects or their representatives. However, by the 1580s, the parliaments had gotten wise to Philip's demands. In 1581, the Neapolitan estates gave Philip less than the asked for 1,200,000 ducats, greatly distressing the viceroy, and causing him to ask for help of any sort in a panicked letter to his liege.¹⁰³

In Milan, the responsibility of representing the people to the Crown was given to the Magistrato Straordinario. Due to its composition of oligarchs, it was easy for the Spanish to levy the monthly *mensuale* tax in 1536.¹⁰⁴ Originally an emergency war tax, the *mensuale* gradually turned into a perpetual monthly extraction of 20,000 scudi from all levels of society.¹⁰⁵ Efforts were made to equalize the burden between the rural and urban populations, and because most of the taxes collected were subsequently spent within Lombardy to pay for the Milanese garrison's wages, arms, and victuals, much of the money recirculated into the local economy.

¹⁰² Ibid., 154.

¹⁰³ AGS-SP 6, 1588.

¹⁰⁴ D'Amico, 126, 132.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 126.

In Naples, the *fiscali*, a hearth tax, was levied by the parliament on each of the Kingdom's twelve provinces. This tax fell mostly on agricultural workers, as the clergy, the old, the poor, and the city of Naples were all exempt, while the nobility just farmed their share of the tax burden out to their rent-payers.¹⁰⁶

The taxes demanded by the central government, while eventually finding their way into the Spanish treasury, served to line the pockets of the Italian elite along the way. Hired to collect the taxes, their personal fortunes funded tax farms, for which the investors would receive an annuity.¹⁰⁷ The different tax farms would bid against each other to secure Madrid's sanction for tax collection, encouraging optimistically high bids. However, this initial investment by the farm would be defrayed by the taxpayers through a mix of legal means and "extra-legal" extortion.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the second estate became responsible for the collection of the majority of direct taxes. Due to the nature of tax farming, the collectors often received exorbitant profits by eagerly exploiting their domains.

In addition to earning them considerable fortunes, the nobility's control over the tax system allowed them to leverage their power in favor of autonomy. Loath to disrupt royal income, the Spanish authorities found themselves beholden to their ostensible subjects. Within the cities, the nobles could draw on their vast resources and higher social standing to effect their wishes; in the country, especially on their own estates, their will was well nigh inviolable.¹⁰⁹ Twice a year, a royal overseer, the

¹⁰⁶ Antonio Calabria, *The Cost of Empire: The Finances of the Kingdom of Naples in the Time of Spanish Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39; AGS-SP 1, f^o 167.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Koenigsberger, 110.

maestro giurato, would tour the province seeking to right the gross abuses of feudal power. However, he could interfere only in those circumstances in which he had immediate proof of such abuse. And even in the event of his intervention, the seigneur in question would often simply ignore his prescription once he had departed from the estate.¹¹⁰ In 1568, Philip informed the Sicilian lords that they could no longer exact “free money grants” from their vassals. It took four years before any reform was actually made, as the nobility had mounted a successful campaign of bribery and petitions to keep the viceroy from interfering with their business.

In light of such obstacles, the Spanish government never mounted a coordinated and systematic program to centralize political power. The Sicilian viceroy summed up the Spanish attitude towards their subject nobility, writing to Madrid that “the best foundation of the security of the state is a contented nobility, which does not want to improve its condition.”¹¹¹ The Spanish coddled the Italian elite obsequiously for their cooperation within the empire. Subsidies and conservative policies of the imperial government helped to forestall the development of capitalism in Italy. Indeed, many of Spain’s policies served to economically retard or even reverse growth in their provinces.

To begin with, the feudal system of administration redistributed the wealth upwards, away from the agricultural and proto-industrial production of the lower orders. By the 1550s, the nobility had realized that their political heft no longer came from their monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, as the monarchy now claimed that right. Instead, the landed estate relied on their feudal monopolies to provide them

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 115-6.

with the new source of power—money. Exercising tight control over their estates in the country, the aristocracy had a variety of methods with which they could extract rents from their subordinates. The rights and monopolies which they held included exclusive access to forests and common land during parts of the year, fixed rents on yields, and monopolies on utilitarian items such as ovens, mills, and inns.¹¹² On Sicilian latifundia, feudal right was so extreme that a baron could force his tenants to sell their crops to him at a pittance in the beginning of the year so that he could gouge them when selling their victuals back to them just a few months later.¹¹³ Noble jurisdiction over communal lands allowed them to charge for hunting, fishing, logging, and even for the washing of clothes in the river. Inevitably, almost everything a peasant did to profit himself managed also to profit his feudal superior in some way.

However, feudal ownership of land or the means of production did not imply responsibility for them. Most of these feudal rights the lord traded to the peasantry each year in return for a large sum. To pay for this, the inhabitants of fiefs (communally referred to as *universita*) would annually collect a grant to allow them to legally use the basic necessities for their way of life.¹¹⁴ They paid this fee both in coin and kind, further increasing the dues required of them by their landlords. In this way, the nobles absolved themselves of the care and upkeep of the community's welfare, while pocketing large sums of money.

The barons would often divest themselves of oversight over their own lands as well. The barons' allodial lands, i.e., those directly under baronial ownership, were

¹¹² Astarita, 40, 75.

¹¹³ Koenigsberger, 76.

¹¹⁴ Astarita., 75.

wholly leased out to farmers for rents.¹¹⁵ These rents constituted the *terraggio*, a sum fixed to the area of the land, assigning total responsibility for its productivity to the peasant, while guaranteeing the rentier his income. Baronial apathy to the productivity of their land ran so deep that any investment into local agriculture was out of the question. A lord would hardly ever lend capital to a peasant, even to entrap him in a cycle of sharecropping, which would quite possibly lead to a reversion to quasi-serfdom.¹¹⁶ Instead, the landed aristocracy simply leveraged taxation against their feudal subjects to impoverish them to the point where they sold their tenancies to the lord out of necessity. When this failed to work, the baron used his tremendous sway over the courts to have the lands seized through civil forfeiture.¹¹⁷ These gains were increased by the *infeudazione* process, whereby a landlord gradually usurped communal pasture for cash-crops, whose cultivation he would invariably rent out.¹¹⁸ Having adopted the position of rural landlord living far from his property, he completely lost all interest in the productivity of his lands. Through this progression, the mental gulf between the aristocrat and his ancestral domains widened. The relationship strongly resembles that of King Philip and his provinces. While distance in Philip's case may have proved an insurmountable obstacle to a high level of efficient control, on the more local level of feudal nobility, their power and oversight allowed for a direct and effective economy of extraction.

Incubating noble apathy towards economic productivity was the feudal conception of *derogance*. Arising in reaction to the growth of a mercantile class of

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Koenigsberger, 119.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 78.

wealthy ennobled commoners, *derogance* banned any member of the second estate from trade or industry on pain of demotion and revocation of his privileges.¹¹⁹ In the upward path of social promotion, a rich commoner could pay for a venal office in his majesty's administration, thus securing a lucrative post in a city. From there, it was a short step to buying a title of nobility from one's employer. By the mid-16th century, money had already become a primary prerequisite of nobility, and Spain's generosity in selling titles solidified this trend.¹²⁰ The ability to purchase noble status helped to eliminate the most industrious of the third estate and kept urban craftworks and shops from gaining appreciable size or efficiency.¹²¹ Beginning in the late 1400s, a series of depressions in Mediterranean trade helped to encourage the wealthy merchant class to settle for the lax and stable life of the landed aristocracy. Land was always for sale, by either bankrupt peasants or the Spanish monarchy, whose constant thirst for money precipitated the sale of much of its feudal domains in Italy.¹²² Though land ownership had some of the lowest returns of any investment, it was also the safest, providing steady income and entrance to the second estate.

Nevertheless, the appreciation in the price of land was higher than that of most other commodities, maintaining the primacy of rentiership above actual agricultural production.¹²³ Despite decades of war in the early 1500s, Italy's population reached new heights by 1600. However, this increased demand met with the limited and increasingly insufficient amount of land in the peninsula. Looking at the 16th century

¹¹⁹ H. G. Koenigsberger, George L. Mosse, and G. Q. Bowler, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Longman, 1968), 46.

¹²⁰ Braudel, 726.

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¹²² Calabria, 2. Indeed, during the course of Philip's reign, royal land in the province of Naples declined from 7% of the total to less than 4%.

¹²³ Astarita, 46.

as a whole, inflation in the Spanish provinces was about 2-3% per year, while land increased in value at an average of 4.5% annually.¹²⁴ The rents from land hovered around 4-5% of the total property value; rents from allodial land were set at 6% of the property's value.¹²⁵

The selling of one's business to finance a fief thus brought with it security, power, and the psychological gratification of having bettered oneself officially by entering the nobility.¹²⁶ Noble privileges were indeed extremely advantageous, granting tax exemptions, proximity to and promotion from the Spanish monarchy, a less hectic lifestyle than that of a merchant or artisan, and rights of lordship over one's land.¹²⁷ This last category constituted a considerable fiscal advantage over one's renters. It included the rights of judicial administration, monopolies, taxation, and the occasional and unpaid labor of one's subjects.¹²⁸ The feudal right of the *corvee*, or forced labor, was no longer enforceable, commuted instead to cash payments.

Combining these baronial incomes with the salaries, pensions, or donatives obtained from the Spanish Crown, much of the Italian nobility grew extremely wealthy. Because land ownership was such a secure investment, the economic prosperity of one's estates was less a concern than advancement via royal patronage. Allegiance at this juncture proved a zero sum game: as nobles aligned themselves with the king, or at least his beneficence, their interest in their subjects waned. Their concern lay in their own well-being, assured through their contact with the monarchy.

¹²⁴ Koenigsberger, Mosse, and Bowler, 29; Astarita, 60.

¹²⁵ Astarita, 60. Figures apply mainly to Naples, though it can be expected that feudal incomes elsewhere were similarly structured. With regard to these two types of property, fiefs were rented from the king and would thus have taxes owed to him. Allodial land was wholly owned by the nobility.

¹²⁶ Astarita, 5.

¹²⁷ Muto, 293.

¹²⁸ Astarita, 39.

Though *derogance* proscribed them from industry, the bans on usury had long since lapsed and nobles took upon themselves the profitable role of financiers. In Philip's continual search for cash, the renting of royal rights to nobles closely resembled the rentiership exercised by his aristocracy. The monarchy depended on a complex array of loans, which formed a proto-national debt. The temporary bequeathing of *juros* (state bonds) and annuities skyrocketed in the second half of the 16th century. The wealthy bought much of Spain's floating debt through the *juros* and the annuities made available by them. Until the early 1560's, the *juro* had been a type of state remuneration in lieu of money for goods, services, pensions, etc.¹²⁹ By 1561, it had been formalized into an instrument with which bondholders could float the monarchy's debt. To encourage investment in *juros*, the monarchy guaranteed outrageously attractive returns. In 1554, lifetime annuities granted twenty percent interest *in perpetuo*. Though these fixed returns lessened over time, to thirteen percent for annuities in 1581 and nine or ten percent for *juros*, they still remained an attractive investment for those with disposable income.¹³⁰ These rates rose in response to the multiple bankruptcies of Philip; however, the monarchy rarely took longer than a few months or a year to begin ravenously borrowing again.

Another major source of revenue for the Spanish Crown was the sale of revenues. In essence, sale of revenues meant tax-farming or the outright forfeiture of jurisdiction over certain areas of royal taxation in return for immediate payment. The entire proceeds from a gabelle, export, or direct tax could be sold for a lump sum provided by the tax farms. Then, for each year of the tax's alienation, the government

¹²⁹ Calabria, 106.

