

Political Conflict and Pacification in the War of the Spanish Succession

The Palermo Revolt of 1708

▼ **ABSTRACT** This chapter unravels the pacification process following the 1708 Palermo revolt, a pivotal moment in the War of the Spanish Succession. It was characterized by the paramount importance of loyalty and the preservation of the Crown's structure in Habsburg dominions embroiled in the War of the Spanish Succession. By dissecting the methods, objectives, and principles of the individuals involved in pacifying the city, a deeper understanding of the political culture and policy-making endeavors of the Bourbon government emerges. This analysis provides valuable insights into the breadth of policies implemented by the Bourbon courts in Madrid and Paris to bolster the King's absolute authority. These policies were portrayed by the royal authorities as essential imperatives driven by wartime exigencies, significantly impacting the relationship between the King and the Kingdom of Sicily, which maintained ties to the Habsburgs through a mutual pact. Through an exploration of these dynamics, this chapter sheds light on the intricate interplay between power dynamics, political strategies, and diplomatic relations during this transformative period at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

In late May 1708, a series of popular protests broke out in the city of Palermo.¹ Domenico Ligesti described this movement in 2008 as a 'magmatic process, ambiguous and dangerous, albeit brief, that dismantled the existing system. The

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movement was [...] fully political, largely unrelated to the fiscal motivations that often lie behind such movements.² This was not the first time that social and political tension within the Sicilian capital had crystallised into a popular revolt.³ The 1708 events, however, took place within the context of the dynastic dispute over the Spanish throne — a conflict that involved all major European powers — which contributed to overinflating the revolt's political implications. Even though local circumstances ostensibly triggered the events in Palermo, they were closely related to the continental war, the dynastic dispute and Palermo's and Sicily's positions within that dispute. If, as the Spanish authorities on the island often warned, 'the whole Kingdom follows the lead of the capital', the conflict could easily have spilt over and 'infected' other cities.⁴ This could have endangered the safety of Philip V's sovereignty over Sicily and the Bourbon's position within the continent's geopolitical context, which was in the process of being redefined, along with its colonial possessions overseas.⁵

Nonetheless, the Kingdom of Sicily remained under the Bourbons until 1713. This was not only a consequence of the Sicilians' oft-proclaimed loyalty to the Spanish Crown and of the bonds that traditionally linked the Sicilian ruling classes to the monarchy.⁶ Other contributing factors were the evolution of the

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- 2 Domenico Ligresti, 'Viceré, Senato, Nobiltà, Maestranze, popolo e plebe nella sommossa di Palermo del 1708', in *Studi in memoria di Enzo Sciacca*, ed. by Fabrizio Sciacca (Milan: Dott. A. Giuffrè, 2008), p. 322.
 - 3 Simona Giurato, *La Sicilia di Ferdinando il Cattolico: tradizioni politiche e conflitto tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento (1468–1523)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2003), pp. 294–325; Adelaide Baviera-Albanese, 'Sulla rivolta del 1516 in Sicilia', *Atti della Accademia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti di Palermo*, Serie IV, 35 (1975–76), pp. 425–80; Rosella Cancila, *Il pane e la politica. La rivolta palermitana del 1560* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1999); Rosella Cancila, 'Congiure e rivolte nella Sicilia del Cinquecento', *Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche*, 9 Anno IV (April 2007), pp. 47–62; Helmut G. Koenigsberger, 'The Revolt of Palermo in 1647', in *Estates and Revolutions. Essays in Modern European History*, ed. by Helmut G. Koenigsberger (London: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 253–77; Francesco Benigno, 'Fora gabelle e malo governo'. Riflessioni sulla rivolta di Palermo del 1647–48', in *Rivolte e rivoluzione nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia, 1547–1799*, ed. by Antonio Lerra and Aurelio Musi (Manduria: Lacaita, 2008), pp. 191–228; Francesco Benigno, *Favoriti e rebelli. Stili della politica barocca* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2011), pp. 167–91; Manuel Rivero, '“Viva Rè di Spagna e moura il mal governo”. Discursos sobre la legitimidad y el ejercicio tiránico del gobierno durante la rebelión siciliana de 1647', in *Tiranía. Aproximación a una figura del poder*, ed. by Guido Cappelli and Antonio Gómez (Madrid: Dykinson, 2008), pp. 187–214; Daniele Palermo, *Sicilia 1647. Voci, esempi, modelli di rivolta* (Palermo: Mediterranea, 2009); Luis A. Ribot García, 'Las revueltas sicilianas de 1647–1648', in *1640: la monarquía hispánica en crisis*, ed. by John H. Elliott and others (Barcelona: Crítica, 1992), pp. 183–99; Luis A. Ribot García, *La Monarquía de España y la guerra de Mesina (1674–1678)* (Madrid: Actas, 2002).
 - 4 Simancas, Archivo General de Simancas (henceforth AGS), *Estado (E)*, Leg. 6123, Mesina, 15 August 1713.
 - 5 Joaquim Albareda, *La guerra de Sucesión de España (1700–1714)* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2010); Marina Torres Arce and Susana Truchuelo ed., *Europa en torno a Utrecht* (Santander: Universidad de Cantabria, 2014).
 - 6 Luis A. Ribot García, 'Las provincias italianas y la defensa de la Monarquía', *Manuscrits*, 13 (1995), 97–122; Luis A. Ribot García, *El arte de gobernar. Estudios sobre la España de los Austrias* (Madrid:

international conflict, in which Sicily only played a marginal role, and, most importantly, the measures which the Spanish government implemented to regenerate, renovate, and uphold the agreements that sustained Sicilian loyalty to the Bourbon monarchy.⁷

In this regard, we may emphasise the way the Bourbon ministers handled the Palermo revolt in the spring of 1708. Lacking the military resources to subdue the island by force, Bourbon authorities adopted delicate political and administrative measures to assuage the situation in the capital and reconstruct, regardless of the precariousness and political cost, the social peace upon which both the stability of the kingdom and Bourbon dominion over Sicily rested. Most Palermitan chronicles, both contemporary and later, and the Kingdom of Sicily's general histories mention, in more or less detail, the revolt of 1708.⁸ This is also regularly, albeit, generically, referenced in recent historiography where the episode is examined within the framework of Spain's last years of domination over Sicily⁹ or as one of the island's many episodes of urban protest — an episode which, in any case, pales

Alianza, 2006), pp. 121–98; Francesco Benigno, 'A patti con la monarchia degli Asburgo? La Sicilia spagnola tra integrazione e conflitto', in *Studi storici dedicati a Orazio Cancila*, ed. by Antonino Giuffrida and others (Palermo: Mediterranea. Ricerche storiche, 2011), I, pp. 373–92.

- 7 Marina Torres Arce, 'Sicilia ante los acuerdos de Utrecht: del desasosiego a la tranquila cesión del reino', in *Els tractats d'Utrecht: Clarors i foscors de la pau. La resistència dels catalans*, ed. by Joaquim Albareda and Agustí Alcobarro (Barcelona: Museu d'Història de Catalunya, 2015), pp. 159–64; 'La guerra, el pacto y la fidelidad: la singularidad de Sicilia en la disputa sucesoria española', *Società e Storia*, 155 (2017), pp. 97–137.
- 8 Marchese di Villabianca, Benedetto Emanuele e Vanni, 'Diario e narrazione istorica de 'tumulti successi nella città di Palermo nel 1708 da 'manoscritti della Biblioteca Comunale', in *Diari della città di Palermo dal secolo XVI al XIX*, ed. by Gioacchino di Marzo (Palermo: Luigi Pedone Lauriel, 1872), X, pp. 153–223; Antonino Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano delle cose più memorabili accadute nella città di Palermo dal 13 gennaio 1705 al 27 dicembre 1719', in *Diari della città di Palermo dal secolo XVI al XIX*, ed. by Gioacchino di Marzo (Palermo: Luigi Pedone Lauriel, 1871), VIII, pp. 48–85; Giovanni Battista Caruso, *Memorie Storiche di quanto è accaduto in Sicilia dal tempo de 'suoi primieri abitatori sino alla coronazione del rè Vittorio Amedeo* (Palermo: Francesco Valenza, 1745), part 3, II, Libro X, pp. 272–75; Giovanni Evangelista di Blasi, *Storia cronologica dei vicerè, luogotenenti e presidenti del regno di Sicilia* (Palermo: Oretta, 1842), pp. 453–67; Pietro Lanza, Principe di Scordia, *Considerazioni sulla Storia di Sicilia dal 1532 al 1789* (Palermo: Antonio Muratori, 1836), pp. 200–04; Vito Amico, *Storia di Sicilia dal 1556 al 1750* (Palermo: Antonio Muratori, 1836), Libro V, cap. II, pp. 153–56.
- 9 Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *La Sicilia moderna del vespro al nostro tempo* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2004), pp. 71–73; Giuseppe Casarrubea, 'Vicerè baroni e popolo nella Sicilia del 700', *Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione*, Anno XXI, 81 (1993), 179–80; Calogero Messina, *Sicilia e Spagna nel Settecento* (Palermo: Società Siciliana per la Storia Patria, 1986), pp. 41–50; José I. Ruiz and Pierluigi Nocella, 'Cambio dinástico en los dominios de Italia del sur', in *Hispania-Austria III: Der Spanische Erbfolgekrieg/ La guerra de sucesión española*, ed. by Friedrich Edelmayer and others (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 2008), pp. 295–318; Fausta F. Gallo, 'Italia entre los Habsburgo y los Borbones', in *Los Borbones: dinastía y memoria de nación en la España del siglo XVIII*, ed. by Pablo Fernández (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2002), pp. 141–62; Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio, '¿El final de la Sicilia española?: fidelidad, familia y venalidad bajo el virrey marqués de los Balbases (1707–1713)', in *La pérdida de Europa. La guerra de Sucesión por la Monarquía de España*, ed. by Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio and others (Madrid: Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2007), pp. 831–911; Cinzia Cremonini, 'Proyectos, aspiraciones y

