

# Incident in Messina: Letters of Ferdinand the Catholic concerning Portuguese *conversos* caught on their way to Constantinople \*

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On the 5th of December 1506 Ferdinand the Catholic received a letter written by Pedro Belforado, archbishop of Messina and Inquisitor General of Sicily, informing him of the capture of a ship carrying a large number of Portuguese *conversos* who were on their way to Constantinople. The archbishop complained that the jurats of the city of Messina had forbidden the unloading of the ship, thus preventing him from exercising his duties as inquisitor.

Ferdinand was in the kingdom of Naples at the time and therefore able to personally intervene in the affair. His presence in the Italian South was due to the complex political situation that followed Queen Isabella's death (1504), when excluded from the government of Castile by his son in law Philip I, husband of Joanna *the Mad*, Ferdinand

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\* The present article originated in a paper presented at a conference held at Bar Ilan University in June 2001: «The Jews of the Ottoman Empire: Culture and Society», organized by the Dahan Center for Society, Culture and Education in the Spanish Jewry Heritage and the Institute for Research into Oriental Jewry. The subject of my paper was the passage of *conversos* from the Iberian peninsula to the Ottoman Empire by way of Sicily. A few months later, while working on inquisitorial material in Madrid, I came upon the correspondence of Ferdinand the Catholic concerning the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily. A surprising number of letters dealt with a single subject: the arrival in Messina of a group of fugitive Portuguese *conversos* caught on their way to the Ottoman Empire. Three of these letters are published as an Appendix to this article.

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turned his attention to his newly acquired territories in southern Italy. In September 1506, shortly before Philip's death, Ferdinand sailed from Barcelona to Italy together with his new wife, Germaine de Foix. The king then spent almost a year in the kingdom of Naples.<sup>1</sup>

The correspondence regarding the affair of the Portuguese *conversos* has been preserved in the inquisitorial registers that are now kept in the Archivo Histórico Nacional in Madrid. Interestingly, few scholars have mentioned the existence of letters dating to the time of Ferdinand the Catholic that concern the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily and South Italy. These letters offer an insight into Ferdinand's personal view of the role that the Spanish Inquisition was to fulfil in both places.<sup>2</sup>

Ferdinand made his first attempt to establish the Spanish Inquisition in the kingdom of Sicily in 1487, when he appointed the Dominican friar Antonio de La Peña of Segovia as Inquisitor of Sicily.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> King Ferdinand arrived in Naples on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1506: J. ZURITA, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando El Católico de las empresas y ligas de Italia*, ed. A. CANELLAS LÓPEZ (Zaragoza 1991) vol. IV, book VII, XX; F. GUICCIARDINI, *Storia d'Italia*, ed. E. MAZZALI (Milano 1988) vol. II, pp. 710-713. On the situation in Naples following the death of King Ferrante see: D. ABULAFIA, *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms 1200-1500. The Struggle for Dominion* (London and New York 1997) pp. 246-258. For the political reasons for King Ferdinand's move see: J. N. HILLGARTH, *The Spanish Kingdoms 1250-1516* (Oxford 1978) vol. II, pp. 557-558.

<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand's correspondence: AHN Inquisición, Libro 243, cc 412v-421r. The letters were mentioned by Pietro Burgarella, a Sicilian scholar, who devoted an extensive article to the management of inquisitorial finances during the time of the first receiver of confiscations, Diego de Obregon, between 1500 and 1516: P. BURGARELLA, «Diego de Obregon e i primi anni del Sant'Uffizio in Sicilia», *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, serie III, 20 (1972) pp. 257-327 (mention of the letters: p. 287, note 59). However, they were overlooked by the two most recent studies concerning the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily: W. MONTER, *Frontiers of Heresy. The Inquisition from the Basques Lands to Sicily* (Cambridge 1990) and F. RENDA, *L'Inquisizione in Sicilia, I fatti. Le persone* (Palermo 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Major studies concerning the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily: V. LA MANTIA, «Origine e vicende dell'Inquisizione in Sicilia», *Rivista Storica Italiana* 3 (1886) pp. 481-598 (reprinted as a book: Palermo 1977); H. C. LEA, *The Inquisition in the Spanish Dependencies* (New York 1908); BURGARELLA, «Obregon», pp. 257-327; RENDA, *L'Inquisizione*; N. ZELDES, «Auto de Fe in Palermo, 1511. The First Executions of Judaizers in Sicily», *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 219 (2002) pp. 193-226. Antonio de la Peña, the first Spanish inquisitor in Sicily, had already proved himself a fervent and fanatical preacher against Jews and *conversos* in his hometown of Segovia: Y. BAER, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, revised, Philadelphia 1992) vol. II, pp. 340-341.

appointment of Antonio de La Peña signaled the triumph of royal policies over papal interests and local traditions, for in Sicily there already existed a functioning Inquisition headed either by local bishops or by inquisitors holding their appointment from the Apostolic See. Previous attempts to introduce the new inquisition had failed, not least because of Pope Sixtus IV's position that the medieval institution was sufficient in order to combat heresy in Sicily.<sup>4</sup> However, the political pressure exerted by the Catholic monarchs forced the next pope, Innocent VIII, to agree to the extension of the Spanish Inquisition to Sicily. In 1486 the pope issued an apostolic bull nominating Tomás de Torquemada Inquisitor General in all Spanish dominions, including the kingdom of Sicily, and in October 1487 King Ferdinand confirmed Torquemada's appointment of Antonio de La Peña.<sup>5</sup>

Despite this early success, the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily was a long drawn affair and it was not until 1500 that a permanent tribunal began its work in Palermo. In June that year the king appointed two new inquisitors: Reginaldo Montoro, bishop of Cefalù and the jurist Giovanni Sgalambro of Lentini, a Dominican friar. Their appointment was followed by an official edict published on the 8th of November 1500 announcing the effective establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in the kingdom of Sicily.<sup>6</sup>

Montoro and Sgalambro were either too moderate or they lacked in efficiency, because two years after their appointment only a small number of Sicilian converts had been investigated and even those were only given relatively light sentences. At this stage no heretics had been burned in Sicily.<sup>7</sup> In 1502 Ferdinand decided to appoint a new inquisitor instead of Giovanni Sgalambro and he chose Pedro Belforado,

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Sixtus's letter stating his refusal to appoint Spanish inquisitors in Sicily: S. SIMONSOHN, *The Apostolic See and the Jews* (Toronto 1991) 10 vols, pp. 1290-1292, Doc. No. 1023.

<sup>5</sup> On the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily see: RENDA, *L'Inquisizione*, pp. 27-30. H. C. LEA, *A History of the Inquisition in Spain* (New York 1906-1908) vol. I, pp. 260ff; Appointment of Antonio de la Peña by Torquemada: SIMONSOHN, *The Apostolic See*, pp. 1344-1345, Doc. No. 1063; A. FRANCHINA, *Breve rapporto dell Tribunale della SS. Inquisizione di Sicilia* (Palermo 1744) pp. 108-116.

<sup>6</sup> The edict was published by LA MANTIA, *Origine*, pp. 28-29; RENDA, *L'Inquisizione*, p. 34 (translated into Italian).

<sup>7</sup> The first executions were performed in June 1511: RENDA, *L'Inquisizione*, pp. 298ff.

the archbishop of Messina. The archbishop immediately established a second tribunal in that city. The number of arrests increased and sentences became considerably harsher.<sup>8</sup>

Up to 1506 the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily concerned itself with either local converts or with foreigners who were immigrants to Sicily. Most of the latter came from other territories of the Catholic monarchs: Aragon, Castile, Catalonia, Valencia.<sup>9</sup> The capture of the Portuguese ship forced the Inquisition of Sicily to decide on the fate of *conversos* who had no intention of settling in the island and were not even subjects of the Catholic king. The problem was complicated by the fact that it was not an isolated incident, as Ferdinand's letters reveal that the ship held in Messina's harbour was one of several vessels that passed through the straits on their way to the Ottoman Empire. It therefore became necessary to formulate a general policy in respect to suspect foreigners who stopped at Messina or sailed through the straits.

After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the subsequent Turkish advances in the Balkans towards the Adriatic Sea and finally the conquest of Albania, turned Sicily and South Italy into frontier regions. Any ship sailing from the Iberian Peninsula to the Ottoman Empire had to pass through the straits of Messina or else sail along the North African shores, which were teeming with pirates. Jewish exiles and *conversos* who wished to reach the Ottoman Empire thus had no alternative but to sail close to Sicily. King Ferdinand was very much aware of this when he wrote to Belforado:

Many ships have passed and still do pass through these seas loaded with New Christians who go to Constantinople in order to become Jews.