¹³⁰ Calabria, 108; Astarita, 60.

paid the farmers an interest rate between eight and ten percent.¹³¹ Barons could also purchase the royal taxes on their own lands, furthering their allodial profits while also receiving the royal interest. The ravenous military-industrial complex of the Spanish Crown, with its regulated and guaranteed returns, monopolized the investment market in Spanish Italy. With such assured profitability, it was easier for the nobility to reap a fixed income from the monarchy than to engage in the previous Italian specialty of Mediterranean trade, investment in improving infrastructure, or financing industrial workshops.¹³²

The aristocracy's other expenses were devoted to the grand trappings of noble life. In the perpetual cycle of aristocratic status-climbing, the elite spent lavishly on tapestries, statuary, paintings, and palaces.¹³³ Indeed, conspicuous consumption dominated the financial priorities of the rich at this time.¹³⁴ To establish their social rank, as well as to insure their posterity's material wealth, the nobility shunned saving in order to ornament their dwellings with an opulence befitting their station.¹³⁵ The luxuries they bought were products of small workshops run within the guild system. The quality of these workshops ranged from local blacksmiths servicing the needs of plowhorses to the Michelangelos and Leonardos producing works for the grandest dukes and kings of Europe. However, due to the small proportion of the population made up by the nobility, the demand they created was commensurately meager.

¹³¹ Calabria, 52

¹³² Braudel, 728.

¹³³ Astarita, 56. Koenigsberger, 140.

¹³⁴ Stuart Woolf, preface to T. Davis, *Famiglie feudali siciliane* (Caltanissetta: Rome, 1985).

¹³⁵ Astarita, 69.

The economic effect of such an aristocracy was thus extremely deleterious. The method in which they grew their lucre, by exploiting their workers and investing in returns from the monarchy drew money away from both areas of society. Philip's government became increasingly indebted to its lenders leading to failures in its foreign policy and a shriveling of domestic economies. Nobles siphoned capital from the larger population, impoverishing what could have become a large consumer class capable of demanding and producing industrial goods. Instead, the investment into their own wealth and luxury caused serious stagnation in the economic productivity of their local realms.

V. The Plight of the Peasantry

The ostentatious display of riches by the Italian nobility was the manifestation of the wealth grafted from the poorer class. Thorstein Veblen, an economist working at the turn of the 20th century, wrote that "luxury is a form of waste that arose to confer status on an essentially useless class." This "useless class" was favored in all respects in 16th century Italian society. We have already seen how the nobility farmed their social inferiors to sustain a lavish lifestyle, but to maintain their privileged position, powerful Italians engineered an environment in which they could continue to dominate the people upon whom they depended. In the local government, peasant farmers were represented by the lords who owned the land. The third estate was made up of towns and farmers who worked land rented from Philip II in his role as Duke of Milan or King of the Two

Sicilies.¹³⁶ Thus, for many of the rural peasantry, there was no easy recourse to protect themselves against abuses suffered at the hands of noble rentiers.

Though the nobles had long since lost the right to be tried by a jury exclusively made up of other nobles, in the 1500s they stopped being tried altogether. Except for the most conspicuous cases of gross misconduct, when it was obligated to respond, the legal system would usually turn a blind eye to wrongdoing by the nobility.¹³⁷ When the Sicilian viceroy Marcantonio Colonna arrested the Marquis de la Favara for aiding a prison break, the island was stupefied at an action taken against one thought to be inviolable. More commonly, the government acted as it did when the baron of Miserendino murdered his page in 1577, that is, by doing nothing. Spanish officials smothered the case and sent the baron off with a scolding. In Italy, it was said that “the hand of justice lies only on the poor.”¹³⁸ Increasingly, the Spanish government prized money above justice and by the 1580s the Neapolitan viceroy urged his subordinates to exact fines from delinquents instead of imprisoning or torturing them.¹³⁹

The situation was naturally far different for the common person. King Philip, in writing to his viceroys, maintained that their most treasured task was the safeguarding of justice.¹⁴⁰ In effect, the viceroy’s primary occupation was the punishment of those who disobeyed the king’s laws. Taking his position as the embodiment of his empire, any crime was a personal affront to Philip, and he demanded it be punished with the sternest severity, a policy often manifested as “guilty until proven innocent”.¹⁴¹ When a member

¹³⁶ Koenigsberger, 151-2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹³⁸ Memorandum on the government of Sicily; Letters and Papers relating to Sicily, British Museum Manuscripts. Add. 28 396, fo. 198.

¹³⁹ AGS-SP 4, 1582.

¹⁴⁰ AGS-SP, Libro 634, pp. 37, 136.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38, 43.

of the third estate was brought to trial, his case was defended by the Procurator of the Poor, a public official appointed specifically for this purpose. However, the position's remuneration was poor and thus rarely, if ever, attracted a responsible or capable lawyer to fill the position.¹⁴² Opposing the defendant was the public prosecutor, who held his position for life and received far higher compensation. Over time, this magistrate was able to usurp many of the powers of the courtroom, with the effect of being able to dominate even the judge in the pursuit of a conviction.¹⁴³ While the rich were rarely brought up on charges or could bribe their way out of them, the poor continued to be the overwhelming recipients of state execution, torture, and imprisonment.

The execution of the law was universally seen to harshly discriminate against the poor, engendering in that class a deep distrust of the very institutions charged with keeping order and peace in Italy. Not only were the magistrates noble, or at least well stationed *letrado*, but their position encouraged a cozy relationship with the rich and powerful. When a legal sentence was handed down, it would most often serve as an instrument of terror to quell anti-establishment sentiment. For instance, the prosecutor could call on the privilege of *ex abrupto*, whereby the accused would be tortured before even being informed of what he was being accused of.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, such measures began to be used as pre-conviction punishment for certain crimes. Anyone accused of highway robbery, for example, was allowed to be tortured immediately upon arrest.

The Impoverishment of Italy

¹⁴² Koenigsberger, 118.

¹⁴³ Koenigsberger, 119.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 121

Such harsh punishments only grew more commonplace as Italy descended into lawlessness in the latter half of the 16th century. With the end of the bloody Italian Wars in 1559, daily life had finally returned to peace. In the wake of the warring armies, however, famine loomed threateningly. Peasants throughout Italy began to experience a depreciation in their quality of life, as it became harder to find food for their larders. Resentment and starvation was growing in the ranks of the people, leading to a rate of banditry scarcely before experienced in the Mediterranean.

The hunger of Italians derived from a series of factors. The first stemmed from a major demographic surge. After the wars, a boom in population stretched the limited resources of the peninsula to the breaking point. In 1505, the population of Naples numbered around 105,000. By the end of the century, in 1596, Naples was the second largest city in Europe, with 250,000 residents.¹⁴⁵ Such an explosion was typical of Italy as a whole, and while the number of people increased, the land under cultivation could not.

By 1575, Italy reached its pre-Black Death population of 8 million and once again began running into Malthusian pressures.¹⁴⁶ As Malthus argued, in the pre-industrial era the total amount of money able to be paid in wages was limited, so that with a growth in population, per capita income necessarily dropped. Conversely, the price of food rose, creating a pincer that squeezed the poorer strata of society in its grip. By 1600, Central-North Italy had a population density of nearly 50 persons per square kilometer. Nowhere

¹⁴⁵ Calabria, 27; Astarita, 82.

¹⁴⁶ Paolo Malanima, "A Declining Economy: Central and Northern Italy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." in *Spain in Italy*, ed. Thomas Dandeleit and James Marino (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 386.

else in Europe was even close. The Netherlands trailed with 36.4 people/km², France with 33, England at 27, and Spain at 15.¹⁴⁷

Compounding the scarcity of food was a succession of bad harvests starting in 1575 and striking every few years until the end of the century. Already in 1560, the viceroy of Naples wrote desperately to Madrid that measures had to be taken to halt the city's population explosion. With Turkish pirates cutting off maritime shipments of grain, overland trade could barely keep up with the city's increasing numbers.¹⁴⁸ Twenty five years later, the situation was even more critical. Famines struck in 1585, and especially between 1590-2 and 1595-7 with corresponding spikes in grain prices from 2.7 to 4.7 ducats/tomolo, and then from 2.8 to 6 ducats/tomolo, respectively.¹⁴⁹ Even at the beginning of Philip's reign, his Neapolitan viceroy faced hungrily angry rabble armed with stones and spears within his kingdom.¹⁵⁰ As we will see, the danger to imperial stability grew markedly when the people learned what constituted real famine.

In Naples, a whirlwind of pressures pushed the kingdom ever closer to starvation. The Spanish government exacerbated the grain shortage by urging the conversion of thousands of acres of farmland into pasture for the grazing of merino sheep, whose fleece had become one of Castile's most important exports. These sheep, though valuable for their owners (who, due to the high startup capital required, were invariably already wealthy), consumed vast amounts of resources and often grazed right over the fields of peasant farmers. Despite its superficial productivity, the burgeoning wool trade actually depressed the Neapolitan economy. Antonio Calabria points to the growth of stock

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ AGS-SP 1, f^o 116.

¹⁴⁹ Calabria, 34.

¹⁵⁰ AGS-SP 1, f^o 107.

farming as an indication of the depression in Naples' economy.¹⁵¹ The very nature of the wool sector reflects the rising inequality, whereby a few very wealthy members of society owned much of the productive capital at the expense of many poorer folk. Noble landlords had figured out how to eke out an even greater profit from their land, and pursued this path in ways that were oblivious to the impact on available food supplies and the local economy at large. In 1580, the Neapolitan ambassador, Alvise Lando, compared this pastoral-plantation economy to a "contagious... pestilential humor" that, through the lure of lucre, was turning the kingdom into an overpopulated poor house with a small cadre of plutocrats at the top.¹⁵²

As the population skyrocketed, so too did the disparity of wealth. Guarded through strict inheritance laws and enlarged through the benefits of nobility, aristocratic wealth gobbled up more and more of the kingdom's capital. Solidified under Charles V, measures to protect noble inheritance ensured that large properties were nearly impossible to break up. Already in 1557, 558 individuals in 327 families controlled lands comprising 78% of the entire population of the Kingdom of Naples.¹⁵³ That percentage only grew as time went on. As their wealth expanded, so too did their domains. Independent farmers became increasingly scarce, as their lands were bought out from under them by the ravenous appetites of the oligarchs.¹⁵⁴ Encouraged by noble privilege and the ability to transition their land to stock farming, the aristocracy was able to demand from their tenants greater and greater proceeds from their harvests, until such an occupation was no longer profitable to the farmer. Not only did this have a marked effect

¹⁵¹ Calabria, 24.

¹⁵² Ibid, 26.

¹⁵³ Muto, 280.

¹⁵⁴ Koenigsberger, Mosse, and Bowler, 44.

on food production, but by driving peasants from the land, it propelled the growth of Spanish Italy's major cities. Peasants streamed in from the countryside, hoping to find work in an environment with an increasing dearth of such.¹⁵⁵ In the 16th century, Naples' population more than doubled, Milan grew from 100,000 to 180,000 people, and Messina's population tripled to 120,000 by 1600.¹⁵⁶ As wealth calcified into the hands of a few, the growing masses became ever more marginalized from the bare necessities of life.

The market forces of the day expedited the local turnover of land to oligarchs, thereby depriving people of access to food. Through the aristocratic requisitioning of rents and feudal dues in kind, much of the grain left the farmers' hands after harvest. Merchants accumulated vast warehouses of the season's bounty and were then able to do with it as the market, or king, demanded. Suffice it to say, when vying in an increasingly globalized commodities market, poor peasant farmers did not have a huge amount of purchasing power. As the single largest entity in operation at the time, political or private, Spain's imperial needs greatly outweighed all competition. Thought hungry citizens would often be forced into brigandage to feed themselves (as we will soon see), hungry soldiers proved an even worse blight on the country. Thus, the Spanish government made sure to prioritize the requisitioning of grain for its soldiers and its subjects in the Spanish homeland above the farmers of Sicily and Naples who produced the very food of which they were starved.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Koenigsberger, 78.