into insignificance when compared to the 1647 or the 1773 revolts.¹⁰ The 1708 revolt has not received enough attention, except Domenico Ligresti's works, in which he analysed the conflict as a way to characterise the actors' political culture and to stress the capacity of popular sectors to participate and affect political processes in both the domestic sphere and the international arena, such as during the Spanish War of Succession.¹¹

This chapter aims to analyse the resolution process of the 1708 Palermo revolt. Contemporary chronicles and the correspondence between the court of Madrid and Sicily, along with the documents produced by the Viceroy's royal secretariat, are examined to track the decisions and actions undertaken by Bourbon authorities and those who helped them to restore order. By identifying the means, aims, principles and values of the actors who worked to pacify the city, we can characterise the Bourbon ministers' political culture and policy-making efforts in a moment when loyalty and the preservation of the Crown's structure were paramount to political practice and theory in the Spanish dominions. This analysis provides valuable information concerning the scope of the policies launched from the Bourbon courts in Madrid and Paris to strengthen the King's absolute power. While the Bourbons presented these policies as a war-driven necessity, we consider their impact on the relationship between the monarch and the kingdom of Sicily, which was traditionally understood as a mutual pact.

The Spanish Monarchy and Urban Conflict

In recent decades, the study of social and political conflict in the Ancient Regime has undergone a historiographical renewal, largely boosted by debates centring on the very nature and typology of conflicts, especially those that occurred in seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century Europe, and on the role they played in the state-building process.¹² Firstly, scholars paid attention to the conflicts' causes and their evolution. Then they focused especially on the actors, their demands and proposals, and their experience and values.¹³ Research has also begun

vínculos internacionales de las élites italianas entre 1700 y 1714 durante la guerra de sucesión al trono de España, in *Els tractats d'Utrecht*, pp. 41–44.

10 Simona Laudani, 'Quei strani accadimenti'. *La rivolta palermitana di 1773* (Rome: Viella, 2003).

11 Domenico Ligresti, 'Viceré'. 'Élites, guerra e finanze in Sicilia durante la guerra di Successione spagnola (1700–1720)', in *La pérdida de Europa*, pp. 799–830; Domenico Ligresti, *Le armi dei Siciliani. Cavalleria, guerra e moneta nella Sicilia spagnola (secoli XV–XVII)* (Palermo: Mediterranea. Ricerche Storiche, 2013), pp. 133–42.

12 A state of the art in Francesco Benigno, *Las palabras del tiempo. Un ideario para pensar históricamente* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2013), pp. 223–43; Xavier Gil, *Tiempo de política. Perspectivas historiográficas sobre la Europa moderna* (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2006), pp. 267–324 (p. 355–95).

13 William Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth-Century France: The Culture of Retribution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and his 'The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution', *Past&Present*, 197 (2007), pp. 75–110. From a different perspective: Edward P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past&Present*, 50

to consider the impact that failed revolts might have had on the legal-institutional, political and cultural spheres; failed revolts which so far had been regarded as irrelevant to the processes of social change, because of their limitations whether in temporal or geographical scope.¹⁴ Importantly, historians are also just starting to take into account the processes that led to resistance or open-opposition movements against the existing authorities.

Hence, recent studies are helping to illustrate the complexity and diversity of strategies and agents involved in the resolution of conflict.¹⁵ Some scholars have focused on the measures that the authorities implemented to reinstate order and on the values and criteria that these measures reflect. According to these, early modern legal literature claimed that the authorities' attitude towards rebels should depend on the varying levels of the rebelliousness of the movement and on whether individuals or institutions with some type of representative power participated in it.¹⁶ In practice, however, the measures that the authorities generally adopted were not only based on legal doctrine and their political culture but also on specific circumstances, such as the international context and the political returns they hoped to achieve.¹⁷

In the case of the Spanish monarchy, self-preservation and balance, as well as order and safety, progressively became the ruling principles of governance. This was especially the case after the mid-seventeenth-century crisis, when West-phalia prompted Spain to abandon its universalist aspirations and embrace a

(1971), pp. 76–136. In recent years, in addition to social, economic, political, administrative, religious and cultural factors, scholars have also considered other variables, such as climatic conditions: Geoffrey Parker, *The Global Crisis: War, Climate, and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth-Century World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

- 14 Francesco Benigno, *Especios de la revolución. Conflicto e identidad política en la Europa moderna* (Barcelona: Crítica, 2000); John H. Elliott, 'Revolución y continuidad en la Europa moderna', in *España y su mundo, 1500–1700* (Madrid: Alianza, 1990), pp. 122–45; Jean-Frédéric Schaub, 'La crise hispanique de 1640. Le modèle des "révolutions périphériques" en question (note critique)', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 49 (1994), pp. 19–39.
- 15 Concerning the Spanish Crown: Violet Soen, 'Reconquista and Reconciliation in the Dutch Revolt: The Campaign of Governor-General Alexander Farnese (1578–1592)', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 16 (2012), pp. 1–22; Yves Junot, 'Réconciliation et réincorporation dans la Monarchie hispanique: l'exemple de Dunkerque au temps d'Alexandre Farnèse', *Revue du Nord*, t. 98, 415 (2016), pp. 233–56; Alicia Esteban Estríngana, 'Las provincias de Flandes y la Monarquía de España. Instrumentos y fines de la política regia en el contexto de la restitución de la soberanía de 1621', in *La monarquía de las naciones: patria, nación y naturaleza en la monarquía de España*, ed. by Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio and Bernardo J. García García (Madrid: Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2004), pp. 215–46.
- 16 For the development of the crime of *lèse-majesté* and, along with it, the expansion of the punitive power of the king from the Late Middle Ages onwards: Mario Sbriccoli, *Crimen laesae maiestatis: il problema del reato politico alle soglie della scienza penalistica moderna* (Milan: Guiffrè, 1974). For the development of arguments in favour of the right of the subjects to resist in Early-Modern period: Angela de Benedictis, *Tumulti: moltitudini ribelli in età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013).
- 17 Letizia Arcangeli, 'Città punite tra riforme istituzionali e repressione: casi italiani del Cinque e Seicento', in *Le châtiement des villes dans les espaces méditerranéens (Antiquité, Moyen Âge, Époque moderne)*, ed. by Patrick Gilli and Jean-Pierre Guilhemmet (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp. 315–37.

non-hegemonic position. Faced with conflict, the policy was generally one of prudence, temperance, moderation, negotiation, reconciliation and peaceful reinstatement.¹⁸ These policies stood in contrast with the authoritarian, violent, and repressive stance that had previously guided Spanish policy.¹⁹