These facts were also mentioned in the letter Ferdinand wrote to the jurats of Messina ordering them to cooperate with the Inquisition:

<sup>8</sup> Appointment of Belforado: RENDA, *L'Inquisizione*, pp. 252-253.

<sup>9</sup> Sicilian inquisitorial registers of this period mention persons who are identified as «hispanus», «de Yspania», «de Toledo», etc. The most prominent immigrant family was that of Aloysio Sanchez, Ferdinand's treasurer in Sicily, who left Saragossa to settle in Sicily: BURGARELLA, «Obregon», pp. 282-286; MONTER, *Frontiers of Heresy*, p. 16. See also my article: N. ZELDES, «Donna Eulalia Tamarit Sanchez: The First Victim of the Inquisition in Sicily – The Migration of a Distinguished Converso Family from Spain to Sicily» [in Hebrew], *Peamim* 69 (1996) pp. 43-55.

... and thus we charge and order you to favour most attentively the said archbishop and the other officials in all matters concerning the operations of the said holy office of the Inquisition, because it is said that ships carrying New Christians and other suspicious persons in matters of faith, and the goods and personal effects of heretics, continually pass through this port, this side of the Faro (i.e. Messina), and we order you to do your utmost to catch and deliver them to the inquisitors so that they can perform justice.<sup>10</sup>

These passing ships reflect the constant movement of Iberian Jews and *conversos* in the Mediterranean basin that followed the 1492 expulsion and continued for over a hundred years. Because of its geographic position, Sicily was a necessary stopover on the way to the Levant.<sup>11</sup>

As for the immediate problem presented by the captured Portuguese ship, the king assured the inquisitor Belforado that he had already instructed the city government to obey the Inquisition. One thorny problem remained: the city refused to allow the passengers to

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<sup>10</sup> Letter to the archbishop: «por esos mares han passado y passandos muchos navyos cargados con xpianos nuevos que se iban a tornar judios en Constantinopla», AHN Inquisición libro 243 c 419v. Letter to the jurats of Messina: «y assi vos lo encargamos y mandamos con mucha atencion favorezcais al dicho arçobispo y otros oficiales en todas las cosas tocantes al exercicio y buena expedicion del dicho santo officio de la inquisicion y por se dize que por esse puerto passo del far (=Messina) continuamente passan naos con xpianos nuevos y personas sospechosas de la fe, bienes y ropas de hereges, vos mandamos que con mucha diligencia entendays en poner tal recaudo que pueden ser presos y entregados a los inquisidores para que fagan justicia», AHN Inquisición libro 243 c 413v, No. III in the Appendix.

<sup>11</sup> Sailing from the Iberian Peninsula to the Levant by way of Sicily: F. BRAUDEL, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, Translated from French by Siân Reynolds (New-York, 1975) vol. I, pp. 133-134. For Messina's role as a trade emporium en route to the Levant see: M. ALIBRANDI, «Messinesi in Levante nel Medioevo», *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, serie III, 21/22 (1971/2) pp. 97-110; D. ABULAFIA, «The Merchants of Messina: Levant Trade and Domestic Economy», *Papers of the British School at Rome* 54 (1986) pp. 196-212; Idem., «The Merchants of Messina: Levant Trade and Domestic Economy», *Commerce and Conquest in the Mediterranean 1100-1500* (Aldershot 1994). However, few studies mention the passage of Iberian Jews and *conversos* through Sicily on their way to the lands of the Ottoman Empire or the Holy Land. The best example for using this route is a document published long ago by Y. BAER concerning a group of *conversos* who sailed in 1464 from Valencia to Valona (Albania) by way of Sicily: *Die Juden im Christlichen Spanien, Urkunden und Regesten* (Berlin 1936) vol. II, p. 440.

disembark or to unload the ship claiming that it came from a plague ridden place.

Mention of the plague and the date of the fugitives' arrival in Sicily help connect this affair with the history of the New Christians of Portugal at this period. After the publication of the expulsion edicts of March 1492,<sup>12</sup> thousands of Castilian Jews headed for the Portuguese border. Already in 1492 Joao II of Portugal began to exert pressure on the newcomers to convert, but after his death in October 1496 the new king, Manuel I, seemed at first to adopt a more conciliatory policy towards the Jews. This policy changed when Manuel married Isabella, the eldest daughter of the Catholic kings, and the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal was made a precondition to the marriage. In December 1496 Manuel announced the expulsion of the Jews from Portugal allowing them ten months to choose between exile and conversion, but in the spring of 1497 he allowed them no alternative but to convert to Christianity. Most scholars agree that the main reason for the forced conversion was Manuel's conviction that the Jews were too important for Portuguese economy to let them go, but the only way to rid Portugal of the Jews, while at the same time retain their economic expertise, was to convert them all. Though Manuel was well-aware that forced conversion could not immediately turn the former Jews into orthodox Christians, he probably hoped that in the course of a generation or two a genuine assimilation and integration could be achieved. In the meantime he issued a protective edict in May 1497 promising, among other things, that no inquiry would be made into their beliefs for the next twenty years. While the king was ready to overlook questions of faith, he would not tolerate the emigration of Portugal's New Christians, for that would have subverted the very purpose of the forced conversion. The royal decrees published on April 20 and 22, 1499 forbade any New Christian to leave the country. This policy did not have the desired effect. Instead of being gradually

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<sup>12</sup> There were in fact two versions of the edict, one for Castile and the other for the Aragonese territories. The Aragonese version was later published in Latin in Sicily on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June: Bartolomeo and Giuseppe LAGUMINA, *Codice diplomatico dei Giudei di Sicilia* (Palermo 1884-1890, reprint Palermo 1992) vol. III, pp. 19-26. The archives of Palermo also have a version of the edict written in Castilian. Another Sicilian copy, with slight variations, was sent to the lands of the Queen's treasury (*camera reginale*): *Fonti per la storia dell'espulsione degli ebrei dalla Sicilia*, ed. R. GIUFFRIDA, A. SPARTI and S. DI MATTEO (Palermo 1992) pp. 11-18, 29-35.

integrated, the converts' position in Portuguese society remained as Jewish as before and the anti-Jewish bias was transferred to the baptized Jews. A series of violent outbreaks culminated in the Lisbon massacre of April 1506 in the course of which over a thousand converts were killed. It stands to reason that many of them wished to leave Portugal after the massacre. Manuel, however, rescinded the order forbidding emigration only on the 1st of March 1507.<sup>13</sup>

Ferdinand's first letter was written on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1506. The fugitives who reached Sicily were probably captured shortly before that date, making it reasonable to suppose that they had left Portugal in the summer of 1506, sometime after the Lisbon massacre. Although there are testimonies for the successful flight of New Christians from Portugal even before March 1507, they only mention the escape of certain individuals or at most a few families, whereas

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<sup>13</sup> On the passage of Jews from Castile to Portugal: L. SUÁREZ-FERNÁNDEZ, *Documentos acerca de la Expulsión de los Judíos* (Valladolid 1964); H. BEINART, *The expulsion of Jews from Spain* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem 1995). The Lisbon massacre: Shlomo IBN VERGA, *Shebet Yehuda*, ed. SHOHAT (Jerusalem 1947) Ch. 60, pp. 125-126; A. HERCULANO, *Da origem e estabelecimento da Inquisição em Portugal*, I (Lisbonne 1854). Here the reference is to the English edition: A. HERCULANO, *A History of the Origin and Establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal* (New York 1972) pp. 263-267; Y. H. YERUSHALMI, *The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the royal image in the «Shebet Yehudah»* (Cincinnati 1976). The same paper appeared in French translation: Y. H. YERUSHALMI, «Le massacre de Lisbonne en 1506 et l'image du roi dans le 'Shebet Yehuda'», *Sefardica. Essais sur l'histoire des Juifs, des marranes & des nouveaux chrétiens d'origine hispano-portugaise* (Paris 1998) pp. 35-173. For a different view of the history of the New Christians in Portugal see: A. J. SARAIVA, *Inquisição e cristãos novos* (Lisboa 1969). According to Saraiva, in the absence of a practicing Jewish community, most converts became sincere Christians (*ibid.*, pp. 38ff). A more recent discussion which brings the fate of the Jews of Portugal within the framework of contemporary Iberian politics is that of B. J. GAMPEL, «The Decline of Portuguese and Navarese Jewries», in *Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion*, eds. Y. T. ASSIS and Y. KAPLAN (Jerusalem 1999) pp. 65-92. As for the number of victims of the Lisbon massacre, the estimates in the sources vary considerably. Andrés BERNÁLDEZ, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos D. Ferdinand y Doña Isabel*, Sociedad de Bibliófilos Andaluces, Primera Serie (Seville 1870) vol. II, p. 283, suggested that there were as many as 3,000 dead whereas a contemporary Jewish chronicle, (see *infra*, note 15) gives a considerably smaller number: «more than 1,400». Marino Sanuto, citing a letter sent by the Venetian ambassador in Spain, gives the number of the victims as being between 2,800 and 3,000: Marino SANUTO, *I Diarii*, ed. R. FULIN (Venezia 1884) vol. VI, coll. 383-4 (thus agreeing with Bernáldez).