¹⁵⁶ Koenigsberger, Mosse, and Bowler, 34.

¹⁵⁷ AGS-Est 1154, f^o 163.

Tragically, grain became prohibitively expensive in the area of the Mediterranean that had historically been the most flush with it. In the Kingdom of Naples, prices of wheat skyrocketed to levels well beyond the reach of many of the tenant farmers. Maddeningly for the farmers who grew it, harvested grain was gathered by landlords or merchants and shipped in bulk to Spain or the Spanish military, while Naples itself had to import grain of middling quality from Sicily, Puglia, or Egypt.¹⁵⁸ Starving and losing hope, many of the growing number of rural destitute flocked to the cities with only one real alternative.

The Rise of Rebellion

That alternative was banditry. As the population of the Italian countryside swelled, many locals formed themselves into roving bands of marauders. They were led by the most infuriated Italians; small and medium-sized landowners since dispossessed of their property.¹⁵⁹ Having once represented the most industrious and entrepreneurial of the rural third estate, they became enraged at the system that had deprived them of their property and livelihood. Pushed from their homes by hunger and poverty, it was easy for the landless to become energized by the political plight of their class. The combination of famines, rising prices relative to income, aristocratic abrogation of customary rights and human dignity, foreign occupation (which often included forced billeting of troops), and a legal system bent on punitively quelling the third estate, led to a highly anti-establishment fervor amongst the landless. Fernand Braudel called banditry a “revenge upon... a political and even social order” that oppressed and starved its people.¹⁶⁰ In Italy

¹⁵⁸ AGS-SP, Leg. 4, 1580. Starting in 1580, a new tax was enacted in order to pay for 40,000 salma of grain from Sicily

¹⁵⁹ Villari, 35.

¹⁶⁰ Braudel, 745.

during the latter half of the 1500s, desperation and resentment led to the formation of a growing class of those willing to take the law into their own hands.

The prominence of banditry reached such a height that any civil strife was liable to add to the bandits' numbers. Though the majority were those who had been unable to make ends meet as farmers, people from all walks of life followed suit. Priests unhappy with Roman oversight, impoverished nobles, and second sons written out of wills all readily joined local bands of outlaws. To these were added adventure-seekers, professional assassins, defrocked monks, and countless others who saw more profit, or fun, in life beyond the state. To add the legitimacy of tradition to their endeavors, bandits often donned the guise of Guelph and Ghibelline and happily lent themselves to ancient feuds.¹⁶¹ Their deeds were celebrated by traveling minstrels, or *urvi*, who deified the bandits as they wandered from tavern to tavern and added to the rugged allure of brigandage.¹⁶² Indeed, a report of a group of bandits who rescued a beautiful maiden from a wealthy hostage-keeper in a tale seemingly straight out of folklore made its way all the way to Philip's desk in 1572.¹⁶³ That within outlaw bands were represented all facets of society, blended with song and traditions from the country's history, made the life of an outlaw a highly acceptable, and even romantic vocation of the age.

It is not surprising, then, that nearly everyone knew someone who had taken up a life of thievery. Because brigandage was a lifestyle choice usually stemming from necessity, brigands would often try to stay within familiar territory, working symbiotically with their home and neighboring villages. They would bring back their

¹⁶¹ Braudel, 752.

¹⁶² Braudel, 745.

¹⁶³ AGS-SP 4, 1572.

looted proceeds, either food or coin, and distribute it amongst the people. In return, they were clothed, fed, and often provided with shelter and help to escape the authorities. Though some were thugs and brutalized villager, merchant, and lord alike, many maintained a strict ethical code, treating women like their mothers and only targeting those who could afford it.¹⁶⁴ Marco Sciarra, perhaps the most infamous bandit-lord, was a paradigm of Hobsbawm's "social bandit." Like Robin Hood, he distributed his gains among the poor and maintained a friendly rapport with those for whom he fought. He steadfastly held onto a code of honor and forbade rape, pillage, or other immoral acts often taken by those already outside the law.¹⁶⁵ Deprived from access to the contemporary economy, brigandage was merely the manifestation of the impoverished attempting to secure some of the money and food that flowed through their kingdom.

Because of the popular roots of this brigandage, legal officials could not easily distinguish between a peaceful resident and a bloodthirsty highwayman. Every effort of extirpation ran up against an irregular foe who could fall back on wide support networks. Villages would do their best to hide their local heroes, and when that failed, armed bands could vanish like a wisp of smoke into the coarse country environment of Italy.

Rocky highlands, rolling hills, and secluded hamlets allowed bandits to easily effect a bewildering escape from pursuing authorities, allowing them to fight another day. Because of the inhospitality of the central Italian wilds, most polities ended there. Still evolving as political entities, the states comprising Italy's fragmented political patchwork could not effectively control the fringes of their domain. The frontier areas that separated Venice, Milan, the Papal States, Naples, and France existed in quasi-anarchy, with police

¹⁶⁴ AGS-SP 4, 1572.

¹⁶⁵ Villari, 51.

efforts nonexistent or incapable of effectively extinguishing the bands of looters. Even moving between Spanish principalities caused trouble for the authorities. In 1577, the Sicilian viceroy reported that many Calabrian bandits move between the Italian mainland and the island. Like a fox evading capture, moving across the water extinguished their trail, allowing the outlaws to pop up unexpectedly in Messina to continue disturbing the rule of law.¹⁶⁶

By retreating into these lands, bandits often achieved safe haven. Not only was it legally unsuitable to execute the law of one principality in another, but interstate rivalries discouraged the crossing of any official body of soldiers into foreign territory. If Venice did not explicitly condone anti-Milanese banditry, the doge saw no reason to track down Lombard outlaws who had sought safety in Venetian lands.¹⁶⁷ Nor would the Venetian government stomach the thought of Lombard or Spanish soldiers in their lands. Even when the authorities did cooperate, there was little they could do far from their supplies, reconnaissance, or backup.

Adding to these safe havens, local parish priests would often open their churches to the bandits, taking pity on those who fought for the mere survival of their parishioners.¹⁶⁸ Adding to this clerical sympathy was the espousal of a single form of justice for the bandit: death. Ecclesiastics, at the insistence of the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Borromeo, were allowed to lead “cofradías” or brotherhoods. By the late 1570s, upwards of 30,000 people belonged to such organizations. Though not inherently a problem, the Governor of Milan at the time complained that such bands began to act

¹⁶⁶ AGS-Est 1147, f°109.

¹⁶⁷ Taking advantage of this custom, many bandits based themselves in one province and operated in another, confounding the law by taking refuge in the deserted Apennine wilderness between polities.

¹⁶⁸ AGS-SP 4, 1572.

illegally and were able to use their special designation of *cofradía* to seek protection under church, rather than state, law.¹⁶⁹ Churches were seen to mitigate the efficacy of the justice system, an observation which may have led to increased pressure to institute the Spanish Inquisition in Italy in 1580.¹⁷⁰ The Inquisition would have given greater power to Spanish officials to control church matters and extirpate secular rebellion from the ranks of the clergy. While Naples had revolted in response to a previous attempt to force the Inquisition upon them in 1510, the increasingly martial law over the kingdom made it more and more reasonable for the Spanish to wield control over all aspects of institutional power.

Attempts at repression only exacerbated the distaste for authority that was causing so much of the brigandage. The tangible arm of executive enforcement was brutal, and blind to compassion for the plight of the commoner. Coming all the way from Philip's desk in the Escorial was the prescription of exemplary and harsh punishment for violating the most sacred obligation of a royal subject: disobedience.¹⁷¹ In a hauntingly draconian passage, Philip tells his viceroy that "God will decide when we have killed enough of the disobedient."¹⁷² Villages were punitively billeted by Spanish soldiers, who pressured the locals into giving up information and prisoners. By 1550, a special brigade of military police had been raised to combat the growing problem of banditry.¹⁷³ Those hired for this duty were oftentimes former bandits themselves, who cycled between the two forms of

¹⁶⁹ They were "en perjuicio de la jurisdicción y preeminencia Real" [in the wrong of Royal jurisdiction and preeminence]. The governor did not go into specifics of what precisely constituted such nefarious activity, though it can be assumed that it resembled the banditry of the other two provinces. AGS-SP 3, year uncertain, most likely mid to late 1570s. Document begins "En la junta de ayer tarde de los dos consejos..."

¹⁷⁰ AGS-SP 4, 1580.

¹⁷¹ AGS-SP Libro 4, pp. 38-43.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁷³ Calabria, 14.

employment, using public funds to arm themselves for both tasks. Regardless of their former occupation, those who displayed the most thuggish tendencies were chosen for the task.

Another issue that arose in both Naples and Sicily was the proclivity of nobles to take over bands of mercenaries claiming to fight for the king's peace.¹⁷⁴ Having lost the feudal right to lord over private armies, nobles essentially mimicked the military philosophy *du jour* by hiring professional soldiers to represent them. The men who could be hired to fight or at least physically intimidate had usually spent time as outlaws as well; the two would have been complementary resumé bullets. Following the orders of their noble superior, they did often chase down bandits, but with even less care for such ideals as "justice" than that exhibited by groups explicitly serving the public.

Encouraged by royally sanctioned "commissions," which conferred rights to draft paramilitary groups for the purpose of eradicating criminals, nobles undertook an aggressive policy of extirpating rebellion.¹⁷⁵ These commissions rooted out those who plundered their warehouses or trade wagons and summarily executed them.¹⁷⁶ They rode from town to town, wantonly attacking villagers and distributing a careless and brutal form of justice. Magistrates meted out blanket punishments to individuals and villages under suspicion. Applying the term "bandito" to any country person under suspicion of being or abetting outlaws carried with it a similar legal burden to our current designation of "terrorist." Banditos were immediately stripped of their rights and, being accused of banditry, were allowed to suffer the torturous *ex abrupto* process. Eventually, anti-

¹⁷⁴ Koenigsberger, 117.

¹⁷⁵ Braudel, 748.

¹⁷⁶ Villari, 40-41.

banditry operations reached the brutality of the wholesale destruction of villages thought to house outlaws.¹⁷⁷ Maimed prisoners released back to their homes, relatives sent off to the galleys, and public executions all alienated the people from the rule of law. In 1582, the Viceroy of Naples reported the social cost of such punitive policies, writing that they achieved the exact opposite end as they aimed for.¹⁷⁸ With such openly barbaric policies towards the general citizen, it was openly and publicly remarked that the citizens of Naples would prefer to be the vassals of the infidel Turk than of His Majesty, King Philip.¹⁷⁹ The brutal punishments which were meant to quell banditry in the kingdom only served to oppress the underclass and cause within them violent resentment against the authorities.¹⁸⁰

By 1588, the antipathy caused by such policies rose the point that even the distant and aloof Philip sent the viceroy of Naples a letter condemning the torturing of Neapolitans for information unless under circumstances of the “gravest injustice.”¹⁸¹ Such a change in policy came too late to prevent calamity and only served to inadequately staunch the gaping wound of social oppression. The situation at the time was horrific. Though petty burglary was endemic to the region, Philip’s Naples was experiencing the greatest wave of rural rebellion Italy had seen in centuries. The sheer number of outlaws presented a new and overwhelming problem for authorities. In a 1572 missive to Philip II, the secretary Vargas wrote that Calabria was completely impassable

¹⁷⁷ AGS-SP 4, 1572.

¹⁷⁸ AGS-SP 4, 1572.

¹⁷⁹ AGS-SP 4, 1572.