In a recent work on the Spanish government's measures to handle urban unrest, disobedience and rebellion in the second half of the seventeenth century, Luis Ribot concluded that, despite the universal prevalence of individual punishment, political reprimands, understood as a reassessment of the relationship between the King and the community, only occurred if the officials or institutions who were depositaries of political representation openly took action against the royal authority. However, even in such cases, political opportunity and international context affected the punishment's harshness.²⁰ The punishment that Charles II imposed upon Messina, after France abandoned the city and Spain defeated the rebels in 1678, serves as a useful example. The punishment administered to the rebellious Sicilian city implied the suspension of all its republican liberties and privileges, the construction of a citadel, and the imposition of a new structure for the urban government, which Spanish ministers now controlled.²¹ While none of these actions broke new ground for how the Habsburgs in their dealings with rebel cities²², the measures taken against Messina

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- 18 Juan E. Gelabert, 'Senza rumore'. El tránsito de Castilla por el tiempo de las seis revoluciones contemporáneas', in *El poder en Europa y América: mitos, tópicos y realidades*, ed. by Ernesto García Fernández (Bilbao: UPV, 2001), pp. 111–39; Alicia Esteban Estríngana, 'El consenso como fundamento de la cohesión monárquica. La operatividad del binomio protección-defensa en los Países Bajos del siglo XVII', in *Lo conflictivo y lo consensual en Castilla: sociedad y poder político*, ed. by Francisco J. Guillamón and José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez (Murcia: Universidad, 2001), pp. 325–76.
- 19 José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez and Gaetano Sabatini, 'Monarchy as Conquest: Violence, Social opportunity, and political stability in the establishment of the Hispanic Monarchy', *The Journal of Modern History*, 81–3 (2009), pp. 501–36; José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, 'Les acteurs de l'hégémonie hispanique, du monde à la péninsule Ibérique', *Annales, Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 4 (2014), pp. 936–42; Violet Soen, '¿Cómo practicar la virtud? Protagonistas y pareceres en la querella sobre la virtud de la clemencia durante la guerra de Flandes (1565–1585)', in *El gobierno de la virtud. Política y moral en la Monarquía Hispánica (siglos XVI–XVIII)*, ed. by Juan Francisco Pardo Molero (Madrid: FCE, Red Columnaria, 2017), pp. 115–42.
- 20 Luis A. Ribot García, 'Ira regis o clementia'. El caso de Mesina y la respuesta a la rebelión en la Monarquía de España', in *Visperas de Sucesión. Europa y la Monarquía de Carlos II*, ed. by Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio and Bernardo J. García García (Madrid: Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2015), pp. 129–58. Ribot discusses different views on the individual and political punishment unleashed after the revolts in Catalonia and Naples, for instance in: Antoni Simon, *Del 1640 al 1705. L'autogovern de Catalunya i la classe dirigent catalana en el joc de la política internacional europea* (Valencia: Publicacions de la Universitat de València-Institut d'Estudis Catalans, 2011) or Rosario Villari, *Un sogno di libertà. Napoli nel declino di un impero, 1585–1648* (Milan: Mondadori, 2012).
- 21 Ribot, *La Monarquía*; Salvatore Bottari, *Post res perditas. Messina, 1678–1713* (Messina: A. Sfameni, 2005); Benedictis, *Tumulti*, pp. 193–206.
- 22 The punishment imposed by Charles V to Ghent in 1540 for crimes of *lèse-majesté* was virtually identical. Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio, 'Nido de tiranos o emblema de la soberanía: las ciudadelas en el gobierno de la monarquía', in *Las fortificaciones de Carlos V*, ed. by Carlos J. Hernando (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para las Conmemoraciones de Carlos V y Felipe II, 2000), pp. 149–51.

seemed remarkably harsh, especially when one considers that the monarchy was trying to reassert royal authority and social peace by promoting respect for the exclusive constitutions of the various political communities and the 'devolution from the King to the provinces'.²³ According to Ribot, one must view Messina's exceptionally callous punishment within an international context — Spain and France were not openly at war and, during the peace negotiations at Nijmegen, the King of France showed no concern for Messina — as well as acknowledging other factors relating to political opportunity for both Sicily and the monarchy in general.²⁴

Three decades later, while immersed in the War of the Spanish Succession, Philip V followed in Charles II's footsteps and administered a similar punishment to the territories of the former Crown of Aragon. Philip V justified the legal and institutional dismantling of the kingdoms of Aragon, Valencia, and, eventually, Catalonia and Majorca, encapsulated in the *Nueva Planta* decrees, by arguing that the right of conquest and the royal prerogative allowed him to punish and suspend the exclusive laws of disloyal and rebellious communities. He argued that the rebellious kingdoms' interpretation of those very exclusive rights had undermined royal authority and that he was now replacing them with a more homogenous model of territorial administration that would come with increased oversight.²⁵ For Ribot, the *Nueva Planta* decrees implied abandoning the prudence that had guided the Habsburgs' response to revolts and beginning a new time for the monarchy which would be characterised by an absolutist and centralist turn, inspired by the French model.²⁶

Exactly a year after the first *Nueva Planta* decrees, a political conflict flared up in Palermo. The capital's loyalty towards the Bourbon monarch was formally intact, but these events placed his Viceroy and government in an extremely delicate political position. Viceroy Felipe Spínola, 4th Marquis of Balbases, whose political

23 Xavier Gil, *La fábrica de la Monarquía. Traza y conservación de la Monarquía de España de los reyes Católicos y los Austrias* (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 2016), pp. 189–251; Xavier Gil, 'La Corona de Aragón a finales del siglo XVII: a vueltas con el neoforalismo', in *Los Borbones. Dinastía y memoria*, pp. 97–115; Luis A. Ribot García, 'Conflicto y lealtad en la monarquía hispánica durante el siglo XVII', in *La declinación de la Monarquía*, pp. 39–68; Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio, 'Neoforalismo y Nueva Planta. El gobierno provincial de la Monarquía de Carlos II en Europa', in *Calderón de la Barca y la España del Barroco*, ed. by José Alcalá-Zamora and Ernest Belenguer (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2001), I, pp. 1061–89; Julio D. Muñoz, 'Consenso e imposición en la conservación de la monarquía. La práctica política en un territorio de la periferia castellana: el reino de Murcia (1682–1700)', *Hispania*, LXIII–3, 215 (2003), pp. 969–94.

24 Ribot, 'Ira regis', pp. 154–55.

25 Jose M^a Iñurritegui, *Gobernar la ocasión. Preludio político de la Nueva Planta de 1707* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Políticos y Constitucionales, 2008); Enrique Giménez, *Gobernar con una misma ley. Sobre la Nueva Planta borbónica en Valencia* (Alicante: Universidad, 1999); Carlos A. Garriga, 'Sobre el gobierno de Cataluña bajo el régimen de la nueva Planta. Ensayo historiográfico', *Anuario de Historia del Derecho español*, 80 (2010), pp. 715–66.

26 Ribot, 'Ira regis', p. 156.

culture and governmental experience had been formed whilst in the service of the now-extinct dynasty²⁷, sought to prevent the conflict from compromising Sicily's loyalty and safety at a very delicate point in Bourbon dominion.

Palermo and the 'disturbo quasi fatale' in 1708

In a letter sent to Philip V on 22 June 1708, the Senate of Palermo described the events that had taken place in the city during the previous weeks as a 'disturbo quasi fatale', the 'vapori' of which had tried to darken 'la tranquilla quiete di questa sua fedelissima città'.²⁸ The obvious object of this letter was to persuade the monarch that, even if the events had resulted in some disorder and unrest, they had in no way undermined the city's loyalty to its legitimate sovereign. In actuality, the letter laid the responsibility for initiating the protest and for the movement's demands on the guilds (*maestranzas*), which embodied the will of the people. The guilds were, however, also considered a key factor in reinstating order, for they had kept the 'popolo minuto' under control and had worked for the citizen's safety alongside the Palermitan nobles and lower gentry connected with the municipal government. The role played by the people and guilds in restoring order, along with the Senate's belief that the movement had been caused by legitimate mistrust triggered by the government's political drive, exonerated Palermitans from any suspicion of disloyalty. From the Palermitans' perspective, the viceroymal and urban governments' policies had threatened the integrity of citizens' property and family, as well as the commonwealth of the community and its traditional rights and prerogatives. The Senate of Palermo attributed the acts of assault, looting, murder, and other forms of violence to a shapeless mob, while they blamed the spread of false news and rumours on an indeterminate group of 'malcontenti' and 'disturbatori della quiete', who found motivation in sinister intentions not adequately explained in the document.

