

‘O Gigante ‘e palazzo and Neapolitan satire

The famous statue known as the “**Palace Giant**”, which stands in the gardens of the National Archaeological Museum, is an imposing marble bust which used to stand on the steps leading up to the Museum entrance. Its base had an inscription reading *Busto di Giove da Cuma* or Bust of Jupiter of Cumae.

The gigantic acrolith was found in XVII century in **Cumae** – in the area known as the Masseria Gigante or Giant’s Manor House – during the *Capitolium* archaeological dig. The Spanish Viceroy **don Pedro Antonio d’Aragona** had it brought to Naples in 1668, and it was decided to use it as a **monumental symbol of the city**. The arms and legs of the colossal statue were redone, and on its stand they put an eagle-shaped coat of arms and a long inscription extolling the virtues of the viceroy.

It was mounted on a large marble base near the “Giant’s Fountain”, near the Viceroy’s Palace, on the corner of the new Port and Palace Road, where Piazza del Plebiscito stands today. From then on, the road leading to Santa Lucia was known as **Salita del Gigante** (or Giant’s hill).

The statue often featured in drawings and prints of the time as a symbol of the city. The **Palace Giant**, as Neapolitans often called him, soon became to Naples what Pasquino was to Rome and the Rialto Hunchback to Venice i.e. an excuse to write **satirical** verses or prose about those in power. Princes and Regents, Viceroys and Cardinals all had the dubious honour of appearing in his **libellous** lines. A guard was put on duty at the statue and passers-by were no longer allowed to stop and read the giant’s words. A reward was offered for the capture of the authors but nobody could stop the Giant’s “inspiration” and he carried on producing over one thousand satirical verses a day.

In reality, even if famous writers wrote some of the verses, most of the work was done by the **people**. The verses were often spontaneous, sometimes trivial and always cutting and provocative. Tradition has it that lots of satirical verses against the viceregal regime were stuck onto the statue like: *Vuie pensate a fa’ le tasse, / nuie pensammo a fa fracasse. / Ve magnasteve i fecatielli, / lo Rre se magna i casatielli*. (You tax us/we protest/we eat tripe/the King eats brioche)

The story goes that when the viceroy Antonio of Aragon put the famous “Quattro del Molo” fountain on a ship bound for Spain, the Giant had the following to say about the Spanish nobility’s hoarding instincts: *Ah! Gigante mariuolo, t’hai pigliato li Quatto de lo muolo! A mme? Io non songo stato: lo Vicerré se l’ha arrobato*. (You’re a thief, Giant! You stole the Quattro del Molo fountain! Me? It wasn’t me. The Viceroy stole it.)

In 1807, before he ceded the throne to Gioacchino Murat, **Giuseppe Bonaparte** had had enough of being the continual butt of the Giant’s satire and propaganda. However, instead of offering a reward for the authors’ capture, he decided to take it out on poor Giove of Cumae instead, who was not only a witness and victim but a spokesperson for the people too. Bonaparte had the statue taken away from the piazza. It is said that, on the morning of the statue’s removal, the statue’s last will and testimony appeared: *Lascio la testa al Consiglio di Stato, le braccia ai Ministri, lo stomaco ai Ciambellani, le gambe ai Generali e tutto il resto a re Giuseppe*. (I leave my head to the Government, my arms to the Ministries, my stomach to the Chamberlains, my legs to the generals, and the rest to King Giuseppe). Everyone understood exactly which “bits” would be given to the king as a token of gratitude...

The statue thus became known as a “**gatekeeper**”, and his role as Giove so temporary that people forgot all about it