¹⁸⁰ Further undermining the trust of Neapolitan citizens in their government, royal troops from the galleys caused all sorts of mayhem when in port. “...cometiere algun delicto, o exceso en tierra...” [committing some sort of crime or excess upon land]. AGS-SP 3, year uncertain, most likely mid to late 1570s. Document begins “En la junta de ayer tarde de los dos consejos...”

¹⁸¹ AGS-SP 6, 1588.

without an armed escort, lest one be murdered and their corpse looted.¹⁸² By the 1580s, with famines pushing more and more people to desperation, the land was teeming with brigands. They developed sophisticated methods of financing themselves, diversifying from simple plunder to extorting merchants for their wares for a pittance and then selling them on the black market.¹⁸³

Though outlaws typically started in small groups of just three or four, like primordial dust, they glommed onto each other, growing larger and larger. By 1572, Campania had at least 4,000 armed brigands roving the countryside.¹⁸⁴ In their increasing numbers, bandits began to resemble militias more than independent highwaymen. This numerical strength allowed forays beyond the highway robbery typical of small time delinquents. Incredibly, bandits began attacking the most powerfully entrenched members of society. Vargas warns that the rich are no longer safe in their own city homes.¹⁸⁵ For instance, in the middle of the day an armed squadron of outlaws dragged a cannon down the main road of Reggio (Calabria's most populous town). They proceeded to blow down the door of a nobleman's house, murder its occupants, and loot it, as the mayor watched helplessly.¹⁸⁶ Such a display of force was merely business as usual. In 1589, a veritable army of country rabble penetrated the walled city of Colonella and, finding the inhabitants sympathetic to their cause, joined forces with them to sack the lord's manor and murder him and his family.¹⁸⁷ When brigands took a town, they ensured

¹⁸² AGS-SP 4, 1572.

¹⁸³ Ibid., in this instance, a Genoese merchant was forced to part with 200lbs of silk when he was arrested by a gang of outlaws.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid; "...en las ciudades y lugares [los forajidos] entran a matar sus enemigos, a componer los ricos, forcar las mujeres, y hacer todos los delitos." The bandits enter the cities to murder their enemies, fleece the rich, rape the women, and commit all manner of crime.

¹⁸⁶ Braudel, 747.

¹⁸⁷ Villari, 40.

a cessation of communication with the Spanish government, and the resumption of such was treated with harsh reprisal.¹⁸⁸ In this manner, the Spanish began losing control over wide swathes of territory, not to an outside invader, but to the very people they supposedly ruled. Already by the mid 1570s, the Spanish began to lose sight of the distinction between outlaw (*forajido*) and rebel (*rebelde*).¹⁸⁹

In 1584, Marco Sciarra took up the mantle of outlaw. Within a year, he had united the various bands operating in Abruzzi, assembling an army of over 1,000 individuals.¹⁹⁰ By the force of his personality and a realization on the part of his adherents of the power in their cohesion, Sciarra's band became a fearsome guerilla unit that terrorized its enemies for over six years. Sciarra created a set of principles to unite his followers, expounding a vendetta, not against a personal enemy, but against the social malevolence of the noble class and the Spanish invaders.¹⁹¹ The army of Sciarra, both in training and comportment, became so fearsome that it essentially ruled much of the territory stretching from the Papal States to the boot of Italy. Only the most powerfully defended towns remained, as islands surrounded by a sea totally awash with outlaws. As their status as a quasi-political actor grew, Sciarra's army diversified its *modus operandi*. While it continued to fund itself through robbery and the looting of wealthy estates, the vagabonds began in 1588 to directly target the royal patrols that were attempting to arrest them.¹⁹² The ability of Sciarra's organization not only to resist, but to defeat Spanish provincial troops, broke up their monopoly on violence, significantly weakening the

¹⁸⁸ AGS-SP 4, 1576.

¹⁸⁹ AGS-SP 4, 1572.

¹⁹⁰ Villari, 49.

¹⁹¹ Villari, 50.

¹⁹² Villari, 51.

perception of Spanish hegemony over their Italian domains. Such attacks were nothing short of a declaration of war by Sciarra; they boosted his popularity tremendously.

In 1576, a plague struck Milan. Fires had destroyed much of the city's poorer housing districts and homelessness, poverty, and overcrowding mixed to produce a situation ripe for contagion.¹⁹³ As a result, many died before a proper quarantine could be initiated. Of the 4,400 people forced behind the sanitary barricade, most never emerged. The number was largely made up of the poor who could barely sustain themselves as it was, and though the Milanese Senate enacted emergency taxes to help pay for disease control, the quarantine zone was frequently undersupplied during the prescribed forty days. The already exhausted treasury was forced to pay an additional 1,500 ducats per day in the upkeep of the city's welfare. Any attempt to escape the quarantine was met with the death penalty for the public good. Thus those who had contracted the plague were essentially condemned to die, either by sickness or by law.¹⁹⁴ While this measure undoubtedly saved the city from many more lives lost, it was a brutal reality that did little to build public sympathy for the governor. This strategy was utilized successfully earlier in 1576, by the Sicilian viceroy, Marcantonio Colonna. Though he saved countless Sicilians by cordoning off the victims, it cost him a degree of his popularity.

The following year, Colonna urgently wrote to Philip from Palermo about the situation in Messina. He could not have borne more dire news. The plague had led to widespread famine, precipitating a surge in brigandage.¹⁹⁵ Joining these local outlaws, bandits had crossed over from Calabria and completely surrounded the city. Within, the

¹⁹³ AGS-SP 3, 60.

¹⁹⁴ AGS-Est 1244, f^o 119.

¹⁹⁵ AGS-Est 1249, f^o 191.

rule of law had totally dissolved. Outlaws bore their imprisoned comrades from jail cells to safety while those in charge of the justice system, such as the Count of Gallomo, were powerless to stop them.¹⁹⁶ The influence of the bandits was so pervasive, that the entire legal system had to be overhauled. Colonna oversaw the appointment of a body of jurors who subsequently hired a completely new retinue of judges for the kingdom, for many of those already in place had either been bought or cowed by the powerful bandit lobby.¹⁹⁷

This new body of judicial administrators worked for the first few months entirely without pay, as the Sicilian treasury was empty. When the head of them, the Perceptor, raised a new tax to help pay their salaries, a crowd 600 strong, brandishing naked steel, and screaming “Long live the king, death to the tax!” stormed the Grand Court in Palermo and ensured that not a single *real* would be extracted from the population.¹⁹⁸ In this way, the effectuation of Spain’s administrative desires was totally coopted by the people.

In 1590, Sicily was called upon to feed the Spanish Navy, its Mediterranean army, and Spain itself. It was also required to feed Naples, which, owing to Spanish exploitation, had ceased being self sufficient a few years before. The viceroy, bowing to market pressures as well as to royal demand, overestimated the Sicilian agricultural bounty and sold the stores necessary to sow the next harvest and feed the Sicilian people.¹⁹⁹ Banditry had already surged in the countryside, due to secret encouragement from noble benefactors and leaders and a lack of imperial oversight, but now it

¹⁹⁶ AGS-Est 1147, f° 109.

¹⁹⁷ AGS-Est 1147, f° 110.

¹⁹⁸ AGS-Est 1147, f° 170.

¹⁹⁹ Koenigsberger, 113.

exploded.²⁰⁰ The famine of 1590 excited in the Sicilians a desperation and rabid hatred of the Spanish government that combined to push thousands of people into rebellion against the ruling administration.

Already by 1577, the Sicilians had grown fed up with Spanish extortion. The viceroy, Marcantonio Colonna, wrote to Philip in utter consternation that his tax farmers were totally unable to collect the various gabelles under their purview.²⁰¹ He wrote that there was no solution to this problem in Messina short of landing squadrons of soldiers to wring the taxes from the people. Of course, when the fearsome Spanish tercios did arrive, they were without arms or armor and suffering from pestilence.²⁰² Such was the sorry sight of Spain's imperial power coming to bear on its unruly citizenry.

As Machiavelli could tell the Spanish and aristocrats, as long as a people still have hope and a comfortable lifestyle, they fear the loss of such too terrible a punishment for insurrection. But take away the people's most basic comforts or necessities—food, in this case—and the lack of options will force them into outright upheaval.²⁰³

The Lure of Cities

When the starving destitute of the countryside wanted to remain legally employed, they would often travel to the city hoping to attach themselves to some rich benefactor or enterprise. With the city's tax exemption and concentration of the upper class, a lot of coin was necessarily going to be spent. Much of the excess population in

²⁰⁰ Koenigsberger, 117.

²⁰¹ AGS-Est 1147, f^o 104.

²⁰² AGS-Est 1264, f^o 107. Here, the Duke of Terranova described the soldiers as “desnuda,” or literally “naked.”

²⁰³ Even worse, in 1578, the Neapolitan government stopped being able to adequately supply water to the city's residents. Though the viceroy made various attempts to rectify the dreadful situation, due to a lack of funds, only slight improvements were able to be made. Such a lack of life's most essential necessity led to the poor leaving the city at even greater numbers, most likely to take up the profession of outlaw. AGS-SP 6, 1578.

the countryside decided to take their chances with urban living. They were those whose land had either been bought or repurposed, or who had become fed up with an oppressed and mean lifestyle serving at the whim of a local lord. The cities attracted a steady stream of rural manpower which helped to fuel their continuous existence.

Like a combustion engine, the early modern city fed on its denizens. Cities were lethal; so many people crowded into such proximity with little ability to prevent disease led to rampant contagion. Crippling sicknesses were coupled with all of society's worst ills: pauperism, hunger, road accidents, and murder that snuffed out lives at every turn. Few remedies were offered, as the cities were run completely by the elites. Having cornered much of the market of specie, the economies hung on noble expenditure. If a poor man couldn't somehow attach himself to the downstream flow of money running off from a noble household, he was in trouble. The bourgeois class separated between the traders and merchants growing fat off the Spanish teat and the artisans, tradesmen, and small workshop owners who slid into poverty as the nascent middle class dried up. As the rich grew richer, the growing under classes became ever more depressed.

Of all the dangers of a city, hunger struck worst of all. The land under cultivation in Italy was declining just as the population was reaching its zenith. Those pouring into the cities did so out of desperation and came with next to nothing in their pockets. In 1562, the Viceroy, Duke of Alcalá, complained to Philip that the masses of people swelling Naples were of a type too poor to purchase anything but the meagerest provisions of bread and wine.²⁰⁴ The poorest residents of a city, those unable to afford access to the economy, were labeled "vagrants" by the administration and considered

²⁰⁴ Calabria, 33.

criminals to be punished, rather than assisted.²⁰⁵ In small towns and villages, residents managed to fend off starvation by supplying themselves with food from their gardens.²⁰⁶ In Naples, Palermo, and other crowded cities, the peasantry had no such insurance policy. Though the government in Naples provided subsidized wheat for its residents, collusion between the ministers in charge of public food programs and grain merchants served to line their pockets at the expense of the hungry mouths of the city.²⁰⁷ Even with the artificially deflated grain prices, due to the massive numbers of poor within Naples, their wages were pushed below subsistence level.

Swollen by indigents, Naples became a powder keg for the Spanish administration. The Dungeons and Dragons manual describes the “Angry Peasant Rule,” a principle which states that with enough peasants, direct opposing their will is hopeless. Combined with the truism that “a city is three meals away from revolution,” the prospect of famine loomed frighteningly before the ruling members of society. Indeed, the viceroy became ever more consumed by the task of ensuring enough food for his city, though this often proved impossible.