Contemporary chronicles and later historical accounts similarly consider the tumults to have begun as a response to the Viceroy's alleged plan to disarm the city and place it under the control of regiments sent from Spain. However, the events that unfolded in late May and June 1708 constituted a complex process involving the interplay of different dynamics and the confluence of diverse actors; each of these actors had their own motivations, but some of them temporarily came together in their pursuance of shared aims. Thus, a conflict which seemingly reproduced the characteristics of similar seventeenth-century episodes in

27 Manuel Herrero Sánchez and Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio, 'La aristocracia genovesa al servicio de la Monarquía Católica: el caso del III marqués de Los Balbases (1630–1699)', in *Génova y la monarquía hispánica (1528–1713)*, ed. by Manuel Herrero Sánchez and others (Genoa: Società Ligure di Storia Patria, 2011), I, pp. 331–66; Siphra Armon, *Masculine virtue in Early Modern Spain* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 117–19.

28 Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', pp. 73–79.

Palermo, which Luis Ribot defined as 'loyalty mutinies', was, in fact, not exclusively driven by the conservation of the privileges of *maestranzas* in the defence of the city, popular demands concerning the shape of the municipal government, or government actions concerning delicate matters such as taxation, supply, and police.²⁹ Deeply significant political matters related to the kind of relationship that existed between the Kingdom and the Bourbon Crown, and the position of Palermo and Sicily in the ongoing dynastic dispute and war further fuelled the movement.

The fall of the Kingdom of Naples into imperial hands in August 1707 increased Sicily's significance to the Bourbon cause within the Western Mediterranean. This led the government in Madrid to stiffen the island's defences and man them with extra troops.³⁰ The State Council considered this deployment more as a political move than a martial one.³¹ This military reinforcement intended to express the King's firm commitment to the Kingdom's defence and aimed to allay the fears that had gripped the island, buttressing the loyalty of Philip V's subjects and encouraging them to comply with the necessary services to the Crown. Louis XIV, despite having initial misgivings concerning his grandson's commitment to the island's defence (and thus weakening the forces available for the Spanish front), finally admitted that

'the arrival of a little aid [to Sicily] will spread the belief that more help is on its way, and since public opinion is such an important factor in the success of all matters, it is important to dispel the rumours, spread by the enemy, that I intended to leave Italy in the lurch.'³²

Thus, the main purpose of sending the troops was to bring Philip closer to the Kingdom and to decrease tension on the island. The deployment of new regiments around Palermo, however, only aggravated the Palermitans' concerns, leading to the May riots.

In truth, the Bourbon authorities had feared a revolt in the city for some time. In February, there had already been some unrest, which they blamed on the hermit Gioachino Fiummino. He claimed to have received a divine revelation

²⁹ Ribot, *La Monarquía*, pp. 579–602.

³⁰ The Madrid government began making plans to retake Naples from Sicily almost from the moment it was lost: Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional de Madrid (henceforth AHN), *Estado (E)*, Leg. 230, Mesina 2 June 1711, Mesina 5 June 1711. AGS E, leg. 6119, Mesina 11 October 1711; leg. 6120, Mesina 3 September 1712; Leg. 6122, Madrid 21 March 1712; Palermo, Archivio di Stato di Palermo (henceforth ASP), *Real Segreteria (RS)*, Diversi di Palermo (DP), 345, Mesina 9 June 1711, Mesina 29 June 1711; *Correspondencia de Luis XIV con M. Amelot, su embajador en España. 1705–1709. Publicada por el señor barón de Girardot*, ed. and translated by José M^a Inurrítegui and Julen Viejo (S. Vicente el Raspeig: Universidad de Alicante, 2012), pp. 511–13.

³¹ AGS E, Leg. 6126, Madrid 17 September 1707; ASP RS, Diversi (D) 164, Palermo 29 November 1707: in September 1707 the State Council explained the opportunity to create permanent Sicilian militias, the purpose of which would be to 'tener quietos aquellos pueblos', rather than to 'otro fin alguno de militar operación'.

³² *Correspondencia*, p. 451.

in which there was a peace treaty in place that handed Sicily to the Archduke, and prompted the Palermitans to both rejoice and revolt.³³ At the time, Antonio Condorelli, consul of the upholsterers, was also arrested for publicly complaining about the noble's monopoly over the municipal government and for demanding that the praetor should also be chosen from among guild members.³⁴ The negative effects of the war on the agricultural and commercial sectors, along with the Viceroy's strong demands (backed by the urban Senate) on the resources of the citizens and the municipal coffers, further compounded these political concerns.³⁵ Throughout the spring, multiple shops and workshops shut down, as the slow process of money replacement that the Viceroy and the Palermitan Senate initiated greatly affected the town. There was also unrest among the bakers, owing to the cost and quality of grain. These circumstances led to a severe scarcity of bread and other basic products.³⁶ The Viceroy's and municipal government's lack of sensitivity to those circumstances greatly contributed to public dissatisfaction and turned unrest into an open revolt that threatened the stability of the city and its government.

The Prudence of the Viceroy and the Tumultuous City

In mid-May, the Marquis of Balbases broke up a plot, which the oarsmen of the galley *Capitana* had concocted, to kidnap him and hand him over to the imperial party in Naples. After this, the Viceroy decided to increase the military forces around Palermo.³⁷ This was a tipping point for the city's population, as the many rumours questioning the Viceroy's real intentions fuelled a deep mistrust. The possibility that the Viceroy might attempt to garrison Palermo with the regiments recently arrived from Spain, effectively disarming the city, would not only signal an undeserved lack of trust on the Palermitans' behalf, but also a

33 Antonio Crutera, *Cronologia dei giustiziati di Palermo, 1541–1819* (Palermo: Tip. Boccone del povero, 1917), p. 241; ASP, RS, DP 340, Palermo 17 February 1708, Palermo 24 February 1708, Palermo 1 March 1708, Palermo 5 March 1708, Palermo 22 May 1708; DP 341, Palermo 2 December 1708. AGS E, Leg. 6124, Palermo 4 March 1708.

34 Luigi Riccobene, *Sicilia ed Europa 1700–1815. Con le vele ed il vento* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1996), I, p. 77.

35 Ostensibly, the government requested loans to fund the defence of the city and to cover the costs of replacing false and altered coins. The drain suffered by the municipal resources affected the *colonna frumentaria*, which managed the grain supply, and the *tavola*, or city bank, hampering the settlement of the two-monthly payments, on which commercial transactions depended, and of the *soggiogazioni* or bonds payable by the Crown. Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', pp. 50–52. AGS E, Leg. 6123, Palermo 3 March 1708; Leg. 6124, Palermo 4 March 1708. ASP RS, DP 340, Palermo 10 February 1708, Palermo 15 February 1708, Palermo 23 February 1708, Palermo 3 April 1708, Palermo 11 April 1708, Palermo 14 April 1708, Palermo 30 April 1708, Palermo 7 May 1708, Palermo 8 May 1708.

36 Other Sicilian cities, such as Trapani, were suffering similar problems: ASP, RS, Reali Dispaci (RD), Registri di Dispaci 1140, Palermo 15 February 1708.

37 ASP, RS, RD, Registri di Dispaci 1140, Palermo 15 May 1708; Biglietti militari 167, Palermo 19 May 1708.

grave encroachment on *maestranzas*'s police and defence roles, which served as an essential component of their identity and institutional legitimacy.³⁸ In addition, the Palermitans feared that they would have to shoulder the cost of keeping the 'foreign' soldiers, despite the city's financial exhaustion caused by the war and the Viceroy's demands.

At first, the *maestranzas* acted in 'perfetta unione' and sought the mediation of municipal officials and the praetor, who was the 'capo' of the guilds and the urban government, as well as the agency of other charismatic members of the local elite, embodied the desire to quell the overarching state of collective anxiety.³⁹ These entreaties aimed to open communication with the Viceroy and thus allay the population's fears. The lack of a quick and satisfactory response from the authorities soon prompted the populace to adopt more direct tactics, in which they moved from basic resistance to open revolt.

On the night of 25 May, the people took the city bastions which were supposedly going to be occupied by the foreign troops. The intervention of city officials and the 'signori della città' connected with the local government momentarily neutralised the situation: they convinced the *maestranzas* to abandon the bastions so that they could take possession of them later with the Viceroy's authorisation. This, however, did not fully negate the reciprocal mistrust that had arisen between the Viceroy and the people of Palermo. The people increased their demands during the following days and tried to force the government's hand with increasingly blunt actions.