Ferdinand's letters reveal that in a short time more than 300 fugitives were captured in Messina:

It is our understanding that on the coming of certain ships from Portugal carrying New Christians and other suspect persons in matters of faith, the Reverend Archbishop of this city (Messina) acting as inquisitor of this realm and wishing to perform his duties, he zealously pursued those ships that had brought more than three hundred souls, and now you forbid the unloading of this ship claiming that it comes from a plague ridden place.<sup>14</sup>

That such a large number of fugitives were able to leave the country illegally is in itself surprising. In any case, this throws a different light on the flight of *conversos* from Portugal at the time, indicating that a genuine migratory movement to the Ottoman Empire may have occurred earlier than anyone has yet suggested.<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the incident in Messina, it would appear that the jurats' worries regarding the spread of the plague were real enough. Plague had broken out in Lisbon in October 1505 and it would not run its course until April 1507. A Portuguese ship coming from that city might have spread it to every port of call.<sup>16</sup> The king could hardly order the city to disregard the danger of infection. Moreover, according to the established custom in the kingdom of Sicily, the jurats of Messina were perfectly entitled to forbid all contact with the ship if they suspected it of carrying the plague. But this right of refusal was a constant bone of contention between the local government and the royal authorities since the latter preferred to encourage trade at any cost, whereas the jurats usually tried to protect their city from the danger of disease. It was not an idle fear. Four years before the

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<sup>14</sup> «entendiendo havemos que viniendo de Portugal ciertas naos cargadas de xpianos nuevos y otras personas sospechosas de la fe, el reverendo arçobispo de essa ciudad como inquisidor en esse reyno puso mucha diligencia en que las dichas naos con trezientas animas o mas, y que queriendo el dicho arçobispo fazer su officio, vosotros prohibis la pratica a la dicha nao diziendo que viene de lugar de pestilencia», AHN Inquisición libro 243 c 413v, No. III in the Appendix.

<sup>15</sup> Escape from Portugal: a contemporary chronicle reveals that there was a number of converted Jews who secretly escaped from Portugal and arrived in the Ottoman empire even before the Lisbon massacre: A. MARX, «The expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Two new accounts», in *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore* (New York 1944) p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> Damião DE GÓIS, *Crónica de felicissimo rei D. Manuel* (Coimbra 1959) I, p. 229.

coming of the Portuguese ship, Messina had in fact suffered an outbreak of the plague.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the seemingly justified decision of the city government, Archbishop Pedro Belforado had good reasons to suspect that fear of the plague was merely a pretext and that the city was less than enthusiastic to obey the Holy Office. It was not the only time that the Spanish Inquisition encountered the opposition of the Sicilian urban elites. When an official of the Inquisition, the *alguacil* Martino Vallejo came to Catania in 1502, the judges and jurats of that city refused to let him arrest suspect converts, claiming the privileges and immunities granted to cities of the royal demesne. Then the same Pedro Belforado, shortly after his appointment as inquisitor of Sicily, responded with a sentence of excommunication.<sup>18</sup> Syracuse was also reluctant to cooperate with the Inquisition. In February 1501 the inquisitors sent envoys to Luis Margarit, the governor of Syracuse and the districts of Queen's Treasury (*camera reginale*), demanding that he surrender certain suspects. His refusal to comply caused the king to write him a letter on the 13th of August 1504 ordering him in no uncertain terms to obey the Inquisition: «for our officials have nought to do but what we ourselves do, which is to obey the Holy Office».<sup>19</sup> Despite the strong admonishments, both cities apparently continued to obstruct inquisitorial justice for many years to come and it is more than likely that their independent stand postponed the prosecution of the local converts to the 1530's when the Inquisition strengthened its hold on

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<sup>17</sup> On measures taken to prevent the spread of the plague in Sicily: H. BRESC, *Un monde méditerranéen; Économie et société en Sicile (1300-1450)* (Palermo 1986) vol. II, pp. 747-748. Outbreak of the plague in Messina in 1501: ZURITA, *Historia*, vol. II, book IV, XXX, p. 266. One is tempted to point out that in 1347 a Genoese ship coming from Caffa (in the Crimea) brought the Black Death to Messina. From Sicily the plague spread to all of Europe.

<sup>18</sup> The jurats of Catania: LA MANTIA, *Origine*, pp. 32-33, note 18; BURGARELLA, «Obregon», p. 277, note 32.

<sup>19</sup> LEA, *The Spanish Dependencies*, p. 8. Part of the Val di Noto, in the south eastern part of Sicily, formed a separate administrative unit which was established in the early fourteenth century as the queen's apanage (literally – the queen's treasury, *Camera Reginale*). The territory of the *Camera Reginale* included the cities of Syracuse, Lentini, Vizzini, Francavilla and Mineo. It had near-independent status and was governed by the queen's officials: E. DE BENEDETTIS, *Della camera delle regine siciliane* (Siracusa 1890). On the governor Luis Margarit see: S. PRIVITERA, *Storia di Siracusa antica e moderna* (Napoli 1878-1879) vol. II, pp. 134ff.

the island.<sup>20</sup> The Spanish Inquisition did not find much support in Palermo either. The Parliament that convened in Palermo in 1514 demanded its abolition and protested its treatment of the Sicilian *neofiti*.<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of March 1516, shortly after King Ferdinand's death, a series of riots broke out in Palermo. First, the crowds, incited by the Lenten sermon of Girolamo da Verona of the order of the Augustine Hermits, fell upon the *conversos* and tore their *sanbenitos* (penitent garments painted with a diagonal cross) under the strange pretext that former Jews who had crucified Christ should not be wearing the cross. Apparently the converts themselves suffered no real harm at the hands of the rioters who immediately proceeded to attack the inquisitorial palace. A party of Sicilian nobles, headed by Pietro Cardona count of Golisano, declared that Viceroy Hugo Moncada should leave the island immediately since custom dictated that a viceroy's term ended with the death of the sovereign. The rebels asked for the abolition of the Inquisition and a return to the status of an independent kingdom that Sicily enjoyed after the Vespers. During the revolt the Palermitan crowd freed the prisoners held in the inquisitorial prisons.<sup>22</sup>

The city of Messina, on the other hand, did not offer resistance to royal power or to the new Inquisition. In 1504 the Spanish Inquisition staged a spectacular and costly procession in Messina in memory of

<sup>20</sup> F. RENDA, *La fine del Giudaismo Siciliano* (Palermo 1993) «Appendix». Only a small number of converts were prosecuted in Catania and Syracuse and most of the names listed under these cities belong to the 1530's and later.

<sup>21</sup> F. TESTA, *Capitula regni Siciliae quae ad hodiernum diem lata sunt* (Panormi 1741) vol. I, p. 582.

<sup>22</sup> The incident is described by the sixteenth century Sicilian historian Tommaso Fazello: T. FAZELLO, *De rebus siculis, decades duae*, eds. Johannes Matheus MAYDA et Franciscus CARRARA (Palermo 1560) p. 598. Italian translation: *Storia di Sicilia*, Traduzione e note di A. DE ROSALIA e G. MUSSO (Palermo 1990) pp. 710-711; RENDA, *La fine*, p. 153. See also the commentary of C. TRASELLI, *Da Ferdinando il Cattolico a Carlo V. L'esperienza siciliana, 1475-1525* (Palermo 1982) vol. I, pp. 170-171; A. BAVIERA-ALBANESE, «Sulla rivolta del 1516 in Sicilia», *Atti della accademia di scienze, lettere e arti di Palermo*, Serie IV, 35 (1975-76) pp. 425-480; Idem, «La Sicilia tra regime pattizio e assolutismo monarchico agli inizi del secolo XVI», *Studi Senesi nel circolo giuridico della R. Università*, 92, Serie III, 29 (1980) pp. 189-310. The number of prisoners liberated during the revolt of 1516 is quite high (over 200): LA MANTIA, *Origine*, pp. 167ff where are listed the names of the converts who escaped during the riots.