In May 1585, the situation crumbled. A succession of crop failures had pushed thousands of farmers off their land and into Naples. There they joined the already bursting ranks of urban poor scratching out a pittance that could not keep up with the price of bread. Wages across the Mediterranean had been declining since the 1520s and by the 1580s, the average person simply could not afford enough food.²⁰⁸ The Genoese, also facing food shortages, leveraged their position as holders of huge amounts of Spain’s

²⁰⁵ Villari, 22.

²⁰⁶ Koenigsberger, Mosse, and Bowler, 42.

²⁰⁷ Calabria, 35.

²⁰⁸ Villari, 33.

debt to gain prioritized access to Sicilian grain.²⁰⁹ By demanding repayment in grain, rather than coin, the Genoese made a deal favorable to Philip, but disastrous to his subjects. After a particularly hard slew of poor harvests, a Neapolitan noble within the ruling bureaucracy, Giovanni Starace, officiated over the large transfer of 400,000 tomoli of grain from the Kingdom of Naples to Castile.²¹⁰ While a shipment of this size was neither unusually large nor uncommon, it came just as famine was beginning to set in.

Having made public this decision at a meeting with popular representatives, Starace was, upon leaving, forced by the assembled people to undergo the humiliations of riding his sedan chair backwards and of removing his hat in the open.²¹¹ As he rode through the streets, his route became more and more congested by hungry citizens angry at Starace's perceived treason. Near the church of Sant Agostino, the tumultuous mob broke ranks, screaming for bloody revolt, tore him from his seat, and butchered him.²¹² From the church, the crowd surged forth to storm Starace's house. They then moved to build popular momentum by marching through the working-class district of the city, attracting masses of adherents. Finally, the spectacle ended in front of the viceroy's palace, solidifying the political underpinnings of their protest. The crowd had chanted "Revolt! Revolt!" at the ambush of Starace, but as the procession continued to the viceregal offices, the theme had expanded to "Death to bad government and long live justice!"²¹³

²⁰⁹ AGS-Est 1246, f^o 117.

²¹⁰ Villari, 22.

²¹¹ Villari, 24.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., 26.

By widening the scope of this insurrection beyond the basic desire for sustenance to a demand for broader political reform, the masses of Naples terrified the ruling class all the way to King Philip. Within two weeks, the people's representatives had created a list of demands. As recorded by the Venetian ambassador, Scipio Guerra, foremost among them was to be equally represented in the ruling councils of the city (Seggi).²¹⁴ The viceroy, Lord Osuna, bought himself time by securing an emergency shipment of grain from Sicily, paid for by a kingdom wide tax levied especially for the purpose. This staved off the worst of the hunger of the Neapolitans while reinforcements could be brought in to quell the uprising.

In July, two months after Starace's death, forty galleys arrived in the harbor of Naples to unload several companies of Spanish soldiers. As soon as the viceroy's army had disembarked, the Spanish began widely meting out harsh reprisals to anyone they could conceivably link to the popular demonstration of discontent. These punishments included seventy one confinements to the galleys, three hundred exiles, and numerous counts of torture.²¹⁵ The leader of this popular unrest, Giovan Leonardo Pisano, was executed, along with thirty others whose heads and hands were stuck on spikes around the central plaza of Naples. Scipio Guerra described the ensuing atmosphere:

These exemplary executions of so many of the poor, many of them not deserving punishment, have sown such terror in the hearts of the people that, while such measures will certainly not have made the people better disposed to the royal government, these sights will have so terrified their

²¹⁴ Villari, 26. At that time, there were six councils, five made up of noblemen, one by popular representatives. The proposal would have expanded the sixth to the size of the other five giving each equal numbers.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

minds, and likewise their tongues, that I do not think they will contemplate a new commotion for any reason whatever.²¹⁶

The uprising which precipitated this whole series of events had been due to a critical food shortage, an instance of the government being unable to provide the most basic of necessities to its people. Responding to the people's hungry outburst with such ruthlessness solidified the notion of a ruling class diametrically at odds with its subjects, rather than one that worked towards the mutual benefit of both parties. By 1588, Naples had jailed so many people for indigency, let alone actual rebellion or theft, that the legal system was completely overburdened and the prisons overflowing.²¹⁷

There was one state-sanctioned way to avoid a life of abject poverty: warfare. The Army of Flanders, based in Milan, had a great hunger for soldiers, and levied thousands of men from the Italian provinces.²¹⁸ To alleviate some of the social pressures in Italy, the imprisoned and destitute were the most readily drafted, with noblemen serving in the officer corps.²¹⁹ However, facing chronic shortages of money, the Spanish state was often unable to fulfill obligations to their soldiers under arms. Upon returning to Milan, these men were still the same poor peasants who had marched off along the Spanish Road years before, but with one key difference: now they were battle hardened, well-equipped, and owed quantifiably large sums of money by the Spanish state.

As the wielders of the state's swords, when disgruntled and unpaid, the soldiers could simply turn around and hold that same state hostage.²²⁰ Due to a plague in 1576-7,

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ AGS-SP 6, 1588.

²¹⁸ AGS-Est 1246, f^o 128.

²¹⁹ Ibid; the Spanish focused their efforts on "la gente mas miserable y vagabunda."

²²⁰ AGS-SP 6, 1578.

Milanese revenues had sunk, and by 1578 the state owed 1,394,533 ducats to the armies and garrisons in Milan. At this time, the state owed its contracted mercenaries 44 months of back pay, the cavalry 34, and the imperial infantry and Milanese garrisons, 13.²²¹ That year, the Governor of Milan, the Marques de Ayamonte, frantically wrote to Philip pleading for money. The precariousness of his situation can be seen in the fact that nearly the entirety of this letter, minus the obsequious introductions, was encoded, for fear that the French would find out just how weak the position of Lombardy was at that time.²²²

Occasionally, the Spanish were responsible for the protection of Italians, such as in 1571, when the Holy League's fleet set sail to fight the Ottomans to great fanfare from the assembled Sicilians. However, the Italian experience of Spanish soldiery was much more often that of victim than of beneficiary. In 1577, Viceroy Colonna recounted the situation created by the soldiers stationed in Sicily:

The tercio of Don Lope, which is uncommissioned and unpaid, is the greatest danger to this kingdom, lives in such liberty and unrestriction that much disorder follows them, and they have caused the greatest inconveniences. The disgraced people of this land have lost respect and self-restraint after many instances of death at the hands of the soldiers and because the perpetrators, who every day commit greater calumnies, are not punished. Nor [am I] capable of the demonstrative punishment necessary to stave off the total destruction of this island.²²³

²²¹ AGS-Est. 1248, f^o 10.

²²² AGS-Est 1250, f^o 3.

²²³ AGS-Est 1147, f^o 135; "El tercio de Don Lope, que como extraordinario y no pagado, de mas del gran dano que habia en este Reyno bivia con tanta libertad, y licencia, que succedian muchas desordenes, las quales havrian podido causar grandes inconvivientes, porque con esto la gente de la tierra indignada havia perdido el respeto y la verguenca, que muchas vezes succedian muertes de soldados, y que no castigando los delinquentes cada dia podria succeder mayores escandalos, o dandoles el castigo con la demostracion necessaria podria ser la total destruycion desta tierra."

To recoup their salaries, armed men began extorting both the state and locals for money and goods to sell. They did this until the Governor was able to acquire enough emergency loans from the Genoese to pay them off (at commensurately high interest rates). Taking matters into their own hands, Sicilians killed three of Don Lope's soldiers who, having quartered themselves in a village, had begun to sack the houses of the inhabitants. Of course, such a defensive action elicited retaliation from the company of soldiers, who began a campaign of indiscriminate pillaging of the countryside, fomenting a veritable war between Sicilian and soldier that lasted until the *tercio* was paid off and shipped to Naples.

Another source of revenue sought by the mercenaries came from undefended churches and monasteries. Awaiting deployment in Milan without pay, the famed White Company raided a Capuchin monastery in September 1588. Worse than simply robbing the monastery, they deprived the monks of the ability to fulfill their charitable acts, taking money directly from the mouths of local farmers who desperately needed that Christian aid.²²⁴ Until they were paid in full, these soldiers refused to leave the locality or to follow any order from a superior above the company level.²²⁵

From two sides the peasantry were under pressure. First, the demographics had finally recovered from the Black Death of the mid-14th century, leading to the age-old problems of overpopulation. With the land available for cultivation limited by geographical reality, the upper bound of food that Italy could produce had been reached. Against this constraint pushed the ever-growing population. The only ways to escape this

²²⁴ AGS-SP 6, 1588.

²²⁵ AGS-Est 1267, f^o 21.

Malthusian trap was through technological advancement, such as more efficient crop rotation or artificially produced fertilizers, or by means of a large plunge in population, as obtained, say, through emigration or plague. While there were certainly improvements to be made to Italian agriculture in the 1500s, landowners were guaranteed rents and thus had little incentive to increase the productivity of their property. Thus, as the population swelled, its ability to survive was called into greater and greater uncertainty. Until the era of industrialization, human society had always run into the limits of the earth's ability to support a population, and while the prospect of mass starvation is horrifying, it's no different from the natural cycle that keeps animal populations in check.

Aside from the natural forces at work depriving the people of food were the pressures of a top heavy society. With financial assistance from the Spanish government, the increasingly wealthy upper class was becoming less and less reliant on the work and productivity of their social inferiors. The rise of a global marketplace run on the basis of cash promoted the pursuit of capital at the expense of all other goals. Profit and political power allowed the Spanish bureaucracy and Italian noblesse to ignore the rising tide of social inequality, unrest, and hunger, as these problems could be solved in the same way as every other problem of the day: through military repression.

However effective this method was, it was starting to become outmoded. As the economic efficiency of a state became its most important path to power, a healthy, vibrant population of employed and productive workers whose taxes funded the public coffers became increasingly important. Since the non-aristocratic members of society were expected to pay a far higher tax burden, their wealth and the wealth of the state went hand in hand. Italy was incredibly wealthy, especially as it soaked up much of the silver

imported from the Spanish Americas. Had any attempt been made to redistribute the wealth, there's little question that the growing population could have been fed. One need only look at the repercussions of the 1585 Neapolitan uprising to see that this was a possibility; when pressed, the Kingdom of Naples was able to provide itself with more than enough food to feed its people.

Unfortunately for the Spanish state whose pecuniary demands were immediate and conservatively based on the existing feudal status quo, economic policy focused on the breeding of a small, rich class of financiers, rather than a society whose every layer was economically productive. This abandonment of the lower classes led to the explosion of anti-establishment resentment in the population. For when the laws of nature and the laws of society conspire to deprive the people of the most basic of necessities, there is little recourse but to attempt to escape those laws to fight for survival.

The rise in brigandage cost the society dearly. First off, thousands of people who could have been working in workshops, factories, or farms were engaged in highway robbery in an attempt to redistribute wealth and provide food for the hungry. Such enterprises have since become the jurisdiction of government. But without a strong and benevolent imperial program providing this necessary service, it was left to the desperate elements of society. Then there was the increasing cost to the Spanish treasury of paying for policing efforts and garrisons to stave off disrupting brigands. In Naples alone, the amount spent on the salaries of the anti-banditry police sextupled in three decades, far above the rate of inflation.²²⁶ With an inadequate conception of how to promote economic vibrancy in its provinces and a rather hands-off approach to governing, the

²²⁶ Calabria, 15.

Spanish Empire allowed for a semi-anarchic state to develop in Sicily and Naples, greatly hindering the benefit able to be reaped from these provinces.

VI. The Economy

In the 1300s, the economically precocious states of Italy turned the power of the market to warfare. The practice of raising armies through feudal levies led to inexperienced and poorly equipped peasants, who were the economic backbone of the time, being marched into combat. With the regularization of professional mercenary armies (the *condotteri*) in Italy, irregular farmers no longer stood a chance in battle.²²⁷ Quickly, the Italian merchant-states realized that they ought to use their coin, rather than domestic manpower, to field armies. As the mettle of professionally contracted soldiers was proven across Europe, money began to replace land as the true source of power. By the age of Philip II, salaried armies had become the norm across Western Europe, and the Spanish Crown racked up massive expenditures maintaining its soldiery across its realms.