On 28 and 29 May there were lootings, personal attacks, and even several violent deaths in the city. These actions were not random; the people aimed their actions at two well-defined targets. First, they sought to intimidate and to chase those people, and attacked places linked to the troops billeted in the city, who they had opportunely identified as French.⁴⁰ One of the people's first demands,

38 Gabriella Lombardo, 'Tra politica ed economia: le corporazioni di mestiere nella Sicilia moderna', in *Le Regole dei mestieri e delle professioni, secoli XV–XIX*, ed. by Marco Meriggi and Alessandro Pastore (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2000), pp. 326–45; Daniela Novarese, 'Le corporazioni artigiane in Sicilia nei secoli XVI–XVIII', in *Presenza e ruolo delle maestranze nell'età moderna, Corporazioni, gremi e artigianato tra Sardegna, Spagna e Italia nel Medioevo e nell'età moderna (XIV–XIX secolo)*, ed. by Antonello Mattone (Cagliari: AM&D, 2000), pp. 289–309; Simona Laudani, 'Le corporazione siciliane in età moderna: ruoli istituzionali e conflitti politici', *Sicilorum Gymnasium*, 51–1 (1998–1999), pp. 481–501.

39 Mediation was sought from the Prince of Butera, head of the kingdom's nobility and of the military arm of parliament, and the Prince of Cattolica. Both noblemen, along with the Prince of Palagonia, who, as praetor of Palermo, was to play a central role in stifling the revolt, and the Duke of Gracia, were described in a report sent a few years later to the court in Turin as the richest aristocrats of the kingdom, who controlled a wide network of relatives, friends and clients, who provided them with 'sommo crédito appreso il popolo palermitano e del regno tutto'. Simone Candela, *I Piemontesi in Sicilia, 1713–1718* (Caltanissetta-Rome: S. Sciascia, 1996), pp. 38–52.

40 According to Villabianca the troops were largely Neapolitan, Milanese and Spanish. Identifying them as French was a way to introduce the dynastic issue into the conflict and heighten tensions even further with the memory of the *vespro siciliano* of 1282. Di Blasi points out that the intention behind

along with the occupation of the bastions, was that the government deploy the Spanish reinforcements far away from Palermo, especially a regiment of Irish dragoons commanded by Marshal Daniel Mahony, whose actions in Cremona and Valencia had earned them a reputation for cruelty. Secondly, the people also directed their anger towards the municipal government, embodied by the building of the Senate, which they attacked, and the praetor (the Messina-born Duke of Cesarò), whom they accused of misgovernment and prioritizing the Viceroy's wishes over the city and its citizens.⁴¹ The threats of the mob not only forced the praetor to flee — screams of *mesinesse e traditore* and *nemico della patria* ('enemy of the fatherland') pursued him in his flight — but also pushed the position upon the Prince of Palagonia, thus bringing into effect a recent royal disposition which had appointed this aristocrat as new praetor.⁴²

From the start, the authorities faced the dilemma of whether to try to bring order back through either force or negotiation. Although the Marquis of Balbases surrounded the vice royal palace with troops to protect it from the unruly Palermitan mob, eventually he decided to avoid taking drastic action against the city. It seems that the Viceroy's main consideration in adopting this policy was to avoid the possible backlash that a show of force could potentially trigger, not only in Palermo, but throughout the whole Kingdom.⁴³ The Viceroy's attitude was largely dissuasive and defensive, even after the Palermitans had taken up position on the bastions, attacked the Senate building and its armoury, and pointed the Kalsa bastion's cannons towards the royal palace.⁴⁴

The Marquis of Balbases followed a strategy of self-restraint and negotiation, as well as back-tracking previous government policies to bring the situation back on track. Relying upon the maxim 'ceder y disimular mucho'⁴⁵, much favoured by

identifying the soldiers as French was to inflame the hatred and the fury of the mob, and that the possibility the people may have wished to 'rinovare l' eccidid del 1282 contro i francesi' was used as a warning to the Viceroy and his officials. Caruso claims that the French reference aimed to increase the people's wariness of Philip V, 'un principe nato, come diceasi, in un regno che conservava l' antico odio e il desiderio di vendicarsi del famoso Vespro siciliano'. Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', p. 162; Di Blasi, *Storia cronologica dei vicerè*, pp. 458–59; Caruso, *Memorie Storiche*; p. 275.

41 As early as January 1708, the Viceroy advised Madrid against re-appointing the Duke of Cesarò as praetor, not because of his performance, which according to the Marquis of Balbases had been characterised by permanent proofs of loyalty and love for the royal service, but because he was loathed by the people, because of his origin. AGS E, Leg. 6124, Palermo 15 January 1708. The Duke of Cesarò explained his actions during the revolt in AHN E, Leg. 1418, Godrano 4 June 1708.

42 At first, the aristocrat had rejected the post, owing to the unstable political situation in Palermo. Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', pp. 55–56; Torres, 'Sirilia', pp. 160–61.

43 Palermitan chroniclers describe a moderate, pro-negotiation party, formed by the city's nobles and officials, versus a pro-repression clique, formed by the three marshals detailed in the city at that time, who advised the Viceroy to use force: Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', 158; Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', pp. 49–50.

44 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 164–65.

45 Juan Gelabert, '¿Motines de subsistencia o materias de estado? Más luz sobre las convulsiones andaluzas de 1647–1652', in *Balance de la historiografía modernista, 1973–2001. Actas del IV Coloquio de Metodología Histórica Aplicada*, ed. by Roberto J. López and Domingo L. González (Santiago de

Spanish ministers during times of crisis, the Viceroy granted many of the demands made by the people since they first challenged his authority on the night of 25 May. Balbases recognised the role of the Palermitan *maestranzas* as legitimate direct political interlocutors, permitted the change of praetor brought about by popular acclaim, ordered the reinforcements away, and left the defence and policing of the city to the guilds.⁴⁶ The lower gentry and aristocrats were to join the guild units, thus increasing the guild's legitimacy through the endorsement of the Palermitan social elite.⁴⁷

On 20 June, the Viceroy, acting in the King's name, officially accepted the seventeen demands presented by the *maestranzas* with the acquiescence of the Senate and some of the Kingdom's main aristocrats.⁴⁸ However, after nearly a month of negotiations (during which high levels of tension existed both within the guilds and between some guilds and the nobility), the popular demands, such as those concerning the city's political organization, had lost most of their political content. The Palermitan elite finally supported, and the Viceroy granted, those popular demands that aimed to restore the previous political balance, which recent municipal and vice-royal policies had undermined. These included guaranteeing the supply of arms and gunpowder for the defence of the city, which was entrusted to the *maestranzas*; the supply of basic products and closing those city gates that were not indispensable for trade; spending the 'gabella dei fiori' (flower tax) only on those ends for which the government had initially decried; the abolition of public games, which the government taxed; besides courts ought to exercise prudence and restrain towards debtors; the enforcement of the order that compelled nobles to return to the city; and a blanket royal pardon for those actions committed during the tumults, except for robbery.⁴⁹ An extra demand, merely symbolic in nature, requested the removal of a plaque placed in the Senate's palace to commemorate the Duke of Cesarò's partnership with the Viceroy, which had brought the city to its current juncture.⁵⁰

Civil and religious ceremonies publicly sanctioned the restoration of peace in the city on that day, the 20th of June.⁵¹ The *maestranzas* had acted as the protagonists of the process that ended that day, although they had not managed

Compostela: Xunta de Galicia, 2003), p. 524; Gelabert, 'Senza rumore', pp. 111–39; Gil, *La fabrica*, p. 206; Rosario Villari, *Elogio della dissimulazione: la lotta politica nel Seicento* (Rome/Bari: Laterza, 1987); Rosario Villari, *Politica barocca. Inquietudini, mutamento e prudenza* (Rome/Bari: Laterza, 2010), pp. 251–313.

46 Di Blasi, *Storia cronologica dei viceré*, p. 463; Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', p. 64; ASP RS, RD, Dispaci 167, Palermo 6 June 1708.

47 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', p. 166.

48 According to Villabianca, the only demand that the authorities did not grant was the request to leave the Nova gate under the command of a consul of the guilds, assisted by a sub-lieutenant and two soldiers. That gate was near the royal palace and in the Viceroy's exclusive custody: Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', 181.

49 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', 78–82.

50 Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', p. 52.

51 ASP RS, DP 340, Palermo 20 June 1708; Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 184–85.

to maintain the seamless unity that they had exhibited at the beginning: while some *maestranzas* actively cooperated with the Senate in reinstating order and controlling the 'popolo minuto', others focused on advancing their demands through the authorities.

