The Shipbuilding Industry and Trade Exchanges between the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies and the Countries of the Baltic and the Black Sea (1734-1861)

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Abstract

This paper aims to explain the development of the Neapolitan fleet and of the shipyards of Naples and Castellammare, which played an important role in the overall social and political reorganization of Southern Italy. This area, which had become an independent kingdom in 1734, needed to create its own fleet and specific trade regulations and structures in order to become a legitimate part of the European political scene. When Charles of Bourbon occupied the kingdom of Naples in 1734, the situation was quite critical because it lacked the infrastructure and the fleet had been destroyed. When Charles became king of Spain in 1759, King Ferdinand decided to call admiral John Acton to come to Naples to reorganize the Navy: so for the new 74-gun vessels Acton decided to build a new royal shipyard in Castellammare. And this shipyard was reorganized in the second part of the Bourbon reign (1815 - 1861) for the construction of new steamships.

Keywords: shipyard of Castellammare, 74 and 80-gun vessels, steamships, guns of Sweden, masts of Riga (Russie)

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1. Introduction

This paper aims to explain the development of the Neapolitan fleet and of the shipyards of Naples and Castellammare, which played an important role in the overall social and political reorganization of Southern Italy. This area, which had become an independent kingdom in 1734, needed to create its own fleet and specific trade regulations and structures in order to become a legitimate part of the European political scene. When Charles of Bourbon occupied the Kingdom of Naples in 1734, the situation was quite critical because it lacked infrastructure, the fleet had been destroyed, the harbours were in disuse and trade was in crisis. Charles’ ministers soon decided to spread the developing European mercantilist theories, previously adopted under Austrian domination. In 1735 Grimaldi made several suggestions to promote trading in the emerging kingdom: first, the reactivation of the harbour facilities and the reduction of duty in order to increase trade; then he wanted to create free ports (“scale franche”), quarantine stations in every harbour and trade companies. Finally, he wanted to favour privateering, as was customary in European navies\(^1\). In the same year Borgia made a circumstantial report in which he stated his ideas about economic development of the kingdom based on mercantilist theories\(^2\). This discussion was resumed one year later by the priest Pietro Contegna, who explicitly asked for the reopening of the harbours that had been destroyed under Spanish and Austrian rule\(^3\). As a consequence, a widespread restoration of the harbours was decided on, starting with the one in Naples: all of them were destined to trade first with European ports, fostered by trade agreements, then with the Americas. In 1739, while the harbour of Naples was being started, a new “Supremo Magistrato di Commercio” (Supreme Ministry of Commerce) was set up to look into questions relating to commerce in order to encourage this sector. Plans were made to restore the fleet of the galleys quickly, because they had to defend the kingdom against pirate ships. In addition, vessels were built similar to those already in use in

\(^1\) Pilati.
\(^2\) Ajello, pp. 175-177.
\(^3\) Ajello, pp. 177-180.