Though the basics of how money circulated through society was understood—i.e., that taxes were collected and then spent on whatever the government desired—an appreciation of economics was still very much in its infancy. Philip II had nearly zero grasp on his finances and how to balance his budget. Instead, the king left such calculations to his finance ministers, whom he conveniently left in the dark about the operations to be conducted by the Spanish Empire.²²⁸ Though he was technically constrained by his bank account, Philip largely blundered along, indifferent to the well-being of his treasury until it was too late. The normally self-assured king once proclaimed

²²⁷ William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 74.

²²⁸ Parker, 41.

that of finances, he “understood very little, almost nothing.”²²⁹ Though not the entire picture, the depth of Philip’s ignorance towards how to effectively balance his books certainly played a part in the five bankruptcies of his reign. Imperial and local policies were adopted with little idea as to how they would affect tax receipts. Despite the growing importance of economics to the viability of the state, the government had little idea or ability to rule in a manner productive to their pecuniary salubrity. “To the student of the Spanish monarchy,” wrote R. A. Stradling, “the question of its economic viability is circumstantial rather than substantial.”²³⁰ With this perspective, we can begin to investigate how the Spanish wrangled with, rather than developed, the economies of the Italian provinces.

Expenditures

Without a consistent economic plan and only an immature understanding of the importance finances would have on the operation of the state, the Spanish government spent money at an increasingly reckless rate. The development of the *trace italienne*, whose earthen ramparts significantly mitigated the power of gunpowder against fixed positions, necessitated the recruitment of far more soldiers than had previously been necessary when besieging a fortress or castle with gunpowder. Wars sprung up in the Mediterranean, the Netherlands, and elsewhere throughout the empire. In response, Philip scrambled to drum up funds to keep his troops marching in the field. Exacerbating the financial strain of war was the decision in the 1560s to maintain a permanent fleet of 100 galleys to patrol the Mediterranean waters for Turks and pirates.²³¹ Before 1556, even in

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Stradling, 38.

²³¹ Marino, *Early Modern Italy*, 19.

the midst of Charles V's German wars, the Spanish Crown was paying less than 2,000,000 ducats per annum on total military expenditures. By the 1560s, it had more than doubled to 4.5 million ducats a year; a decade later, 8 million; and by Philip's death, the Spanish owed their soldiers upwards of 13 million ducats per year.²³²

Compounding the problem of Spain's long term debt, the Crown attempted to pay its contracted mercenaries as little as possible, preferring to pay them higher wages over time instead of a single lump sum.²³³ In response, captains would rarely elide the names of the dead, wounded, or AWOL from their company rosters, instead preferring to take in as much money as possible from their miserly Spanish contractors. Add to these personnel costs the millions of ducats per year spent on the salaries that made up the ever-expanding bureaucratic governments of Spain and its possessions, and one can see that Philip's empire was growing increasingly expensive.²³⁴

While the coin flowing into the military multiplied throughout Philip's reign, the percentage of total expenditure it represented actually fell. When Philip took the throne in the 1550s, the military represented nearly half of public expense. By his death it had fallen to slightly more than a quarter.²³⁵ The reason for such a fall was the steadily increasing amount to be spent paying the interest on its public debt. Spain had adopted the deficit spending pioneered by the Italian states during the Renaissance. However, Spanish officials failed to also adopt the punctuality of the Venetians in paying their debts, and so their interest swelled to greater and greater proportions of the annual

²³² McNeill, 110.

²³³ AGS-SP 6, 1578.

²³⁴ While I do not have figures for total personnel expenditures in the Spanish Empire, Dandeleit, p. 21 cites 3,000,000 ducats/year as the cost of Italy's bureaucratic expenses in 1593.

²³⁵ Calabria, 83-5.

budget.²³⁶ Compounding this interest were the intermittent bankruptcies of the Spanish Crown, which occurred five times under Philip II. These bankruptcies forced bankers to up their rates so as to avoid falling into insolvency themselves.²³⁷ By Philip's death in 1598, over two-fifths of Spain's budget was spent servicing debts. In total, three-quarters of all government expenditures were devoted to paying for current or past wars.²³⁸ By the turn of the seventeenth century, total Spanish debts reached the astronomical sum of 100 million ducats. The interest alone consumed two thirds of total Spanish revenue, which at this time hovered below 13 million ducats per year.²³⁹

To keep pace with the growing cost of empire, Spain would have had to develop its sources of revenue beyond that of short term loans. Philip's income had a number of origins. Empty ecclesiastical benefices, customs duties, and sale of assets all filled his treasury. However, the most important one was direct taxation. The clergy was exempt from this, as were the nobles whose wealth increased precipitously during Philip's reign.²⁴⁰ Thus, the peasantry of the empire became ever more burdened with Spain's pecuniary needs. For Philip's empire to function, he would need to promote economic growth in his provinces. Yet they saw only stagnation.

By the 16th century, the economies of Naples, Milan, and Sicily had reached "maturity." Maturity in this case means that within the available paradigms of technology and social structures, further development was nearly impossible.²⁴¹ After a brief increase of cultivable land in the middle of the century, due to the importation of rice and the

²³⁶ McNeill, 110.

²³⁷ These occurred in 1557, 1560, 1569, 1575, and 1596: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_II_of_Spain.

²³⁸ Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Kindle Edition, page 1883 of 19491, or 10%.

²³⁹ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1987), 47.

²⁴⁰ Richard Dunn, *The Age of Religious Wars, 1559-1715* (New York: Norton and Company, 1979), 24.

²⁴¹ Malanima, 385.

subsequent conversion of swamps to agricultural productivity, the amount of land under tillage in these Italian states again stagnated until the mid to late 1800s.²⁴²

Hampering the growth of Italian production was a lack of the competitive forces that would engender the rise of capitalism. Entrenched within society were a number of powerful groups whose self-interest smothered creative solutions to the problems of the day. The system of guilds in Italy was one such group. Essentially cartels, guilds constituted cohesive bodies of artisans that diminished competition between members to ensure a decent living for the craftsmen it represented.²⁴³ However, such conformational pressure also discouraged the need for productive competition. In the antithesis of an open market, the guild systems allowed for a healthy and productive stasis amongst its members.

Another confounding factor was the aristocracy, who, as we've mentioned, were loath to upset a balance that profited them so lavishly. The vast powers of feudal privilege, such as monopolies on certain resources or fees charged for the use of mills and streams severely, limited peasants from using their capital productively. Most of their funds went straight into subsistence, with little left to spur industry or technological development. The upper class soaked up greater and greater hoards of wealth and, due to the tenet of *derogance*, used this wealth to solidify their position as ostentatious landholders who invested in Philip's military projects or their own capital gains. In order to maintain its social and economic supremacy, members of the aristocracy did their best to quash any effort to upset the status quo. The greatest innovation they accepted was to

²⁴² Marino, *Early Modern Italy*, 58.

²⁴³ Fernand Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce; Civilization and Capitalism 15th-18th Century, Vol. 2* trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982), 314.

invest heavily in the *juros* offered by the Spanish government, which gave regular and guaranteed returns. Apart from that, they undertook little industrious risk.

Unlike today, where we have numerous stock exchanges, each with hundreds or thousands of entities listed, under Philip II, there was only one: the Spanish Crown. With an average return of 13%, investing in the state became a lucrative and relatively risk-free venture.²⁴⁴ And because of the monarchy's constant need for cash, it became a gaping maw that soaked up nearly all of the capital available for investment.²⁴⁵ With its established and increasingly sophisticated form of attracting investment, the Spanish government competed and triumphed over the much smaller enterprises of Italian cities.

Pulling revenue from such a vast conglomeration of territories, the Spanish Crown was able to pool tremendous resources in the pursuit of its enterprises. However, by collecting taxes from aristocrats across the empire, the monarchy took money that might otherwise have been spent on locally immediate ventures: roads, businesses, or trade, for example. The nature of monarchy is a double-edged sword, however. By concentrating the operations of such a huge empire into the hands of a single man, Philip II, the hammer blow of the Spanish could be tremendous. By the same token, the smaller projects that were overlooked by a man with such great power went ignored and impoverished.

This created a strange economic phenomenon that mimicked the singularity of the monarchy. In Messina in 1571, when the armada of the Holy League was mustering for the great showdown that would become Lepanto, the city experienced an artificial boom

²⁴⁴ While the Spanish Crown did default, it returned to pay its debts after refinancing. So if one could stay afloat while the government sorted itself out, there was still the expectation of eventual repayment at even higher interest rates.

²⁴⁵ Calabria, 6.

in its economy. With 80,000 soldiers, 250 galleys, and all the associated personnel for such a venture residing in the port, the local merchants, craftsmen, and shop owners had their most productive year in history.²⁴⁶ Afterwards, the city went back to exporting its taxes and receiving little reciprocal benefit from the monarchy. As Philip's gaze shifted focus, so too did the direction of imperial redistribution; regions were exploited or fattened depending on their immediate utility to the monarch's plans.

Naples experienced a similar dump of investment during the 1560s, as Philip battled the Turks. While the kingdom began by paying for a fleet that docked in its harbor and kept its shores safe, that money went elsewhere after Lepanto and the ensuing peace in the Mediterranean. After 1571, as Philip's focus increasingly turned North, Naples' tax ducats went to work in Milan, or the Netherlands. Already in the year following Lepanto, the increasing number of Spanish soldiers and German mercenaries stationed in Milan ate up all the existing funds dedicated to the succor of the Lombard army. The commander in Milan at the time wrote to Spain complaining of the shortages of money, weapons, and powder, finding himself stuck between a total collapse of his credit or an armed mutiny.²⁴⁷ Philip duly granted the commander his money, and for the rest of his life, the king consistently poured more and more cash into the city's armed forces, at the expense of the rest of his empire. By the turn of the century, 1,300,000 ducats had left Naples alone to purchase armaments or pay salaries of the Milanese garrison.²⁴⁸

For this reason, Milan scarcely comes up in the literature describing rebellion or social unrest in this period. As the northern bastion of Spanish Italy and the military

²⁴⁶ Koenigsberger, 107.

²⁴⁷ AGS-Est 1235, f^o 30.

²⁴⁸ Calabria, 89.

nucleus of Spain's eastern empire, Milan enjoyed a brilliant bath of coin throughout Philip's reign, most especially after the Dutch Revolt broke out in 1566. Money from all over the world—Mexico, Castile, Naples—went into the hands of the Milanese aristocracy, artisans, and food suppliers. There was so much money that people's per capita incomes soared. Armed with greater purchasing power, it became more efficient for the peasants to buy food than produce it. Food already came in from all over Italy to feed the army, and the funds of the Lombards ushered in more. This allowed for finer agricultural goods like silk to be produced, and with these commodities, higher returns for their producers. Thus the Duchy of Milan experienced a surge in wealth from top to bottom. Though the rich naturally grew the wealthiest (they were, remember, the recipients of large cash grants just to keep them docile), the entire kingdom flourished as a result of the generosity showered on it by the Spanish treasury.²⁴⁹

This was the age of an extreme military-industrial complex. The government never spent less than 75% of its total expenditures on financing the military and the servicing of public debt. The number is closer to 85% if one includes the upkeep of fortresses.²⁵⁰ The money gleaned from all of its sources of income (taxes, *juros*, benefices, and more) thus went either back into the pockets of wealthy financiers or to those directly involved in the military machine. The oligarchic insertion into this system was so deep that the Crown's financiers, often merchants themselves, were the suppliers of the empire's material needs. In essence, they lent the monarchy money to buy their

²⁴⁹ It's interesting to note here that even when the Duchy flourished, the wealth was still going to the oligarchy in absurd proportions. It turns out that the financiers, often being merchants themselves, were the ones who supplied the monarchy. In essence, they were buying their own goods, plus a healthy commission from the empire. AGS-Est 1243, f^o 31.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83-5.

goods at a profit, and then charged them that money back, plus interest for considerable profit.