Ecclesiastics, many of whom were particularly close to the Palermitan elite, had tried to cool the mood of the people with sermons and processions, but some accused several members of the clergy of instigating the revolt.⁵² On this occasion, neither the *Tribunale della Monarchia* nor the Inquisition played any role in resolving the crisis by advising the Viceroy or assuaging the people.⁵³ By not taking an active part in these events, the inquisitorial tribunal went against a trend that consolidated during the second half of the seventeenth century, when the tribunal in Palermo had played an active role as a direct political intermediary between the city and the Crown and as a guarantor of the Kingdom's loyalty.⁵⁴ In 1708, the local elites, especially those in the Senate, with the Prince of Palagonia at its head, and both municipal and royal officials, acted as mediators with — and in some cases even as advisors of — the popular groups.

In reality, the nobility's position concerning the events unfolding in Palermo was ambiguous, especially at the beginning. Many decided to leave the city, and those who stayed did not openly side with the Bourbon authorities.⁵⁵ However, from the moment that some interjected themselves into solving the crisis, whether by advising the Viceroy, controlling the people, or placing limitations on their most ambitious demands, the nobility stood out as the key political factor in keeping the peace and vindicating their role as the city's traditional link between local elites and the Crown in the city's and Kingdom's government.⁵⁶ The powerful Prince of Cattolica's return to Palermo, one day after the ceremonies had officially restored order in the city, symbolically endorsed these ideas. His return complied with the *maestranzas*' demand that the nobles obey the order requesting

52 Mongitore paid attention to the attitude of members of the Church during these events: Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', pp. 59–63.

53 Like the *maestranzas* and other local corporations, the Inquisition organised its members into a company of urban militia in June. However, during the conflict, it limited itself to receiving the prisoners that the *Junta*, a political body created to deal with State matters, sent to it. AHN, *Inquisición*, Leg. 1755, Palermo 7 August 1708; Leg. 2302, Palermo 29 March 1713; Marina Torres Arce, 'La Inquisición y la última conjura antiespañola del siglo XVII en Sicilia', in *Centros de poder italianos en la monarquía hispánica (siglos XV–XVIII)* ed. by José Martínez and Manuel Rivero (Madrid: Polifemo, 2010), II, pp. 837–92.

54 Manuel Rivero, 'Técnica de un golpe de Estado: El inquisidor García de Trasmiera en la revuelta siciliana de 1647', in *La declinación de la Monarquía Hispánica en el siglo XVII*, ed. by Francisco J. Aranda (Cuenca: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2004), pp. 129–53.

55 Some documents suggest that nobles were initially in league with the *maestranzas* to destabilise the city's government. The statements issued by the leaders of an anti-Bourbon conspiracy broken up three years later insinuated that the people were distrustful of the nobility of Palermo for having failed to keep their word in 1708. This was used as an excuse to call for the support of the imperial army in 1711. AGS E, Leg. 6120, Mesina 11 Oktober 1711.

56 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', p. 167.

them to return to the city⁵⁷, but the act's political significance went deeper. The Prince of Cattolica left Misilmeri, his estate, in the company of a large entourage that included consuls, masters, and officials of some of the Palermitan *maestranzas*. The prince was received on the outskirts of Palermo by the archbishop, who escorted him into the city, alongside a group of 300 fishermen 'squadronati [...] per farli complimento', to show off the aristocrat's popularity amongst the popular classes. The following day, the Senate entrusted the Prince of Cattolica and six other aristocrats with the task of enforcing the Viceroy's concessions, with the assistance of the senatorial officials and the consuls.⁵⁸

On that same day, 22 June, the Palermitan Senate sent Philip V their account of the events in a memorandum which recognised the Marquis of Balbases' role in restoring peace. According to the memorandum had solved the crisis, guided by his prudence, justice, dexterity and intelligence, and with the assistance of the 'buoni cittadini' of Palermo, The senatorial nobility and the 'onorate e nobili maestranze', both of whom were guided by their love for the motherland and their loyalty to the King, formed the core of that group.⁵⁹ Thus, in 1708 the Senate offered arguments that differed very little from those used seventy years earlier to describe the Marquis of Vélez's actions during the revolt that swept the city in May 1647 to Philip IV.⁶⁰

Prudence, which had characterised the actions of Balbases, was a key political virtue of the shrewd ruler, according to the treatises and the political culture prevalent in the Spanish monarchy.⁶¹ However, prudence could also be seen as a sign of weakness.⁶² Palermitan chronicles and diaries interpret Balbases's position in these terms. According to these accounts, the people 'nel vedere che il governo era sulla via dell'indulgenza e delle concessioni' had been encouraged to increase their demands during the revolt. Furthermore, the interpretation of the Viceroy's soft approach as a sign of fear had helped the 'instigatori al malfare' to undermine his authority and, with it, the Crown's, and to try to steer popular unrest towards dynastic conflict.⁶³

57 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 175–76.

58 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 185–87.

59 Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', pp. 67–68.

60 Daniele Palermo, 'Un viceré e la crisi. Il marches di Los Velez nella rivolta palermitana del 1647', *Libros de La Corte*, 4 (2012), 126–40, p. 134.

61 Chiara Continisio, 'Il re prudente. Saggio sulle virtù politiche e sul cosmo culturale dell'antico regime', in *Repubblica e virtù. Pensiero politico e Monarchia Cattolica fra XVI e XVII secolo*, ed. by Chiara Continisio and Cesare Mozzarelli (Milan: Bulzoni, 1995), pp. 311–35; Juan F. Pardo, 'Gobernar según la virtud en la Monarquía Hispánica', in *El gobierno de la virtud. Política y moral en la Monarquía Hispánica (siglos XVI–XVIII)*, ed. by Juan F. Pardo Molero (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2017), pp. 9–52; Gil, *La fábrica*, pp. 121–87; Gil, 'La razón de estado en la España de la Contrarreforma. Usos y razones de la política', *eHumanista*, 31 (2015), pp. 357–77.

62 The way the Duke of Arcos dealt with the revolt in Naples in 1647 was regarded in very similar terms. Guiseppe Galasso, *Il Regno di Napoli. Il Mezzogiorno spagnolo e austriaco (1622–1734)* (Turin: UTET, 2006), pp. 346–48.

63 Lanza, pp. 202–04; Di Blasi, *Storia cronológica dei vicerè*, pp. 461–65.

The rulers and the Crown's advisors also saw the matter from the perspective of 'weakness'.⁶⁴ Louis XIV offered the following comments upon the Sicilian events:

although the movement has been stifled, it is to be feared that the people of Palermo, having tested their own strength, will now easily turn to disobedience and sedition, setting a bad example to other Sicilian cities. The Viceroy has no troops near him and no means to keep those which he's been forced to send to Messina. This is even more unfortunate because the number of people with bad intentions will increase with the hope of getting assistance from the British fleet in the Mediterranean.⁶⁵

The official accounts sent to Bourbon courts from Sicily downplayed the gravity of the events and stressed the newly gained stability and order, probably as a way to save face in front of the authorities in Madrid and Paris. In addition, the Sicilians presented their demands in a way that meant they could be framed as a manifestation of obedience. In some cases, they represented an expression of 'celo ed ubbidienza di tutta questa città verso il servizio del re Filippo V nostro signore e della patria', as worded by the manifesto published by the Viceroy on 10 June, in which he expressed his satisfaction about the loyalty and the attitude adopted by the Palermitan *maestranzas* in stifling the tumults in late May.⁶⁶ On other occasions, they explained what happened in the city according to the dispositions and proclamations that the Viceroy issued as events unfolded. These actions confirmed, at least formally, that the loyalty of the city had never faltered and that the 'disturbo' never undermined royal authority, represented by the Viceroy and the royal courts.

The allegations referring to the fidelity and the stability of Palermo soon affected Bourbon courts. Only a fortnight after making his previous damning assessment, Louis XIV reconsidered the situation of Sicily in his correspondence with Amelot. Based on the latest reports, the King of France concluded that simply some members of the '*populacho* allured by the possibility of loot' had started the tumults of Palermo. These events had not involved any 'member of the nobility or the well-off classes' and 'had not undermined the authority that the Marquis of Balbases must keep'. Thus, the French King advised Madrid to reject Carlos Felipe Spinola's request to be removed from his position as Viceroy in a Kingdom that had already known 'of his generosity'.⁶⁷

That the marquis was keenly aware of the vulnerability not only of his government and Bourbon domination of the island, but also of his person is made clear by his petition of removal and resignation, which he issued immediately

64 Ribot, 'Ira regis', p. 131.

65 Fontainebleau, 2 July 1708. *Correspondencia*, p. 529.

66 Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', pp. 67–68.

