

21. MASANIELLO

Tommaso Aniello di Cecco d'Amalfi was born in Naples, in Vico Rotto al Mercato, on 29 June 1620. He was a fishmonger like his father and was short, dark-skinned, with brown hair, pony-tail and moustache. He often wore baggy shirts, canvas breeches and a red cap and never wore shoes.

He married **Bernardina Pisa** in 1641. She was soon arrested for smuggling, and Masaniello had to sell the few things he owned and ask his relatives for a loan to raise the money to pay the fine and get her out of prison. He also ended up **in prison**, where he met a young Law graduate called **Marco Vitale** and they became great friends. It was Vitale who introduced him to the old, experienced lawyer **Giulio Genoino**, who was determined to fight for a more egalitarian representation on the city's administrative council. The council was known as the City Corps and used to meet at San Lorenzo so it was also known as the **Tribunale di San Lorenzo**. The members of this Tribunal belonged almost exclusively to the Neapolitan nobility. The old priest and man of letters, Genoino, had already been exiled in 1619 for protesting against the disproportionate power of the nobility and demanding that merchants, "civilians" and artisans have a greater role in running the city.

By mid Seventeenth century, Naples was one of the biggest and most densely-populated cities in Filippo IV's empire. Widespread discontent started to make itself felt when **Rodriguez Ponce de Leon**, Duke of Arcos and viceroy of Naples, imposed a tax on fruit in his edict of 3 January 1647. On **7 July 1647** the fruit growers from Pozzuoli refused to pay the tax, saying that it was the responsibility of the fruit sellers in the market at Piazza Mercato but they refused too. There was lots of shouting and arguing, and the tax-collectors got bags and fruit thrown at them. A group of "**alarbi**" or young thugs joined in and made the situation worse. The crowds gathered and a procession formed, headed by Masaniello. They set off towards the viceroy's palace shouting: «**Viva il Re di Spagna e mora lo mal Governo!**». Long live the King of Spain, down with this awful government!

During the night of 7 July, the young thugs along with a group of other people gathered in Piazza Mercato to destroy the customs sheds, attack the security guards and get hold of weapons. Masaniello ordered them to set the tax-collectors' houses on fire, especially don Girolamo Letizia's near Portanova.

On 8 July, don Tiberio Carafa and don Ettore Ravaschieri were sent by the viceroy to the market square to try and negotiate with the leaders of the rebellion. The rebels were demanding a written declaration that **all taxes would be abolished**, and that the **privileges accorded to the Neapolitan people** by Charles V in 1529 would be recognised.

On 9 July 1647 the populace, headed by the young fishmonger, made their way to San Lorenzo to steal the cannons which were kept there. Armed with guns, they tried in vain to break their way in through the door next to the Campanile but it was guarded by about thirty Spanish soldiers. A fairly large group broke away from the crowd and managed to get into the San Lorenzo cloisters by breaking their way in through the kitchen door of the convent in Vico dei Majorani. That same day Duke Diomede Carafa and his brother Giuseppe were sent to the square to try and negotiate a deal but without success.

In the meantime the revolt was gathering momentum. Masaniello was even nominated **General Captain of the Faithful People of Naples** by the viceroy himself. Tax registers were burnt and members of the nobility had their houses set fire to and their things confiscated. Masaniello headed the government along with Francesco Antonio Arpaia and don Giulio Genoino.

The 10 July was marked by the **execution in Piazza Mercato of don Giuseppe Carafa**, who was accused of plotting to kill Masaniello. The viceroy, the Duke of Arcos, decided to entrust negotiations to the Cardinal Archbishop Ascanio Filomarino.

The evening of 11 July, Masaniello went on an **official visit to the viceroy**. During their meeting Masaniello seemed to lose all sense of reality and then fainted. These were the first

signs of the physical and mental disturbances which would affect his behaviour over the following few days.

On Saturday 13 July, in the Duomo, the viceroy swore on the treaty that granted favourable conditions to the people.

Many people were dubious about Masaniello's supposed "madness". Some even said the viceroy had arranged to have him poisoned. What is more probable is that the young fisherman had become psychologically unstable because of the huge responsibility he had been given. Within the space of a few days, the lowly fishmonger had become a revered gentleman, acclaimed by the people who saw him as their redemption after centuries of oppression and injustice.

The night of 16 July, Masaniello, in one of his last speeches delivered from the window of his house, reminded the people of all the advantages they had gained through his government. He was reduced to skin and bone, looked possessed and his gestures were jerky and frenetic. He also stripped in front of the crowd. The people who had come to listen to him started jeering and shouting.

On the day of the Madonna del Carmine celebrations, after yet another display of madness, Masaniello was killed in the monks' dormitory at the Carmine Church. The four fatal bullets were fired by four mercenaries Salvatore and Carlo Catania, Michelangelo Ardizzone and Andrea Rama. Masaniello's **head** was paraded around the city and his body thrown in the graves between Porta del Carmine and Porta Nolana. This was definitely a plot which the viceroy had hatched and Cardinal Filomarino had been a party to it or at least given his tacit consent.

His body was recovered and huge crowds turned out to watch his funeral. Masaniello immediately became a symbol of liberty, and took on the status of quasi-saint, hero and myth.

When bread started to be taxed again, the people were forced to take up arms. Violent fighting continued throughout the summer.

It was only in April 1648, with the arrival of Giovanni of Austria that the Hapsburgs regained control.

The mortal remains of the people's leader were buried in the Carmine Church

After the 1799 revolution, when the monarchy had been restored, the Bourbon King Ferdinando IV gave orders for Masaniello's tomb to be destroyed and his bones to be scattered to ensure all memory of the old 1647 revolution was lost.