For such lucrative business, the wealthy merchants heartily exploited the empire's domains. In Sicily, merchants and tax farmers removed 2,600,000 ducats and hundreds of thousands of salma of wheat from the kingdom between 1578 and 1598 at the behest of the Spanish.²⁵¹ These were taken as taxes or requisitioned for a pittance. Without direct investment by the Crown, the only hope for investment into infrastructure or other public goods was the private sector. However, aristocrats had little to no interest in helping the common good. If a project wasn't seen to directly benefit a baron, rest assured he would keep his purse strings tight.

The Spanish Empire exercised a very haphazard and not at all cohesive economic strategy. Philip's administration pulled resources from wherever they could be found for immediate use, but never developed a consistent economic plan.²⁵² Indeed, the contemporary understanding of economics was so minimal that opportunities to efficiently meet the demands of certain imperial provinces with the goods or services of another were routinely neglected. For example, Sicily had a dearth of proper industrial production, yet there was no encouragement or even allowance for the craftworks of Spain or Lombardy to feed this demand, a relationship which would have fostered growth in both areas. Aside from the government's demand for materiel, there was no policy to ease trade restrictions. Instead, filling the need for resources or goods was left to the local administrators and merchants. Such a reliance on private enterprise meant that in 1588, at the height of Neapolitan food shortages, the government was still paying an import tax on

²⁵¹ Koenigsberger, 132.

²⁵² Koenigsberger, 142.

Sicilian grain shipped to relieve the famine.²⁵³ Not only that, but the grain shipments, essential for sustaining Neapolitan lives, were under increasing taxation as the Crown's thirst for money became increasingly desperate. Philip attempted to compromise, insisting that the Sicilians collect only the ancient, and not recently imposed, taxes, but the Sicilian government and merchants demanded the higher price. Even across the narrow Straits of Messina, the Spanish couldn't build a sphere of free trade! The closest that the Spanish came to doing so was to forbid grain from Puglia and Naples to be sold to Venice or other Italian states before Spanish Imperial needs were met.²⁵⁴ While Castile had set up an exclusive economic zone over the Americas, the Crown was so uncreative that they neither opened the New World to the rest of its empire's inhabitants, nor did they extend such a zone to the longer-established Italian States. There was no attempt to create an institutionalized, protected network of open commerce among imperial subjects as was done, for instance, in the later British Commonwealth system.²⁵⁵ This lack of imperial intervention in markets allowed Genoese merchants free reign to ply their goods in Sicilian and Neapolitan markets, often out-competing Catalans or even local vendors for business.

Though the Spanish did exercise a trading monopoly over the Americas, they never thought to establish the same system in the Italian states. Even the restriction that only Castilians could do business in the American territories would have been better than practices that often concluded with the Spanish army buying the cheapest supplies

²⁵³ AGS-SP 6, 1588.

²⁵⁴ AGS-SP 3, 1570? (date unclear). Document begins: La Ciudad de Napoles para su bastimento...

²⁵⁵ There was, however, a certain free trade agreement during the lifetime of the Holy League in the 1570s. Neapolitan grain went to Venice and the Papal States for reduced prices. (AGS-SP 3, 1573). A wider free trade among the states of Italy was nipped in the bud during the 1570s by a recalcitrant Grand Duke of Tuscany and a Spanish desire for greater customs proceeds. (AGS-SP 3, 1575).

available to them. Ironically, this meant that the Army of Flanders often found itself purchasing goods produced by the very Dutch rebel states they were fighting.²⁵⁶ Had Philip coordinated the economies of his empire to work as a unit, undoubtedly he could have turned his empire into a much longer lasting and far more powerful entity than the Spanish Empire ever became.

A primary reason for the failure to develop mercantilist and capitalist policy was the massive silver receipts pouring in each year aboard the Spanish treasure fleet. Between 1540 and 1590, the value of silver flowing in from the Americas skyrocketed from 200,000 ducats per year to nearly 3,000,000.²⁵⁷ In an era still emerging from the feudal Middle Ages, there was no understanding that one did not become rich simply by making money. Spain had an effective monopoly of the vast quantities of silver entering Europe and could thus drum up massive quantities of capital to pay for its policies.

Unfortunately, this did not equate to massive quantities of cash. Incredibly, the Spanish experienced a shortage of precious metals, including silver, during the reign of Philip II. Because silver was a commodity that literally equaled money, it had the highest negotiability of any good on the market.²⁵⁸ Everyone would buy it. This allowed, nay, encouraged, the Spanish to sell futures of their precious import when strapped for cash.

This proved very similar to the system of tax farming that they employed for collecting taxes. The Spanish Empires had huge quantities of productive capital: taxable land, customs, silver imports, and royal domains. However, every opportunity to exploit these resources came at the price skimmed off by a third party hired to provide the benefit

²⁵⁶ Koenigsberger, Mosse, and Bowler, 54; Stradling, 35.

²⁵⁷ Kennedy, 47.

²⁵⁸ Stradling, 40.

to the Crown. Propelled by the immediate needs of constant warfare, Philip's government mortgaged nearly all its capital in order to collect smaller sums immediately rather than the all the proceeds slightly later.

Loans and investment

Starting in the 1520s, the Spanish Crown had become more and more reliant on deficit financing as it operated in perpetual war.²⁵⁹ By the 1540s, the Spanish created an official securities market in Naples to sell future shares of its various revenues. They began with extremely lucrative returns, but because the Spanish were in such desperate straits for constant cash, they were never able to negotiate the return rates down. Unlike in other Early Modern exchanges (such as that of the Dutch), even after half a century creditors were guaranteed 10% returns on bonds and up to 20% on annuities.²⁶⁰

Annuities obligated the Crown to assure a holder's income until his death, and sometimes longer. Realizing the stability of such an investment, aristocrats moved nearly half their wealth into liquid investments by the closing decades of the 16th century.²⁶¹ Between 1583 and 1600, the total holdings by Neapolitans of Spanish annuities nearly sextupled, from 457,000 to 2,700,000 ducats.²⁶²

The Spanish government never cut spending. Its needs only rose. This incited a fire sale of its assets that began in the 1560s. First were the shares of public debt, mentioned above. Then there were the mortgages of tax collection, sold to aristocratic tax farmers. Customs duties were auctioned off to the highest bidder, allowing the Genoese to collect import taxes on all goods brought into Naples. In 1579, after having bought the

²⁵⁹ Calabria, 5-6.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁶¹ Astarita, 52.

²⁶² Calabria, 93.

right to Spanish customs duties levied in Naples for an annual return of 50,000 ducats, the Genoese found the Spanish unable to pay. The Spanish viceroy was at that point able to come up with only 20,000 ducats. Furthering the debt of the Crown, this customs debt was refinanced at significantly higher interest rates, giving the Spanish a slight reprieve at the cost of higher returns to the Genoese for the remainder of their contract.

In a further attempt to raise cash, the Spanish began selling venal offices, a practice that only increased as time went on.²⁶³ Though viceroys and established Spanish officials were instructed not to sell positions to those without the proper qualifications, money eventually won out over good government.²⁶⁴ Ruinously for the productivity of the realm, it got to the point by 1589 that a candidate for the Secretary of Naples, handpicked by the viceroy for his aptitude, was passed over in favor of a wealthy merchant who could pay a premium for the office.²⁶⁵ Royal lands, which had been passed down through the ducal and royal estates of Milan, Naples, and Sicily, were auctioned off as well, fertilizing the soil for aristocratic latifundia.²⁶⁶ Though this strategy might work in the short term, it led to tremendous financial trauma as a long term economic plan. As Spain alienated its assets at ever greater rates, Spain's public debt quadrupled during Philip II's reign.²⁶⁷

One major factor that allowed the Spanish to continue to borrow was its importation of pure money. Silver futures were essentially no different from loans, as a

²⁶³ Calabria, 47.

²⁶⁴ AGS-SP 3, 1576.

²⁶⁵ AGS-SP 6, 1589.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

return in cash or kind was the same. This merging of the two securities simplified the matter of Spain requesting more and more money from investors.

The instant turnover of American silver to financiers meant that those with capital to invest profited immensely each time the silver was unloaded in Seville. Merchants and bankers in Spain, Italy, Germany, and especially Genoa found their coffers flush with the metal. The normally regular and lucrative returns on investment provided by the Spanish, and their monolithic control over available investment options, encouraged financiers to commit the greatest sin of investment: pooling all one's hopes in a single fund. The five bankruptcies experienced during Philip's reign absolutely decimated the financial sector of Europe. By the close of the 16th century, many German and Genoese firms that had profited so grandly from the Spanish monarch had defaulted and plunged into insolvency, never to re-emerge.

During the good times, though, the burgeoning bank accounts of the aristocracy and the ensuing rise in purchasing power meant that the wealthy could buy whatever they liked at previously out-of-reach costs. If a Milanese baron wanted a tapestry, instead of looking to a readily accessible local artisan, he could afford to go abroad and buy the highest quality Flemish work. This further exacerbated the lack of local demand, which could have led to a proliferation of Italian craftsmen.

Even more disastrous for the protection of bullion within Spain's borders was its heavy reliance on foreign bankers. Having already been well established in 1557, the banking families of Genoa—the Grimaldi, Spinola, and Doria—were able to seize a major share of Spanish debts at Philip's accession to the throne. They were supported by the most important banking houses of Venice, Florence, Milan and Lucca—only one—a

Spanish domain.²⁶⁸ These incorporated lenders were crucial to the Spanish king, as their professional history allowed them to exchange silver for gold, the metal demanded by Spain's soldiers.²⁶⁹ The mutually beneficial relationship saw the two sides, the borrower and lenders, spiral out of control as each continued to give the other greater and greater sums of money.²⁷⁰ Though residents of the Spanish Empire gave and profited considerably from Spanish debts, the corporate lending houses of foreign countries displaced considerable wealth from Spanish lands to the outer world.

Thus the Spanish silver was widely, but thinly, spread throughout the continent. The elite who used their considerable wealth to finance the Spanish government spent their returns only on the most high-end wares and services. Though this luxury market eventually trickled down to the growing masses of the lower class, it filtered down only enough to be spent on life's essentials. Many in Italy had more coin in their pocket as a result of the heightened circulation of specie, but systemic inflation meant that it had to be spent on food and little else.

Because of the relatively high proliferation of silver through the kingdom, prices rose throughout the 1500s (and especially in Philip's reign), while real wages fell nearly

²⁶⁸ Rich and Wilson, 490. Spain did attempt to create banking houses in its territories. By the-1570s, individual merchants and bankers became unable to single-handedly support perennial loans to the monarchy, due to the precarious nature of Spanish repayment. Aristocratic families banded together in order to grant Spain the massive lump sums Philip demanded. Unfortunately, the effort to avoid financial collapse was largely unsuccessful. The inconstancies of Spain's repayments were too frequent for private Italian citizens. In 1577, Philip ordered the creation of insurance plans for banks, to protect against the threat of bankruptcy. By 1581, the eleven main Neapolitan banks were no longer willing or able to finance the Spanish Crown, even at the exorbitant interest rates that it was willing to pay. Upon hearing this, royal officers dissolved the banks and reconstituted them, first into four, and then into a single bank, which was ordered to immediately loan 300,000 ducats to the viceregal treasury at 6% interest. He was essentially trying to create lenders who were too big to fail. Instituting larger banks simplified the lending process and allowed the monarchy to pay lower interest rates, as the bank wasn't so vulnerable to collapse. (AGS-SP 3, 1575, f^o 60; AGS-SP 3, 1577; AGS-SP 4, 1580-1).