67 Fontainebleau, 16 July 1708. *Correspondencia*, p. 535.

after the pacification of Palermo.⁶⁸ The methodology used to put down the revolt also reflects the Viceroy's awareness. The Bourbon's delicate position within both the international dispute and the local framework, where the Viceroy only had recourse to limited independent military resources, all favoured a negotiated conclusion of the 'disturbo' in Palermo. Throughout this process, the Viceroy's authority and prestige suffered, but they ultimately played an important role in the restitution of peace within the city.

Trust and Justice for the Restoration of Order

In contrast to his predecessors, who had nearly always opted to leave the city during periods of revolt, the Marquis of Balbases weathered the crisis in his palace, protected by his soldiers and cavalry companies. In any case, the Viceroy avoided making any public appearances when tensions ran high. This policy, which the Marquis likely adopted for safety reasons, ultimately contributed to bringing order back to Palermo's streets.

The Viceroy's physical absence fed the rumour, and the fear, that he would leave the city. Palermo's condition as the capital of the Kingdom, the source of a long dispute with Messina, was inevitably attached to the actual presence of the vice-royal court and government in the city.⁶⁹ In times of crisis, the presence of the Viceroy became even more relevant, since, as the absent King's representative who held maximum political and military authority within the Kingdom, he worked as a privileged political interlocutor and the only agent who could legitimise and guarantee agreements in the monarch's name.⁷⁰ Moreover, the Viceroy's withdrawal, followed shortly after by that of the nobles, magistrates, and public officials, would have a profoundly negative effect on the city's economy.

To prevent the Viceroy's flight, the *maestranzas* considered to demand the Viceroy move his residence from the royal palace to the palace of Aiutamicristo; this palace was centrally located and easier to control than the vice-royal palace, which was situated between the two gates under the exclusive authority of the Viceroy.⁷¹ Discouraged by local nobles, the *maestranzas* came under pressure to first soften their demands and then to exercise restraint in the enforcement of the Viceroy's concessions. This caused internal disputes within the guilds, which revealed both a lack of internal cohesion and an inconsistency between their political aspirations for the city and their assessment of the elite's role. As such,

68 According to Villabianca, on 27 May, when the revolt began, someone had made a new attempt on the Viceroy's life: Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 159–60.

69 Francesco Benigno, 'La questione della capitale. Lotta politica e rappresentanza degli interessi nella Sicilia del Seicento', *Società e storia*, 47 (1990), pp. 27–63.

70 Manuel Rivero Rodríguez, *La edad de oro de los virreyes. El virreinato en la Monarquía Hispánica durante los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Akal, 2011).

71 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 170, 177.

while the so-called *maestranzas* 'di consiglio' worked to demobilise and monitor the population in cooperation with the Senate, the local nobility, and the royal authorities, some guilds, or at least a number of individuals within them, kept playing the agitation card as a way to maintain their hold over the government and the urban patriciate, and thus to increase their demands and to ensure that the government would address those already presented.⁷²

The Senate's leadership in the restitution of peace within the city also led to some discomfiture among the high magistrates, who believed that the municipal institution had overstepped its jurisdiction to the detriment of the authority of the royal courts.⁷³ In this context of reciprocal mistrust, the Viceroy tried to occupy an arbitrating position from which he could preserve his authority and prestige. The administration of justice — punishing as well as pardoning and rewarding — was essential in this process, within which symbolic acts played a crucial role.

In July, a conflict arose between the *maestranzas*, which had come under pressure to apply the Viceroy's concessions with moderation, and the nobility, which was trying to demobilise the guilds and loosen their grip on the city, turned the Viceroy into the guarantor of the promises made to the popular faction.⁷⁴ Simultaneously, the Viceroy's office began dealing with the granting of titles and honours of Spanish grandees to those members of the nobility who had stood out in bringing order back to Palermo. Although these royal honours involved the negotiation of voluntary donations, the Bourbon ministers presented these titles as a reward for the loyalty of those worthy nobles. The same noblemen also gained access to the position of general-vicar in regions of the island in which they maintained their estates. These measures aimed to strengthen the bonds between the Bourbon government and dynasty and the island's main political actors: the vicariate boosted the nobility's traditional military function and linked their interests and the integrity of their territorial possessions with the solidity of Philip's Crown, while the titles of grandee recognised them as members of the royal household, incorporating them into the Bourbon court system.⁷⁵

This reward policy even reached the popular sectors. The Palermitan consul of the silversmiths and that of the seamen in Termini stood out for 'their personal service [...] during this city's recent accidents'.⁷⁶ The Viceroy also appointed Antonio Guerrero, a lawyer who had been designated advisor and spokesman of the *maestranzas* during the June negotiations, as a judge on *tribunale del consitorio*, and started to arrange his future appointment as judge of one of the high tribunals of the Kingdom in Madrid because of 'his knowledge and prestige'.⁷⁷ This

72 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 192–93.

73 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', p. 171.

74 Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 191–93.

75 Torres, 'La guerra', pp. 121–30.

76 ASP RS, DP 342, Palermo 21 May 1709; D 167, Palermo 11 July 1708; AHN E, Leg. 1292, 1711; Mogitore, p. 65.

77 AHN E, Leg. 2216, Buen Retiro 5 August 1708.

appointment, however, never ended up taking place, as Guerrero was convicted of the crime of *lèse-majesté* since he had supposedly urged the people to attack soldiers during the unrest in May and actively conspired to bring Palermo over to the Austrian cause. The authorities displayed his decapitated head in the middle of Quattro Canti, directly above the epitaph 'traditore di Dio, di Sua Maestà e della patria', on the morning of 17 October.⁷⁸

A couple of months before the tumults in Palermo, the Viceroy of Sardinia, Marquis of Jamaica, explained his response to a pro-imperial conspiracy discovered on that island, saying that 'it is not possible (for those two things are hard to achieve at once) to allay sedition and to harshly punish the seditious'. In Palermo, the Marquis of Balbases based his actions on the same maxim. In his response to a pro-imperial conspiracy discovered on that island, the Viceroy also had written that 'it is not possible (for those two things are hard to achieve at once) to allay sedition and to harshly punish the seditious'.⁷⁹ The tension in the city of Palermo lasted for approximately a month, and although authorities arrested a significant number of both men and women during this time,⁸⁰ they did not administer capital punishment until 19 June, when the negotiations between *maestranzas* and the Viceroy were about to close. The person executed was Ignazio Volturo; he had been accused of *lèse-majesté* for encouraging 'il popolo a ribellarsi e ad introdurre un governo repubblicano'. The arrest of this hermit, who was not from Palermo, had no link to the *maestranzas*, and likely had little direct involvement in the revolt, which led to a summary trial. The praetorian court decided not to intervene and the *maestranzas* did not exercise their prerogative to reverse one death penalty per year.⁸¹ The display of the rebel's corpse, hanged upside down as an expression of his crime against the *status quo*, coincided with celebrations organised to publicly celebrate the city's return to peace in the presence of the Viceroy, who only now resumed his public role after nearly a month's absence.

One of the chapters of the agreement published on 20 June extended a blanket pardon for all offences committed during the troubles, except robbery. Five days after the Viceroy had granted this pardon, the Archbishop of Palermo published an edict exhorting Palermitans to confession, communion, and fasting, and granted a 40-day indulgence in thanksgiving to God and the patroness of Palermo for having 'liberato' the city 'da 'pericoli ne 'quali potea incorrere negli accidenti passati'.⁸² The royal and the divine pardons combined to ultimately bring about Palermo's pacification.

78 ASP RS, D 168, Palermo 14 September 1708; Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', pp. 202–03; Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', p. 84; Caruso, *Memorie Storiche*; pp. 275–76.

79 Archivo Ducal de Medinaceli, *Archivo Histórico*, Leg. 44, ramo 20, Caller 21 March 1708.

80 ASP RS, D 167, Palermo 22 June 1708, Palermo 24 June 1708, Palermo 21 June 1708, Palermo 16 July 1708, Palermo 30 August 1708.

81 ASP RS, DP 340, Palermo 19 June 1708; D 167, Palermo 20 June 1708; Crutera, p. 241; Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', p. 72; Villabianca, 'Diario e narrazione istorica', p. 183.