Queen Isabella and in June 1505 it celebrated an Auto de Fe in that city in the course of which several converts suffered public penance.<sup>23</sup> The citizens of Messina did not protest on either occasion. However, this was not to say that the Messinese were less jealous of their municipal privileges than other cities of the royal demesne, quite the opposite.

Ever since the Norman conquest of Sicily, Messina had been a thriving commercial city whose citizens eagerly sought concessions and royal privileges (even forged ones).<sup>24</sup> But Messina had always been different from other Sicilian cities. It had the largest Christian population even at the time when Sicily was under Muslim rule and it experienced heavy immigration of Latins from Apulia, Calabria, Lombardia and Liguria from the Norman period onwards.<sup>25</sup> Messina was never the seat of royal power, but in the later Middle Ages it had surpassed Palermo in its economic importance because it was the gateway to commerce with southern Italy on one hand, and with the Levant on the other. Already at the end of the twelfth century the Muslim traveller Ibn Jubayr noticed the lively trade of Messina and was impressed by the busy port of that city.<sup>26</sup> Closer to the period under discussion, Rabbi Ovadia de Bertinoro, an Italian Jew who visited Sicily in 1488, described Messina as a trading center that attracted merchants and ships from all over the world because of the city's strategic position and its deep harbor:

This town is a place of trade for all nations; ships come here from all parts; for Messina lies in the middle of the Pharos, so that ships from the east and the west pass it by and its harbour is the only one of its

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<sup>23</sup> BURGARELLA, «Obregon», p. 279.

<sup>24</sup> C. TRASELLI, *I privilegi di Messina e di Trapani, 1160-1355* (Palermo 1949); Idem, *Da Ferdinando*, pp. 322-330; ABULAFIA, «The Merchants of Messina», pp. 196-198; For the fourteenth century see: C. W. BACKMAN, *The Decline and Fall of Medieval Sicily. Politics, Religion, and Economy in the Reign of Frederick III, 1296-1337* (Cambridge 1995) pp. 92-95.

<sup>25</sup> On the encouragement of immigration by the Normans see: D. ABULAFIA, «The Crown and the Economy under Roger II and his Successors», *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37 (1983) p. 5; I. PERI, *Uomini, città e campagne in Sicilia dall'XI al XIII secolo* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Bari 1990) pp. 145-151.

<sup>26</sup> *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, ed. and transl. R. J. BROADHURST (London 1952) pp. 338-339; p. 348.

kind in the world; the largest vessels may come here close to the shore.<sup>27</sup>

The city's economic success depended mainly on its port and the services it provided to foreign shipping and less on local production. By the late fifteenth century Messina exported silk and flax, but its abilities to develop other local industries were restricted by the lack of available land close to the city.<sup>28</sup> Because of its isolation from the hinterland, Messina suffered from constant lack of supplies that occasionally caused famine in the city. Hence its dependence upon royal favor.

From the Norman conquest onwards, Messina obtained toll exemptions, trade privileges and other concessions, which put it in an advantageous position over the other Sicilian cities. In the fifteenth century Messina was an almost sovereign city: it took a separate oath of fealty to the king thus manifesting its special status while the *stratigoto*, Messina's highest official, was given jurisdiction over the surrounding districts, a rare privilege in Sicily. However, Messina remained discontent. Because the city wished to supplant Palermo as capital of the kingdom, it often adopted its own political course, sometimes at odds with the rest of the island. Messina had been more loyal to royal power than other Sicilian cities: in the war of the Vespers Messina joined the rebels only when the outcome was inevitable, and at the time of the Catalan-Aragonese conquest of 1392 it quickly sided with the new rulers.<sup>29</sup> When Palermo and Catania rose

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<sup>27</sup> M. HARTOM and A. DAVID, «Ovadia di Bertinoro's Letters», in *Jews in Italy. Studies dedicated to U. Cassuto* [in Hebrew], ed. H. BEINART (Jerusalem 1985) p. 58. English translation: *Jewish travellers. A Treasury of Travelogues from 9 Centuries*, ed. E. N. ADLER (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York 1966) p. 214. A modern scholar, Stephan Epstein, is in complete agreement with the observations of the fifteenth century Jewish traveller: «that Messina's mercantile community, the largest and most powerful of its kind in medieval Sicily, arose as a result of the city's unusually large number of privileges and monopolies over local resources which were in turn a response to Messina's poor rural hinterland and its strategic position on the Straits», S. R. EPSTEIN, *An Island for Itself. Economic Development and Social Change in Late Medieval Sicily* (Cambridge 1992) p. 245 (see the author's discussion in pp. 241-267).

<sup>28</sup> EPSTEIN, *An Island for Itself*, pp. 199-210.

<sup>29</sup> The Vespers: S. RUNCIMAN, *The Sicilian Vespers. A History of the Mediterranean world in the thirteenth century* (Cambridge 1958) pp. 216ff. During the fourteenth century and especially at the time of the Catalan conquest: EPSTEIN, *An Island for Itself*, pp. 124-128.

in revolt against the Spanish rule after Ferdinand's death (1516), Messina again refused to join the rebels and welcomed the overthrown viceroy, Hugo Moncada. According to both a contemporary author, Federico Del Carretto, and the eighteenth century Sicilian scholar, Giovanni Evangelista Di Blasi, the Messinese welcomed the viceroy out of jealousy of Palermo.<sup>30</sup> Present-day scholarship appears to agree with this view, namely that the traditional rivalry between the two principal Sicilian cities prevented a successful revolt against royal power.<sup>31</sup> For a consummate politician such as Ferdinand the Catholic it was therefore important not to alienate Messina.

Faced with the city's refusal to cooperate with the inquisitor, Ferdinand was careful not to antagonize its governing body. To the archbishop the king explained the city's misgivings:

Do not be astonished if they now raise obstacles and forbid the unloading of the ship for fear of the pestilence, because you have already seen what a dangerous thing it is to cause the infection of a city, and especially one that is situated on an island... inasmuch as it touches your ministry, take care always to do what needs to be done without causing damage to the public good.<sup>32</sup>

In his letter to the jurats and *stratigoto* of Messina, written on the same date as the letter to the archbishop, Ferdinand attempted to

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<sup>30</sup> In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: TRASELLI, *Da Ferdinando*, pp. 331-333; BAVIERA-ALBANESE, «Sulla rivolta del 1516 in Sicilia», pp. 425-480; Idem, «La Sicilia tra regime pattizio e assolutismo monarchico», pp. 189-310. Messina's welcome of Viceroy Moncada: F. DEL CARRETTO, *De Expulsione Hugonis de Moncada*, in *Opuscoli di Autori Siciliani* (Palermo 1758) vol. I, pp. 13-15. G. E. DI BLASI, *Storia cronologica de' Vicerè, Luogotenenti e Presidenti del Regno di Sicilia* (Palermo 1974, reprint with introduction by I. PERI) pp. 17-21.

<sup>31</sup> That the conflict and rivalry between the two cities played an important role in the political and social structure of late medieval Sicily is a hypothesis advanced by S. EPSTEIN, «Conflitti redistributivi, fisco e strutture sociali (1392-1516)», in *Élites e potere in Sicilia*, eds. F. BENIGNO and C. TORRISI (Cantazaro 1995) pp. 31-45.

