

Social Class in Mid-Eighteenth Century

Calabria, Italy: A Case Study Using Data from *Catasto Onciario* of 1742

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Introduction

Historically, taxation issues have been the main reasons for many governments to take a census. Censuses can also provide useful sociological and demographic information about the population being enumerated. For this paper four towns - Soriano, Capistrano, Brognaturo and Fabrizia - were chosen in the southern Italian province of Vibo Valencia, region of Calabria¹ to reconstruct aspects of social class that existed in this region. The principal documentary source for this analysis will come from the *Catasto Onciario*,² which was a register of taxable property combined with a household census as ordered under the *Catasto Onciario* law of 1742 to be completed for all towns by 1753. This law was aimed at remedying the chaotic system of taxation in the Kingdom of Naples in the mid-eighteenth century by evaluating the possessions/revenues of citizens for a "fairer" taxing of households. Thus, every town in southern Italy should have a *Catasto Onciario* for the period - if it has

¹ The region of Calabria is in southern Italy and forms the "toe" of the Italian Peninsula. The province of Vibo Valencia is to the east of the actual province that is the "toe" (Reggio di Calabria) and borders the Tyrrhenian Sea. Figure 1 shows the region and province locations.

² "ounce cadaster"

not been destroyed by natural or man-made means - and is usually available at the one of the state archives. This source of data is slowly being made available at state archives as genealogical sources. Historical demographic scholars writing in English have used few.³ Genealogists have started to take advantage of this information for tracing families and individuals back into the 18th century. However, because their interest is in individuals sometimes the available transcribed data does not include the taxable registered property of the household - important for understanding social stratification during this period.⁴ For the purpose of this paper and research, the source of the data is available to the public free of charge by the University of Calabria under a project to collect and make available documentary sources to researchers with interests in the region of Calabria see (The URL is located in reference section). It has both the household demographic information as well as the taxable registered property of the household.

The Catasto data includes information about each member of a household including name, relationship to head of household, occupation or condition, and age. In addition to demographic information, there are economic details on household assets and revenues. Figure 2 shows an example of the first page of information for an enumerated household. This paper will examine household size, household composition, and occupation of householders, as well as report on a preliminary cluster analysis examination of the taxable registered property of the household by occupation of head of household.

³ A conference held in 1983 with proceedings published in 1986 had two volumes of papers that discussed, in Italian, various aspects of this Catasto Onciario law of 1742 (Il Mezzogiorno settecentesco attraverso i catasti onciari). Although the focus of many of the papers was on the legal/political consequences of this law to the Kingdom, there do appear to be more Italian researchers beginning to take advantage of the data for quantitative analysis.

⁴ For example, the Abruzzo region, Abruzzoheritage - an organization focused on the culture and genealogy of the Abruzzo region - has transcribed for purchase many town catastos, but only includes the information about each member of a household including name, relationship to head of household, occupation or condition, and age, not the other economic details on household assets and revenues. This information is available in the original documents, but was not transcribed for genealogical purposes. The researcher had initially contemplated using the transcribed data for one of these Abruzzo towns to examine and evaluate the quality and usefulness of this data for demographic purposes. However, decided to hold off until she can arrange to go to L'Aquila's state archive to collect the economic detailed data.

Following the methodological example of Galt (1989) who examined Catasto data for a town in the region of Apulia, I will perform cluster analysis in order to reconstruct aspects of social class in these four towns. Galt (1986) argued, "there existed a degree of social mobility even within the structures of late feudalism, that both an entrepreneurial elite and yeoman peasantry existed ..." in the region of Apulia. By using cluster analysis and like Galt (1989), I will be examine patterns that may not necessarily be intuitively perceived, as well as compare and contrast my results with those of Galt (1986) who focused on the region of Apulia to examine aspects of social stratification during the mid-eighteenth century.

The period is of importance to historical demographic researchers to gain an understanding of the "baseline" peasant society before many of the structural changes of the nineteenth century happened in the Kingdom of Naples (i.e., southern Italy). Some of the important events that occurred in the nineteenth century were:

- feudalism was abolished in 1806,
- Napoleon took over control of the Kingdom of Naples in 1807, first placing his brother Joseph on the throne, and then his brother-in-law Joachim Murat who stayed in power until 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon by European powers.
- political unification to create the Kingdom of Italy in 1861
- industrialization of northern Europe and extensive out-migration of the population from southern Europe

References

Galt, A. H. 1986. "Social Class in a Mid-Eighteenth-Century Apulian town: Indications from the Catasto Onciario." *Ethnohistory*. 33:4 (Fall 1986). Pages 419-447.

Il Mezzogiorno settecentesco attraverso i catasti onciari. Napoli : Edizioni scientifiche italiane, c1983- <c1986 > v. <1-2 > : ill. ; 24 cm. Pubblicazioni dell'Università degli studi di Salerno. Sezione Atti, convegni, miscellanee ; 5, 10

Catasto Onciario data source - <http://www.archicalabria.it/>

Figure 1: Location of the region of Calabria and its five provinces

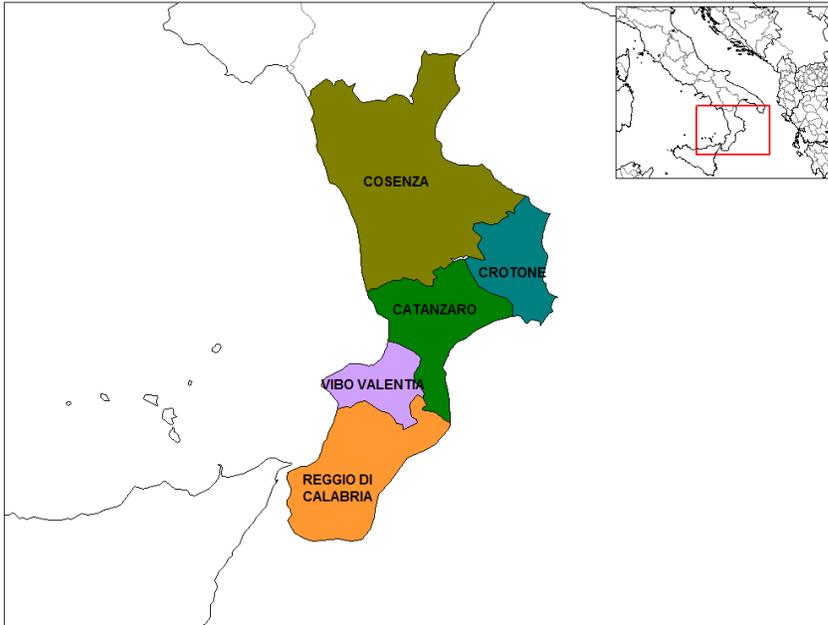


Figure 2: Example of a first page for a household from a Catasto Onciario