82 Mongitore, 'Diario palermitano', p. 80.

During the following weeks, the authorities released many of the people arrested for participating in the tumults⁸³, except those convicted of political crimes. The Viceroy entrusted a *junta* convened to deal with 'state matters' (*materias de Estado*) with investigating those who had stood out as agitators or who had adopted a radical stance in the negotiations with the authorities; the courts gave many of these individuals prison, corporeal, and exile sentences. The death penalty was for those accused of *lèse-majesté*. Apart from Volturo's, the other executions (including that of Guerrero) resulted from the discovery of a pro-imperial plot which aimed to take advantage of the popular agitation in Palermo to propitiate the imperial invasion of Sicily.⁸⁴ Against dissidence, the Marquis of Balbases wrote years later 'there is nothing [to do] but punish, and justice must not hesitate to do it'.⁸⁵ In this regard, the courts relied upon executions and, more importantly, the ceremonial display of the corpses of those killed for committing crimes of *lèse-majesté* as a public statement regarding the rectitude of royal justice.⁸⁶

The successful invasion of Sardinia by a British and Dutch armada in mid-August of 1708 rekindled past tensions and again plunged Sicily into uncertainty; there were fears that the island could be the Allies' next target. The Viceroy saw this as enough justification to bring back some of the regular and cavalry troops who had been sent away from Palermo during the troubles in May. The *maestranzas* and the Senate endorsed this measure, although the defence of the city remained in the hands of the guilds and urban militias, two bodies that were also responsible for keeping public order and guaranteeing the city's food supply as it prepared for its defence.⁸⁷ Again, aristocrats showed little enthusiasm for complying with the Viceroy's new decree for military service (in the cavalry); in his proclamation, the Viceroy also forbade nobles from leaving Palermo and ordered the return of those who had already left for their country estates.⁸⁸ The rewards and graces that the nobles had received in the recent past seem to have

83 ASP RS, D 167, Palermo 22 June 1708, Palermo 16 July 1708.

84 The seriousness of this plot, concocted in Palermo, Castelvetro, and Trapani, led the Viceroy to give the general auditor Nicolò Pensabene extraordinary powers to act upon and judge, independently from the courts, the *Junta de Estado*, and the *Tribunal de la Gran Corte*, any person from any social condition, even if that person was a minister of the Sacred Council. In the event, the plot involved members of the lower nobility, the cathedral chapter, and the regular clergy, as well as local officials, civil servants, soldiers, and members of the *maestranzas*. ASP RS, D 167, Palermo 21 June 1708, Palermo 8 July 1708, Palermo 6 September 1708, Palermo 14 September 1708, Palermo 22 October 1708; Pedro Voltes, 'Aportaciones a la historia de Cerdeña y Nápoles durante el dominio del archiduque D. Carlos de Austria', in *Estudios de Historia moderna I. Relaciones internacionales de España con Francia e Italia (siglos XV a XVIII)* (Zaragoza: Instituto Jerónimo Zurita, 1951), pp. 49–128.

85 AGS E, Leg. 6118, Mesina 10 November 1710.

86 The court sometimes aimed its punishment at criminal's families: AHN E, Leg. 8703, Barcelona 6 December 1710.

87 ASP RS, DP 341, Palermo 2 September 1708, Palermo 7 September 1708; Candela, pp. 147–48.

88 ASP RS, D 165, Palermo 7 September 1708, Palermo 27 September 1708.

had little effect on their nonchalant approach to the defence of the Bourbon cause in case of an Allied invasion.

The possibility of Allied action against Sicily progressively waned as summer turned into autumn. The Viceroy continued working to adapt the June agreements to the interests and objectives of the Bourbon monarchy, which at that time was focussing all of its efforts on winning the war on the Iberian Peninsula and strengthening royal control on the monarchy's political and administrative structures. These aims were a major source of friction with local political agents in Sicily. The Palermitan tumults made it clear that, while the war's context offered great possibilities for expanding royal authority and executive power under the umbrella of *necesitas*, it also set limits on them, as the King's authority ultimately rested on the Kingdom's loyalty, which depended on the consensus between the monarch, the cities, and the estates.

The fragility of the Bourbon position within both the international context of the War of Spanish Succession and Sicily in 1708 contributed to solving the Palermitan troubles through a tested strategy based on prudence, tact, negotiation and concession. The Viceroy's priority was to re-establish order, no matter how precariously, to preserve the city's and Kingdom's loyalty to the Bourbon dynasty. He used royal justice, which included not only punishment but also pardon and rewards, to neutralise the conflict, guarantee peace agreements, and try to strengthen the links between local political agents and Philip V's monarchy. However, the model adopted to pacify Palermo had a great political cost. The management of the crisis undermined Balbases's authority and upset the pre-existing balance between the Viceroyal government and local political actors and institutions. This is clearly shown by the Viceroy's decision to move his residence to Messina in September 1709; it was only from there that Balbases could establish an extraordinary and executive government with which to respond to the equally extraordinary demands in wartime. By adopting this course of action, the traditional agreements on which the Sicilians' loyalty towards the Spanish crown rested fell again under great pressure. In the following years, tumults and anti-Bourbon plots revealed the political instability and uncertainty that were consuming the island. The Bourbon government once again had to manage this delicate situation by not only resorting to harsh punishment but also exercising moderate and contemporary policies. Finally, Madrid prompted the introduction of substantial changes in the so-far operation of the Viceroyalty government and in Balbases' policy of confrontation with the traditional power groups of Palermo, both the parliamentary nobility and high magistracies. For Philip V, this became a matter of preserving the realm for the forthcoming European peace negotiations.⁸⁹

89 Marina Torres Arce, 'Un reino, dos reyes y una capital sin corte: la conspiración de Palermo de 1711', in *El príncipe, la corte y sus reinos. Agentes y prácticas de gobierno en el mundo hispano* (ss. XIV–XVIII), ed. by Guillermo Nieva and others (San Miguel de Tucumán: UNT, 2016), pp. 365–96.

Appendix. Public Statement by the Viceroy of Sicily, the Marquis of Balbases, Palermo, 10 June 1708

Provenance: Antonino Mongitore, *Diario palermitano delle cose più memorabili accadute nella città di Palermo dal 13 gennaio 1705 al 27 dicembre 1719*, in *Diari della città di Palermo dal secolo XVI al XIX*, ed. by Gioachinno di Marzo (Palermo: Luigi Pedone Lauriel, 1871), vol. VIII, pp. 67–68.

La inalterabile fedeltà, con la quale la città e popolo di Palermo si ha sempre governato verso i suoi serenissimi padroni, non ha punto mancato di continuarla, a pari de' tempi trascorsi, nel -presente dominio del nostro glorioso monarca Filippo quinto (che Dio conservi). Che pero conoscendo l' ecc.^{mo} signore signor D. Carlo Filippo Antonio Spinola, marchese de los Balvases, duca del Sesto, vicerè e capitán generale per Sua Maestà in questo regno di Sicilia, il gran zelo ed attenzione, la quale-tutto il popolo, e specialmente l' onorate e nobili maestranze di essa, han manifestato in quest'ultimi giorni-per il real servizio del re nostro signore;-e volendo Sua Eccellenza corrispondere con la sua generosità all'attestati d' amore ed attenzione di questi fedelissimi popoli ed onorate maestranze, che di continuo non lasciano di manifestarli a Sua Eccellenza con la prontezza, che protestano di spargere tutto il sangue per servizio li S. M.; li è parso divenire, per-maggior consolazione di questo publico, alla presente dichiarazione, per la quale si fa palese ad ogn'uno restare l' Eccellenza Sua pienamente sodisfatta della fedeltà, zelo ed ubbidienza di tutta questa città verso il servizio del re Filippo quinto, nostro-signore; assicurando S. E. di passare con tutto gusto alla real notizia di S. M. l'ossequio de' suoi fedelissimi popoli palermitani, dovendo essi sperare dall'amore e piacevolezza d' un tanto monarca tutte le grazie e beneficii, che dal suo real animo si possono compromettere. Et acciocchè ad ogn'uno, così di cotesti fedelissimi popoli, come ad ogn'altro vassallo di S.M. ed a qualunque altra persona, sia nota e palese la sicurtà, che S. E. tiene, dell' ubbidienza e sodezza del popolo di Palermo, ha ordinato si publicasse la presente dichiarazione per consolazione di questo publico e di tutto il regno; sicurissimo, che non la scierà di segnalarsi con tutte le marche di fervore e zelo nel servizio del nostro glorioso ed impareggiabile monarca Filippo quinto, che Dio mantenga per conservazione della santa fede cattolica et augumento de' suoi fedelissimi vassalli.

D. Carlo Filippo Antonio Spinola Colonna
In Palermo 10 giugno 1708

PART IV

Pardon and Pacification