<sup>32</sup> «No vos maravilleys si en alguna manera vos pongan agora impedimento en no dar la pratica a la dicha nao por el recelo de la pestilencia porque ya vedes quan peligrosa cosa es en toda parte infectionarse una ciudad quanto mas essa que sta en isla. Con todo que nos screvimos agora a los dichos jurados y stratico y tambien scrivimos a los que stan en el monasterio del Salvador lo que nos parece sobre ello vos tambien por lo que toca al cargo de vuestro pastoral officio myrat que lo que se proveyere sea siempre sin danno de la re publica.», AHN Inquisición libro 243 c 413v, No. I in the Appendix.

convince and reassure them that no harm would come to the city if they allowed the inquisitor to interrogate the captive *conversos*. The king's language is conciliatory:

You forbid the unloading of the ship because you say that it comes from a plague-infested country and for that reason you hinder the archbishop in the performance of his duties, as if your fear were justified. But, considering the time that has passed since that ship had left Portugal, since all the passengers are still healthy, for God's service and ours and for the honor of our holy Catholic faith, it is fitting that heretics and evil-doers should be punished and that the Holy Inquisition should freely perform its office, which cannot be done if you continue to prohibit the disembarkation of the ship with such rigor...<sup>33</sup>

Messina, however, allowed itself to disregard official policy when it was convenient for it to do so. Among other things, Ferdinand mentioned in his letter that the *stratigoto* gave a safe-conduct to a certain Jewish physician who was living in Reggio Calabria allowing him to come to Messina in order to cure a certain gentleman of that city of an unpleasant complaint, a furuncle or a pustule (*postema*).<sup>34</sup> Now, Messina was allowed since 1397 to give safe-conduct to any foreign merchant who came to Sicily,<sup>35</sup> but granting it to a Jew after the 1492 expulsion ran contrary to the order forbidding the entrance to all Jews under pain of death.<sup>36</sup> There is, however, a possibility that

<sup>33</sup> «vosotros prohibis la pratica a la dicha nao diciendo que viene de lugar de pestilencia en manera que el dicho arcobispo no puede fazer su officio como seria razon y ahunque vosotros tengays alguna iusta causa de temer. Pero considerado el tiempo que ha questa nave partio de Portugal, y que todos los que en ella vienen estar sanos de sus personas, y que cumple al servicio de Dios y nuestro y a la honra de nuestra santa fe catholica que los hereticos y malos sean castigados y el officio de la santa inquisicio se faga con toda libertat lo que no se podria fazer si vosotros tan rigidamente prohibiessedes la pratica de la dicha nao», AHN Inquisición libro 243 c 413v, No. III in the Appendix.

<sup>34</sup> «Quanto a lo que dezis quel stratico guio ciertos judios aqua, se nos fizo relacion por parte dessa ciudat como el stratico havia guiado y confesso difficultat hun judio cirurgiano que vive en Rijoles para que curasse de una postema ahun gentilhombre dessa ciudat al qual dizque fizo muy grandissima cura», AHN Inquisición Libro 243 c 413, No. I in the Appendix.

<sup>35</sup> *Capitoli e privilegi di Messina, Memorie e documenti di storia siciliana*, ed. C. GIARDINA, ser. 2,1 (Palermo 1937) No. 52 (cited in EPSTEIN, *An Island for Itself*, p. 250, note 38).

<sup>36</sup> The edict of expulsion was published in Sicily on the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 1492 and the last Jews left the island in January 1493: B. and G. LAGUMINA, *Codice diplomatico dei Giudei di Sicilia* (Palermo 1884-1890, reprint Palermo 1992) vol. III, pp. 19-26, 276.

the safe-conduct was connected with the coming to Messina of either Don Isaac Abravanel in 1494 or his nephew Joseph Abravanel in 1501.<sup>37</sup> In any case the king preferred to let the city off without punishment as long as it did not repeat the offense.

A large number of *conversos* caught on the Portuguese ships were being held in the Basilian monastery of San Salvatore, one of the Greek monasteries that had survived in Sicily since the Norman period. The religious community of San Salvatore continued living in the ancient monastery until the time of Emperor Charles V who confiscated the building in order to erect a fortress on its strategic site in the harbour of Messina.<sup>38</sup>

The monastery of San Salvatore was not eager to cooperate with the Inquisition claiming that the ship came from a plague-infested country and for that reason refused to let the inquisitor interrogate the captives. Ferdinand's letter, addressed to the «procurator»<sup>39</sup> and the religious community of San Salvatore used stronger terms than the one he wrote to the city government:

And when such a thing takes place, it is detrimental to the service of God and the Holy Office. For that reason we expressly order you that from now on you shall take care not to hinder the said archbishop in his duties and you shall obey better than you have done before,

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<sup>37</sup> Isaac Abravanel stayed several months in Messina in 1494 after coming to Sicily with King Alfonso of Naples. Joseph Abravanel, the nephew of Don Isaac, joined the Gran Capitán, Gonzalo Fernández de Aguilar da Córdoba, in Messina in 1501: B. NETANYAHU, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher* (Ithaca and London 1998, revised edition) pp. 70-71, 80. On the coming of Joseph Abravanel to Messina: SANUTO, *I diarii*, vol. III, p. 1439.

<sup>38</sup> Although largely in decline by the fourteenth century, Greek monachism in Sicily survived in certain areas, mainly in the Val Demone, in the North Eastern part of Sicily and especially in the city of Messina. San Salvatore figures among the Greek monasteries that were taxed in 1457: BRESCH, *Un monde*, pp. 587-591. For a brief description of the history of the monastery of San Salvatore see: *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents: A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' «Typika» and Testaments*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies 35, eds. J. THOMAS and A. Constantinides HERO (Washington D.C. 2000) vol. II, pp. 638-639.

<sup>39</sup> In certain religious communities «procurator» was the title given to the person in charge of the economy and supplies: C. DU CANGE, *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis* (Graz 1954); and also the *Diccionari Català – Valencià – Balear*, ed. A. M. ALCOVER (Palma de Mallorca 1957).

otherwise you would incur grave punishments that would be justly imposed...<sup>40</sup>

Many of the Sicilian clergy opposed the Spanish Inquisition for a variety of reasons. For one, it revoked the ancient prerogative of bishops to conduct their own inquisitorial investigations. The edict announcing the establishment of the new Inquisition in 1500 ordered that former inquisitors, ecclesiastical or secular, should cease to interfere in matters of faith.<sup>41</sup> A far more serious matter was the Inquisition's demand that priests should reveal secrets that they heard in confession. Such instructions ran contrary to traditional Christian teachings and were for that reason strongly resented. In 1510, when the Inquisition attempted to enforce them on the Sicilian clergy, many monks and priests ran away and found refuge in the kingdom of Naples.<sup>42</sup>

The unwillingness of the local clergy to cooperate with Archbishop Belforado was probably caused to some degree by a general resentment towards foreign prelates. Such feelings became apparent during the revolt of 1516, when the rebels demanded that only Italian prelates should be appointed to Sicilian sees (i.e. not Spaniards).<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> «E porque si a tal cosa se diesse lugar seria Dios muy deservido y el dicho Santo Officio recibiera mucho detrimento. Por ende mandamos vos expressamente que myreys de aqui adelante en no perturbar al dicho arcobispo en el exercicio de su officio y de obedezcays mejor que haveys fecho fasta aqui porque fino lo fiziessedes incurrirjades en grandes centencias y en otras penas por derecho impuestas...», AHN Inquisición Libro 243 c 413r, No. III in the Appendix.

<sup>41</sup> Edict promulgated by the Spanish Inquisition: LA MANTIA, *Origine*, pp. 28-29. Italian translation: RENDA, *La fine*, p. 138; Idem, *L'Inquisizione*, p. 34. An example of an episcopal court at work after the earlier establishment of the Spanish Inquisition is the trial held in Mazara in 1494: A. RIZZO-MARINO, «Gli ebrei di Mazara nei secoli Quattordicesimo e Quindicesimo», in *Atti della Società Trapanese per la Storia Patria*, eds. G. DI STEFANO and S. COSTANZA (Trapani 1971).

<sup>42</sup> «...in pochi giorni vennero in Napoli piu di 400 huomini da bene siciliani et ancor assai preiti et frati, li quali fuggero da detta Isola de Sicilia perche l'Inquisitore voleva che li monachi et li preiti havessero revelato li peccati di quelli che si erano confessati a loro...», L. AMABILE, *Il Santo Officio della inquisizione in Napoli* (Città di Castello 1893-1897) vol. I, p. 109, note 1.