²⁶⁹ Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism*, vol. 2, 525.

²⁷⁰ Braudel, 524.

60%.²⁷¹ Prices of wheat closely mimicked the supply of silver in the European market. At the same time, the price of industrial goods in Italy experienced only half the inflation that attached to agricultural products.²⁷² In this comparison we can see how the demand for these two types of products reacted to the economic realities of the day. A wide portion of the population simply could not afford more than to put food on the table. While average income stagnated or decreased in the kingdoms, food prices continued to plow on ahead of inflation.²⁷³

Nevertheless, wages still rose considerably in nominal value, due to the massive influx of bullion. The high wages relative to other areas in Europe hamstrung the exportability of Italian goods. Milan's domestic production fell sharply under Spanish rule, and its main market moved from Central and Northern Europe, to Naples and other Spanish territories.²⁷⁴

The resulting economic stagnation kept Spanish proceeds low, strikingly low, when compared to the economic boom experienced by most empires. While Philip was pulling in six times the amount of money in 1596 as he had when he assumed the throne, mounting costs and inflation shackled him to perennial crisis.²⁷⁵ In Naples, though government revenue increased from 1,300,000 ducats to 3,000,000 ducats during Philip's tenure, this rise did not even match inflation.²⁷⁶

²⁷¹ Koenigsberger, Mosse, and Bowler, 41.

²⁷² Koenigsberger, Mosse, and Bowler, 33; E. E. Rich and C. H. Wilson, ed. *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe Vol. IV: The Economy of Expanding Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 470.

²⁷³ Malanima, 393, 396.

²⁷⁴ Calabria, 4.

²⁷⁵ Stradling, 39.

²⁷⁶ Calabria, 56-7.

VII. Conclusion

Underlying this entire discussion has been the fact that imperial armies and navies were constantly in conflict with Philip's enemies. In the 1560s and '70s, the Spanish and Ottomans clashed in the Mediterranean. Beginning in 1566, the Netherlands also descended into bitter revolt that would last eighty years until its conclusion with the Treaty of Münster in conjunction with that at Westphalia. Two decades into the rebellion, the Dutch officially brought English forces into an anti-Habsburg alliance, in order to needle Spanish ships plying the oceans. Also in the 1580s, Philip engaged the Army of Flanders in the French civil wars to put his own Catholic claimant on the throne. But for one brief six month period in 1576, the empire knew only war.

The lack of reprieve from perpetual warfare led to serious economic hindrances. By falling into the vicious cycle of spiraling deficit spending, Philip's government became ever more dependent on taking out new loans and paying back old ones. There was never a moment when the tremendous income of the empire (which rose dramatically under the Prudent King) was allowed to catch up with the debts previously incurred. To service his expenditures, Philip once again had to prioritize his immediate needs over the long term health of his credit. Thus, he initiated a fire-sale of his assets, selling taxes, lands, customs duties, silver, offices, and incomes, all of which brought him a lump sum of money up front at the cost of the regular incomes they provided.

The farming out of the empire's capital cost Philip dearly over the course of his five decades of rule, and continued to do so for the remainder of the Spanish Empire's existence. It ruined the monarchy's credit, hamstrung its ability to raise funds, and encouraged the amalgamation of the empire's wealth into the hands of a few, not all of

whom were Philip's subjects. By concentrating the assets of the world's first trans-oceanic empire into a small oligarchy, the economic health of the empire was poisoned. Consumption plunged, start-up capital for industrial workshops disappeared, and inflation drove up prices while real wages plummeted. Difficulties were further exacerbated because Philip couldn't directly tax the wealth of those who profited so grandly from his policies. Their growing hoards remained protected behind feudal privileges while the poor, growing poorer, had to shoulder the pecuniary demands of Madrid's treasury. The borrowing from merchant-bankers at interest to buy goods from these very same lenders created a system that constantly fleeced the monarchy for the gain of the aristocracy.

The second major handicap of the constant expense of war was that Philip and his ministers never had a chance to attempt a coordinated reorganization of the empire's financial structure. Business had to go on as usual, and any interruption could mean military as well as fiscal disaster. The Crown was operating on the cusp of bankruptcy for nearly the whole of Philip's tenure; to bring a halt to the empire's operations meant an inability to pay its immediate debts and obligations, which would have led to military mutiny, default, invasion, or any number of geopolitical disasters.

With room to breathe, it's conceivable that thought could have been diverted from military campaigns and financing to the economic backbone of the state. The Spanish Empire had incredible resources at its disposal and many opportunities for their exploitation. While it is admittedly an anachronistic conjecture, what if Philip had opened up the New World to non-Castilian investment? We might have seen the creation of a broad network of plantations, such as those created by the British a century or two later. With the incredible wealth of the Italian oligarchic class, extremely productive

enterprises could have been set in motion. Imagine a Medici run plantation-state covering the area of Guatemala for the sole purpose of profit. The profit-oriented capitalist drive existed in that age; however, it was totally consumed by the Crown's need to feed its war machine. If instead of investing into the royal stock exchange, the merchant-bankers of Italy had used their money to produce commodities both at home and abroad, the duties on such could have filled Spanish coffers, while bringing employment and revenue to all levels of imperial society. Instead, the wealth of the Spanish Empire was sucked into the perpetually narrowing vortex between the Crown and its small coterie of astoundingly wealthy financiers.

All of this created an economy that sucked wealth from the majority of its constituents, leading to rampant inequality. One remedy to this, government redistribution, was curtailed by the Crown's solitary focus on the military. Public expenditure almost never aided the public good. In the rare case that the Spanish administration stepped in to promote the general well-being of its citizens, it came in response to a crisis, such as a famine or widespread fires, and only then to avert even greater calamity. With a shortage of available funds, cheaper preventative care was never administered until it was too late. Instead of public housing projects, infrastructure investment, or entrepreneurial encouragement, the viceroy was left to beg King Philip for money to stave off or redress a disaster—e.g., to clean up once a plague had struck an overburdened city, or to hire mercenaries to kill starving peasants who had turned to banditry.

Indeed, imperial policies did naught but disenfranchise the lower classes of wealth, property, and eventually food. In so doing, the government ensured that it was

viewed as a threat, rather than a protector. People had to eat, and in their deprived state were willing to take up arms against their overlords. By responding with draconian punishments, rather than solving the root of the problem, the provincial administration essentially declared war on its own people. Starting in the 1570s, Naples and Sicily especially could be seen as additional theaters of war for the Habsburg king.

If we take the Roman Empire as the spiritual progenitor of the Spanish, one huge difference in policy that determined their varying degrees of success is investment in its citizenry. Roman citizenship was highly desired; indeed, wars were fought with Rome by its neighbors *to become Roman citizens*. People wanted Rome to incorporate their lands into its empire for one major reason: Roman rule brought with it a better life. When Romanized, one could expect high quality roads, military protection, access to fresh water, an illustrious culture, and stability. Spanish rule made sure to keep the feudal status quo, and failed to bring any positive developments to its subjects. While the Spanish did bring peace to Italy (albeit after bringing six decades of war), the only subsequent difference felt by the Italians when compared to their previous local rulers was a deterioration in their economic status, a result of having to pay for foreign wars they cared nothing about.

Spain's presence did raise the station of one segment of the population—the aristocracy. However, the reliance on the upper class exacerbated all the problems experienced in this economic situation. Their role as tax farmers and administrators further grated on their social inferiors, who were pushed ever deeper into poverty. The aristocracy's business practices alienated peasants from their land or further drove up the price of bare subsistence. Finally, their feudal privileges, while shielding their wealth

from public use, came at the price of *Derogance*, ensuring that their money was not invested into local businesses or trade.

There was also the inherent inefficiencies of the monarchic structure of the Spanish Empire. The pressure of five continents' worth of activity on the brain of a single man was overwhelming, and Philip's inability to cope with such a weight can be seen in the stagnation of his provinces. Rather than engage in pro-active problem solving, Philip's deliberations were confined to ex post facto responses aimed at minimizing damage. The conciliar system could have worked on creative solutions to the empire's problems, yet in practice, it did little more than pass along information to the king. Additionally, progress was hindered by the constant drain of war on funds, energy, and resources.

Progress was made in the areas where the king was focused, but in others, the viceroy and his administration were unable to produce progressive policy without the king's approval. The Spanish Armada of 1588 exemplifies this problem. The massive invasion fleet took up an entire year's revenue (10 million ducats), and Philip was consumed by every little question, from the wood used in ship construction to the strategy of how to land his army. One hypothesis for this tremendous exertion was that Philip simply wanted to focus on a single thing. He had ruled for over thirty years and wanted to simplify his life. Instead of turning from Guanajuato to Breda to Milan to Manila in rapid succession, the man was simply trying to find a small measure of peace in the singular task of the Armada.

Additionally, because the Spanish Crown constituted by far the largest enterprise in the empire (indeed the world) at the time, there was no competitive pressure to

encourage creative solutions to problems. Competition did exist at the state level, say between Philip's empire and that of the Ottomans or the Dutch, but the vast assets available to the king allowed a certain emergency fund on hand for him to utilize. Instead of working to develop more efficient financial mechanisms or economically productive ventures (such as corporations, plantations, or industry) to increase proceeds, the Crown simply used pre-existing methods of raising revenue: taxes, short term loans, and the alienation of its incomes for ready cash.

Thus the survival of the fittest archetype embodied by free-market capitalism was totally absent from the Spanish Monarchy. Lulled into a sense of security by the vast lands, resources, and incomes gained by discovery, marriage, and conquest, Philip *almost* had enough to achieve his imperial vision. Unlike the Dutch, who had to figure out how to best take advantage of a small population living on marshy land, Philip could simply buy what he needed with silver or the proceeds from selling his property. This lack of competitive impetus doomed Philip's empire to stagnation. Its economic foundations were decidedly feudal, yet they were summoned to support the increasingly modern proportions of the military, a task which it proved unable to accomplish alone.

The imperial buffer of vast inherited wealth allowed for Philip's perpetual warfare far beyond what other polities at the time were capable of. What we have is a monolithic entity that consumed the resources at its disposal, to the detriment of the vast majority of its people. It was unfortunate for Philip that he ruled at a time when the true wealth of a nation was in its people, rather than its material assets. Instead of measuring Spain's wealth by how much wheat, silver, or iron the state could extract from its subjects, it would have been more profitable to imperial coffers had the average citizen enjoyed a

higher income. Instead of having to spend all their money on food and taxes, members of a wealthier lower class would have encouraged industry, cash crops, and a greater consumption of goods, which would have multiplied their wealth. In turn, as they were the tax base of the system, not only would they have supplied more money to the state treasury free of interest, but their demand for imports would have brought custom monies to the Spanish treasury as well.

Philip made the crucial mistake of ignoring the power invested in his people. Their prosperity was tied to his, but their ruin could also spell his own. Instead of flourishing, Philip's Italian subjects fell into ruin. Instead of supporting Philip's government, they fought against it. At every turn, the Spanish Empire undermined the foundations upon which it rested, not only exacerbating its weaknesses, but creating new ones. Philip bent his empire to the destruction of his enemies, but he pushed too hard, exhausting his subjects to the point of collapse.

A note on archival sources:

All archival materials come from the Archivos General de Simancas. The two different departments I looked through were that of the Estado and of Secretarias Provinciales, denoted in the footnotes by Est and SP respectively.

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