<sup>43</sup> These demands are related in a letter sent by Viceroy Hugo Moncada to Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros: «que ellos (the rebels) querian ser patres patriae in librar al reino de la tiranía en que habia muchos años en que estaban y facerlos francos del régio donativo y quitarles las gabellas y nuevos

Even if the Messinese did not side with the rebels, it is likely that this preference for prelates of Italian or Sicilian origin reflected the prevailing attitudes in Sicily at the time.<sup>44</sup>

The monastery of San Salvatore, being of the Greek Orthodox rite, was a special case. Although there is no evidence for a systematic persecution of the Greeks by the Spanish Inquisition, there are nevertheless indications that they were regarded as «suspect in matters of the faith». In 1505 the inquisitors conducted an inquest among the Greek Orthodox communities living in the island and sent a friar to preach to them about their doctrinal errors.<sup>45</sup> In the later half of the sixteenth century, Philip II proposed the complete suppression of the Greek monasteries in his dominions, but was successfully opposed by Pope Gregory XIII. Around that time, perhaps echoing royal policy, the

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impuestos que se ponian en los fromentos y llevar la Inquisicion y la Santa Cruzada, y facer que las prelacias y dignidades no se diesen sino á italianos, y que el Virey no pudiese ser sino Siciliano», *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España (CODON)* (Madrid 1842-1895) vol. XXIV, pp. 138-139. Excerpts of that letter are cited by BAVIERA-ALBANESE, «La Sicilia tra regime pattizio e assolutismo», p. 192.

<sup>44</sup> Hostility towards the Catalans and later towards the Spanish was always present to some degree. Already at the beginning of the fifteenth century, on the appointment of a Sicilian viceroy (Niccolò Speciale), the Sicilians expressed their joy that it was not another official of Iberian origin: «Ja multi tempi desideramu et speramu ki unu sikilianu fussi a lu regimentu di quistu regnu, et deu per sua misericordia ni lu conchessi et precipue ki ni provicti di la vostra signuria di la quali vinuta a lu regimentu appimu tucti universali et in particulari immensa et excessiva consulacioni», cited by C. TRASELLI, «Sicilia Levante e Tunisia», in *Mediterraneo e Sicilia all'inizio dell'epoca moderna* (Cosenza 1977) p. 76. Feelings of hostility against the Spanish in Sicily increased towards the end of the sixteenth century, and especially towards the Inquisition which by that time was closely identified with Spanish rule: V. SCIUTI RUSSI, *Astrea in Sicilia. Il ministero togato nella società siciliana dei secoli XVI e XVII* (Napoli 1983) pp. 153-154, note 32. See also H. G. KOENIGSBERGER, *The Government of Sicily under Philip II of Spain. A Study in the Practice of Empire* (London 1969) pp. 161-170.

<sup>45</sup> Preaching to the Greeks in Sicily: BURGARELLA, «Obregon», pp. 278-279, note 38. There is an entry in the account books of the Spanish Inquisition, preserved in the state archive of Palermo, that lists the expenses incurred by two envoys of the Holy Office: «Joanni Cortesio de civitatis Thermarum (Termini Imerese) misso per dominos inquisitores ad Palatium Adriani (Palazzo Adriano, in Western Sicily) ad citandum grecos ibi habitantes inquisitos, tarenis sexdecim; et venerabili fratri Garsia misso ad predicandum contra errores ipsorum grecorum, tarenis XXIII», Archivio de Stato di Palermo (ASP), Tribunale del Sant'Uffizio (TSU), Ricevitoria, registro 4 c 56, 24 October 1505. Burgarella believed these Greeks to be Albanese immigrants, but the entry in inquisitorial registers does not provide any information indicating their origin.

inquisitor Luis de Páramo argued for the need to maintain a large number of officials of the Inquisition because of the presence of great numbers of Moors and Greeks in the kingdom.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore understandable that regardless of their opinion of the captive Portuguese *conversos*, there was no love lost between the monks of San Salvatore and the Spanish Inquisition. The king however prevailed and the captives were apparently questioned by the Inquisition's officials and declared guilty of heresy and condemned to various forms of penitence.

Writing to the commander of the Spanish fleet, Tristan Doz (or Dolz), Ferdinand informed him that the archbishop of Messina would send to the kingdom of Naples seventy of the men who were condemned to perpetual prison and that thirty men or more he could use as rowers.<sup>47</sup>

The growing number of condemned heretics became by the beginning of the sixteenth century so large that there were not enough inquisitorial prisons to hold all the prisoners. In 1503, following the intervention of the Inquisitor General Diego de Deza, Pope Alexander VI Borgia agreed to commute sentences of imprisonment to condemnation to the galleys.<sup>48</sup> It is the accepted view that this form of punishment came into use during the reigns of Charles V and Philip II.<sup>49</sup> However, here we have proof that it was ordered by Ferdinand the Catholic as early as 1506.

<sup>46</sup> Policies of Philip II: *Byzantine Monastic Foundations*, *ibid.* Páramo: SCIUTTI RUSSI, *Astrea in Sicilia*, p. 271.

<sup>47</sup> «Tristan Doz: Nos escrevimos al arçobispo de Mecina que de ciertos xpianos nuevos que tiene condempnados al carcel perpetua enbie aqua (=acá, i.e. the kingdom of Naples) los setenta dellos y que todos los otros que se cree son trenta o mas se den a vos para esas galeras», AHN Inquisición reg. 243 c 414v.

<sup>48</sup> «... an vos penam carceris perpetui huiusmodi in aliam penam perpetuam, que magis ad extirpationem huiusmodi criminis... vobis et singulis inquisitoribus dicte heretice pravitatis in eisdem regnis et dominiis pro tempore existentibus, quibus maxima cura esse debet, ne qui semel a fide Catholica recesserunt, iterum ad vomitum redire possint, ut penam damnatorum predictorum ad perpetuos carceres hactenus iniunctam, vel deinceps iniungendam, in aliam penam, etiam deportationis in insulis, etiam ultramarinis, vel deputationis et incarcerationis eorum in galeis aut triremibus regiis...», SIMONSOHN, *The Apostolic See*, No. 1166.

<sup>49</sup> Although MONTER cited a precedent from 1505, he considered this punishment to have been implemented only in the reigns of Charles V and Philip II: *Frontiers of Heresy*, pp. 32-35. On the imprisonment of heretics and other punishments of the Spanish Inquisition: H. KAMEN, *The Spanish Inquisition: An Historical Revision* (London 1997) pp. 200-201.

The other captives, including the women, were sentenced to «perpetual prison», which was, by the way, not necessarily a life sentence.<sup>50</sup> It is therefore not unlikely that the condemned remained in Sicily since some Portuguese *conversos* figure in Sicilian inquisitorial registers of a later date.<sup>51</sup>

Punishing the fugitives was not enough, and the ship's captain and its crew were also deemed guilty of heresy. The king reasoned that if they knew at the time when they embarked in Portugal that their passengers were New Christians who were going to the land of the infidels to become Jews, and they took them nevertheless, they were worthy of the same punishment as the heretics themselves.

Ferdinand's letters, written in the winter of 1506-1507, conclude with a general order to watch the straits of Messina in order to prevent the passage of suspect vessels. This policy was probably duly enforced in the following years since in 1509 another Portuguese ship was caught, this time on the high seas and the *conversos* it carried on board, thirty-nine men and women, were brought to trial in Sicily. All members of that group were reconciled to the Church in April of that year. Two of the women were later sentenced as relapsed heretics and executed in June 1511.<sup>52</sup>

Preventing the flight of converts to other countries became an established policy and in the second half of the sixteenth century it was perceived as one of the main justifications for the existence of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily. In 1567 the captain Villegas de Figueroa,

<sup>50</sup> KAMEN, *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> RENDA, *La fine*, «Appendix». I have noted the presence of *conversos* of Iberian origin in Sicily in my article: «Tracing a Profile of the New Christians of Sicily» [in Hebrew], *Zion* 65 (2000) pp. 307-342.

<sup>52</sup> «Portogallo. Beatrice de Quintal, neofita. In questo processo si narra che nel 1509 venendo una nave, e trovati molti neofiti giudaizanti al numero di 39 tra uomini e donne, li quali presi dal Tribunal e fatti i loro processi insieme colla già esposti nello spettacolo celebrato entro la Chiesa dei Santi Quaranta Martiri, alla presenza dell'Inquisitore Vescovo di Cefalù a primo aprile 1509. Indi la detta Beatrice de Quintana ricaduta nelli stessi errori a 6 giugno 1511 nella piazza Marina fu rilascata in persona al braccio secolare cioè a Matteo di Settimo capitano» LA MANTIA, *Origine*, Nos. 76 and 100. The account books of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily reveal that the two women, mother and daughter, were caught on the high seas: «Item debe el dicho receptor (the receiver of confiscations, Diego de Obregon) tari 13 por otros tantos recibio en un ducado que se hallo sobre las personas de Ana y Beatriz de Quintal *pressas en la (sic) mar...*», ASP TSU Ricevitoria reg. 9 c 53v.

an official of the Inquisition in Sicily, sent a report to the Inquisitor General arguing for the necessity of having the Spanish Inquisition in the island:

It should be taken into consideration that this kingdom (Sicily) is at the frontier of Turkey and Barbary (North Africa), and Greek heretics, Mohammedans and renegades come from these places. And so close is it to Calabria that there is no more than a narrow sea, a league wide, separating them, and it is common knowledge that Calabria is so touched by the Lutheran heresy that they all but preach it there. Sicily is also the passage to the Levant and it happens every day that converted Jews from Portugal, Flanders and Italy pass through on their way to the Levant...<sup>53</sup>

Earlier studies have dismissed the importance of the Spanish Inquisition as a possible check on the secular administration in Sicily arguing that it was «too clumsy an instrument», but now scholars are beginning to realize its influence on Sicilian internal politics as well as its role in limiting contacts with foreign people and foreign ideas.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the Inquisition was expected to erect a strong wall around Sicily to ward off heresy.<sup>55</sup>

In view of the letters cited above, we may safely conclude that this policy did not begin with Philip II, nor was it caused by the Reformation. Ferdinand the Catholic traced the way for generations to

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<sup>53</sup> «Se deve considerar que aquel Reyno [de Sicilia] está en frontera de Turquia y de Berberia, de donde acuden hereges griegos, mahometanos y renegados, y está tan cerca de Calabria, que no ay más de un braço de mar de una legua, y la Calabria se entiende estar tocada de eregia luterana que no falta sino osar predicarla. Tambien Sicilia hes paso para Levante y de Portugal y de Flandes y de Ytalia pueden, y cada dia acaçe que pasan judíos conversos a Levante...», C. A. GARUFI, *Fatti e personaggi dell'Inquisizione in Sicilia* (Palermo 1978) p. 302. For the presence of Greeks and Albanese in the Italian south from the fifteenth century up to modern times see: V. GIURA, *Storie di minoranze ebrei, greci, albanesi nel regno di Napoli* (Naples 1984) pp. 119ff.

<sup>54</sup> This was the argument of KOENIGSBERGER, *The Practice of Empire*, pp. 161-170, later refuted by SCIUTI RUSSI, *Astrea in Sicilia*. MONTER, focusing on the Aragonese inquisitions, noted their role in the persecution of foreign Protestants who came to the Spanish dominions: *Frontiers of Heresy*, pp. 29-54; see also KAMEN, *The Spanish Inquisition*, pp. 83-102; RENDA, *L'Inquisizione*, Ch. IX.

<sup>55</sup> Spanish inquisitors writing their reports to Philip II insisted that the main role of the Inquisition in Sicily was to erect «a strong wall against the invasion of the heretics» (*un muro fortissimo che lo difende dall'invasione degli eretici*): SCIUTI RUSSI, *Astrea in Sicilia*, p. 141.

come by establishing the role of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily as the guardian of the straits and the defender of the faith in the Mediterranean.

Spain pursued the *marranos* long after they left its borders, arguing that baptized Jews who later returned to their former faith were to be considered rebels against the Catholic king (Philip II), just as they were rebels against God. The administration of Philip II was concerned with both the passage of *conversos* through Spanish territories and their settlement in Italy; therefore an order was given so that all the sea-ports should be watched, including of course that of Messina.<sup>56</sup>

The case of Sicily helps shed new light on Ferdinand's religious policies, allowing us to reconsider his personal views regarding the problem of the *conversos*. The incident concerning the passage of the Portuguese ships demonstrates that eradication of heresy was so important for Ferdinand the Catholic that he was ready to risk disturbing international shipping and commerce in order to catch fleeing *conversos* who were not even his own subjects. Indeed, in time the straits of Messina became dangerous to non-Catholic shipping, forcing the English and the Dutch to sail close to the North African coast in order to avoid Sicily.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Several letters to this effect were published by H. BEINART regarding the settlement of Jews in the Duchy of Savoy: «Settlement of the Iberian Jews in the Duchy of Savoy» [in Hebrew], in *Scritti in memoria di Leone Carpi. Saggi sull'ebraismo italiano*, eds. D. CARPI, A. MILANO and A. ROFÉ (Jerusalem 1967) pp. 72-118. Among these letters there is one by the President of Sicily, Carlo d'Aragona the Duke of Terranova, writing from Messina. The letter, dated the 13th of May 1573, confirms the king's order to watch the port of Messina for the coming of *conversos* from the Levant: «La lettera de V. M<sup>ia</sup> delle 28 di Marzo ho ricevuto, et inteso quanto mi comanda intorno alli ordini et essencioni datte dal duca di Savoya alli giudei che anderanno a vivere nelli suoi stati comandandomi che usi ogni gran diligenza quando di Levante o vero di altra parte capitassero qui nel Regno alcuni di essi giudei o confessi (i.e. conversos)», BEINART, «Settlement», Doc. 29, p. 106. See also: R. SEGRE, «Sephardic Settlements in Sixteenth-Century Italy: A Historical and Geographical Survey», in *Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean after 1492*, ed. A. MEYUHAS GINIO (London 1992) pp. 120-122.

<sup>57</sup> «At the end of the century, English and Dutch ships in their turn followed the coast of North Africa from Gibraltar to the Sicilian Channel, which they too crossed diagonally to reach the Sicilian coast and then the Greek coasts on the way to Crete, the Archipelago, and Syria. This was doubtless to avoid Spanish inspections at the straits of Messina», BRAUDEL, *The Mediterranean*, Vol. I, p. 134.

## CONCLUSIONS

The incident that occurred in December 1506 in Messina embodies almost all the aspects of the Spanish politics in Sicily and South Italy: royal policies imposed without regard to local interests, the interplay between the aims of the monarchy and the sensibilities of the urban elites, religious tensions between Catholic and Orthodox Christians and above all the powers accorded to the Spanish Inquisition. Ever present in the background are geographic and political realities of that period: the Spanish conquest of Naples, the struggle against the expansion of the Ottoman Empire and finally the ceaseless movement of the Jewish exiles and especially the Marranos throughout the Mediterranean in the aftermath of the expulsion.

## DOCUMENTARY APPENDIX

AHN Inquisición, Libro 243, cc 412v-421r

## I.

Sobre una nao de judios que se tomo en Sicilia

Responsio archiepiscopo Messane

El Rey

Muy reverendo in Xpo (Cristo) padre arcobispo. Ayer martes a cinco del presente recibimos vuestra letra por la qual nos fazeis saber di la naue que se ha tomado con los que iban a fazerse judios a Constantinopla y havimos plazer que hayays puesto buen recaudo en tomar la dicha nao ver de ser que nos dizen que se fue otra que llevaba mas gente. Nos scrivimos a los jurados y al stratico que agora y de aqui adelante pongan mucha diligencia assi en favorecer vos como en tomar qualesquier naos que passaren por esse puerto que lleven judios o ropas dellos y de qualsquier herejes y sospechosos de la fe.

No vos maravilleys si en alguna manera vos pongan agora impedimento en no dar la pratica a la dicha nao por el recelo de la pestilencia porque ya vedes quan peligrosa cosa es en toda parte infectionarse una ciudat quanto mas essa que sta en isla. Con todo que nos screvimos agora a los dichos jurados y stratico y tambien scrivimos a los que stan en el monasterio del Salvador lo que nos parece sobre ello vos tambien por lo que toca al cargo de vuestro pastoral officio myrat que lo que se proveyere sea siempre sin danno de la re publica.

Vos nos haveys fecho saber que bienes tienen esos que se han tomado y lo que pueden valer screvir nos lo y pongase en ellos el recaudo que es razon sobre el comprar dellos bienes confiscados scrivimos nuestro parecer y lo que convyene crehemos que de aqui adelante se fara mejor lo que toca a la buena expedicion desse santo officio.

Quanto a lo que dezis quel stratico guio ciertos judios aqua se nos fizo relacion por parte dessa ciudat como el stratico havia guiado y confesso difficultat hun judio cirurgiano que vive en Rijoles<sup>58</sup> para que curasse de una postema ahun gentilhombre dessa ciudat al qual dizque fizo muy grandissima cura y visto el benefificio que dello se siguió y por nos lo haver suplicado la dicha ciudat nos plugo remitirle. Por esta vez perdonesele, pero si de aqui adelante usare de semejantes guiages provehereys lo que fuere justicia.

Quanto a las personas destos dezis que se tomaron en esta nao vos dezimos que fue buena vuestra diligencia y nos plaze que nos hayays consultado sobre ello. Todos los hombres que sean de sesenta y cinco años abaxo servirán para los galeras de Jhesu Xpo (Cristo). Los quales assignados por carcel perpetua, fareys que entretanto esten a buen recaudo por manera que ninguno no se vaya, ni destos ni delos que antes tenyades presos por la ciudat. De los otros y de las mugeres provehereys lo que fuere justicia conforme a derecho y para que luego mañana Dios mediante partiran dos galeras ultra nuestras para traerlos della dicha carcel.

Quanto a lo que dezis della nao si a vos constare que se compra de dineros dellos dichos judios o que se iban a tornar judios es confiscado y vos pertenece y por esso se ha de poner en recaudo.

Quanto al patron y a los otras personas della nao parece nos que si ellos sabian al tiempo que los embarcaron en Portugal que estos eran cristianos y se yvan a tierra de infideles a fazerse judios y ellos los llevavan que merecen la misma pena de herejes por eso myrat lo vos que lo proveays como con derecho y buena consciencia fazer se deva que los con semejante delito cometen propriamente se pueden llamar heregiarcos.

Quanto a lo del alguazil pues Diego Ruyz vuestro pariente se fue a su casa plaze nos que vos pongays a quien a vos pareciere que sea abil y suficiente para servir el dicho officio.

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<sup>58</sup> Reggio Calabria.

Quanto a lo que dezis que se piden al Conde de Golisano <sup>59</sup> quinientos ducados fagase lo que fuere justicia la qual expiderys con toda rectitut y faziendose assi el havra paciencia y porque Obregon <sup>60</sup> que venya para aqua dizque ha adolecido en el camyno y no sabemos cosa alguna del provehereys que en la fazienda se ponga mucho recaudo que assi cumple a nuestro servicio. Data en la ciudat de Napolis a VI dias del mes de deziembre del año Mil D VI.

Yo El Rey

[Juan Ruyz de] Calcena secretario <sup>61</sup>.

II.

c 413r

#### Archiepiscopo Messane

II.

El Rey

Procurador y religiosos. Sabido havemos que viniendo a esse Monesterio el Reverendo Arcobispo de Mecina para examinar y tomar sus dichos y deposiciones a ciertos xpianos nuevos que se iban fuyendo de Portugal. Vosotros no le quereys dar lugar y le poneys impedimento diziendo que las personas que por el y por su officio se hano prendido en una nao que venya de Portugal vienen de parte infesta de peste y ahunque el dicho arcobispo ha reconocido la dicha nao y todos los que en ella vienen y no se falla ningun doliente sino que todos estan sanos dizque ni ahun por esso no quereys dexarle fazer su officio en mucho deservicio de Dios y menos preso del dicho Santo Officio. E porque si a tal cosa se diesse lugar seria Dios muy deservido y el dicho Santo Officio ricibiera mucho detrimento. Por ende mandamos vos expressamente que myreys de aqui adelante en no perturbar al dicho arcobispo en el exercicio de su officio y le obedezcays mejor que haveys fecho

<sup>59</sup> Pietro de Cardona, former *stratigoto* of Messina. Later he was among the leaders of the 1516 revolt (see above).

<sup>60</sup> Diego de Obregon, an official of the Spanish Inquisition and the receiver of confiscated goods in Sicily: BURGARELLA, «Obregon».

<sup>61</sup> Juan Ruiz (or Róiz) de Calcena was Ferdinand's secretary in inquisitorial affairs conducting all his correspondence in such matters, and he was also secretary to the *Suprema*: H. C. LEA, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain* (New York 1906) vol. I, p. 193.

fasta aqui porque fino lo fiziessedes incurrirjades en grandes cen-  
tencias y en otras penas por derecho impuestas las quales se executo ja  
en vosotros como impedidores del Santo Officio de la Inquisicion y  
nos daryamos favor para ello demas que seriamos muy deservido.  
Data en la ciudad de Napolis a VI dias del mes de deziembre del anno  
Mil D VI. Yo El Rey.

[Juan Ruiz de] Calcena secretario

III.

c 413v

Curie inquisicionis

El Rey

Stratico y iurados: entendiendo havemos que viniendo de Portugal  
ciertas naos cargadas de xpianos nuevos y otras personas sospechosas  
de la fe, el reverendo arcobispo de essa ciudad como inquisidor en  
esse reyno puso mucha diligencia en que las dichas naos con trezientas  
animas o mas, y que queriendo el dicho arcobispo fazer su officio,  
vosotros prohibis la pratica a la dicha nao diziendo que viene de lugar  
de pestilencia en manera que el dicho arcobispo no puede fazer su  
officio como seria razon y ahunque vosotros tengays alguna iusta  
causa de temer. Pero considerado el tiempo que ha questa nave partio  
de Portugal, y que todos los que en ella vienen estar sanos de sus  
personas, y que cumple al servicio de Dios y nuestro y a la honra de  
nuestra santa fe catholica que los hereticos y malos sean castigados y  
el officio de la santa inquisicio se faga con toda libertat lo que no se  
podria fazer si vosotros tan rigidamente prohibiessedes la pratica de la  
dicha nao. Por ende encargamos vos y mandamos expressamente que  
luego entendays en dar tal medio sobre esto con el dicho arcobispo  
que guardandosse la ciudat de inconveniente el dicho arcobispo pueda  
liberamente tratar con los de la nao e interrogarlos y tener los presos y  
a buen recaudo y fazer todas los otras cosas necessarias a su officio sin  
quedar cosa alguna de lo que cumple al servicio de Dios. Certificando  
vos que seriamos muy deservido si otra cosa se fiziesse y poner vos  
jurados en peligro de incurrir en las censuras impuestas contra los que  
impiden el officio de la santa inquisicion. Y de aqui adelante es  
menester y assi vos lo encargamos y mandamos con mucha atencion

favorezcais al dicho arcobispo y otros oficiales en todas las cosas tocantes al exercicio y buena expedicion del dicho santo officio de la inquisicion.

Y por se dize que por esse puerto passo del far continuamente passan naos con xpianos nuevos y personas sospechosas de la fe bienes y ropas de hereges vos mandamos que con mucha diligencia entendays en poner tal recaudo que pueden ser presos y entregados a los inquisidores para que fagan justicia certifficando vos que nos fareys en ello muy señalado servicio demas del merito que por ello honreys faziendolo por todo de manera que tengamos causa de mucha contentacion y de vosotros ni de esso ciudat no se pueda dezir ni diga cosa que no deva (=deba) que vosotros fareys lo devido y nos seremos muy servido. Data en la ciudat de Neapolis a VI dias del mes de Deziembre del anno Mil D VI. Yo El Rey.

[Juan Ruiz de] Calcena secretario

Letter of Ferdinand concerning the government of Castile: HILLGARTH, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, II, pp. 596-597.

## RESUMEN

Las cartas escritas por el rey Fernando el Católico durante su estancia en el reino de Nápoles arrojan luz sobre aspectos poco conocidos de su política religiosa: los esfuerzos dedicados a prevenir la huida de conversos al Imperio Otomano, donde podrían volver al judaísmo, y el papel asignado a la Inquisición en Sicilia como guardiana del Estrecho de Mesina. Así mismo, las cartas revelan que cientos de conversos escaparon de Portugal inmediatamente después de la masacre de Lisboa, antes incluso del edicto real de marzo de 1507, que les permitía dejar el país. Su arresto en Mesina, así como los incidentes posteriores que implicaron a conversos de la Península Ibérica que se dirigían a Levante, muestran que habría que prestar más atención a Sicilia como país de paso y frontera de la Cristiandad en el Mediterráneo.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Conversos, Inquisición, Sicilia, Portugal, regreso al judaísmo.

## SUMMARY

Letters written by King Ferdinand the Catholic during his stay in the kingdom of Naples shed light on previously little known aspects of his religious policy: the efforts directed at the prevention of the flight of *conversos* to the Ottoman Empire where they could return to Judaism, and the role he assigned to the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily as the guardian of the straits of Messina. The letters also reveal that hundreds of *conversos* escaped from Portugal immediately after the Lisbon massacre, even before the royal edict of March 1507 that allowed them to leave that country. Their arrest in Messina, as well as subsequent incidents involving *conversos* from the Iberian peninsula on their way to the Levant, indicate that more attention should be paid to Sicily as a country of passage and a frontier of Christendom in the Mediterranean.

**KEYWORDS:** *Conversos*, Inquisition, Sicily, Portugal, return to Judaism.