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Between Portugal and Naples: The Converso Question in a Letter of Ferdinand the Catholic (1510)*

On the 5th of October 1510 King Ferdinand wrote a letter to the viceroy of Sicily¹ ordering him to prevent the passage of Portuguese ships carrying Castilian and Portuguese conversos through the straits of Messina. A copy of the same letter was addressed to the viceroy of Naples.² The text is preserved in the Inquisition registers of the Archivo Histórico Nacional of Madrid.³ It is interesting to note that no reference to this document was ever made either by Felipe Ruiz Martín (who used this particular register), or in other collections of documents concerning the Catholic monarchs' relations with Portugal.⁴

I shall first summarize the contents of this missive. The letter begins without any preamble. It is addressed to the viceroy (of Sicily) but it then goes on referring to the king's concerns regarding the situation of the conversos in Portugal. Ferdinand mentions having already writ-

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¹ The viceroy of Sicily was Hugo Moncada, who arrived in Palermo in December 1509. He served as viceroy until the Sicilian revolt of 1516-17: G. Di Blasi, *Storia cronologica de' Vicerè, Luogotenenti e Presidenti del Regno di Sicilia*, Palermo 1974 (reprint with introduction by I. Peri), I: 329-341.

² Ramon de Cardona, formerly the viceroy of Sicily. In October 1509 he came to Naples to assume his charge as the new viceroy, replacing Juan de Aragon, Count of Ribagorza: Di Blasi, *Storia cronologica*, I: 327-328.

³ Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid; hence AHN), Inquisición, Cédulas reales, libro 244, c. C 131r. See the appendix to this article.

⁴ F. Ruiz Martín, "La expulsión de los judíos del reino de Napoles", *Hispania* 9 (1949) 28-240. The letter is also absent from an important collection of documents concerning the relations between the Catholic monarchs and Portugal: A. de la Torre, L. Suárez Fernández, *Documentos referentes a las relaciones con Portugal durante el reino de los Reyes Católicos*, 3 vols., Valladolid 1963.

ten to the king of Portugal (Manuel I) to whom he refers as his son (*nuestro fijo*). Dom Manuel I had in fact been twice Ferdinand's son in law: first he married Isabella of Aragon who died in 1498 giving birth to a child; then he married her sister, Maria (d. 1517). In 1502 Maria gave Manuel an heir: João III. Despite the endearing and intimate form of address, Ferdinand expresses his displeasure for what he considers the king's lenient or negligent policy on the question of conversos. Ferdinand is particularly concerned about Castilian conversos who crossed over to Portugal to flee the Inquisition.

According to this letter, Manuel allowed such persons to enter his kingdom. Ferdinand also mentions a royal edict of Manuel which decreed that all those who came to Portugal seven years before (around 1503) were supposed to leave within two months. King Ferdinand informs his addressee that "it is said that they are boarding ships going to Turkey". Going to Turkey was not like any other destination, it meant in fact that these conversos could return there to Judaism.

It appears that this was not a general warning, but a letter written in response to specific news, namely that the king knew about a large ship of heavy tonnage (*quinientos toneles*), and one or two caravels carrying conversos which were heading towards the Faro or other parts of the kingdom. It is unclear whether Ferdinand meant Sicily or Naples.⁵ The Faro (lighthouse) is the usual term for the straits of Messina. After imparting this information he adds that these persons, all of whom had already been condemned in person or in effigy, should be brought before the Holy Office in order to bring clarity to the matter, or in other words, to be tried on suspicion of heresy and punished accordingly. Therefore, Ferdinand advises that all ports should be warned about the coming of these vessels and that the passengers taken in custody. The letter then orders the *alcayde* and captain of Reggio, intending the official in charge of the straits, to take care of this matter. Finally, the king alludes to a past incident concerning a ship which carried baptized Jews (i.e. conversos) headed for Constantinople. This refers to an incident which occurred in December 1506 while Ferdinand was staying in

⁵ «... e tocara en alguna parte desse reyno». Since the letter is addressed to the viceroy of Sicily, it seems logical that he meant the island kingdom, but as a copy of the same letter was sent to the viceroy of Naples, it could have been the latter. However, it can be also understood in that in this case Ferdinand was regarding both kingdoms as one.

Naples. Passengers and crew were apprehended and tried by the inquisition in Sicily on Ferdinand's orders.⁶

The present letter has interesting implications for both King Ferdinand's relationship with Portugal and for his religious policies in his Italian dominions. One of its striking aspects is the reproving tone he uses when referring to Manuel's conduct in regard to the converso question. Ferdinand almost accuses him of failing to act against the conversos despite his avowed promise to expel them from his kingdom. It is apparent that Ferdinand expected Manuel to force them to return to Castile to be tried by the inquisition, and instead he allowed them to escape by sailing to the Ottoman Empire.

Manuel I (1495-1521) can hardly be considered as a monarch favorable to Jews or converts. Shortly after he acceded to the throne of Portugal, towards the end of 1496, Manuel decided to expel the Jews from his kingdom. However, in the course of 1497 it became apparent that Manuel intended to convert the Jews instead of letting them go. The absolute ruthlessness of the forced conversions in Portugal was noted by the contemporaries, Jews and non Jews alike. Abraham Zacut, who witnessed these events, wrote in his *Sefer Yuhasin*:

There was a great forced conversion that year [1497], like never before. On the eve of the Great Sabbath (*Shabbat ha-Gadol*)⁷ it was decreed that all young boys and girls should be taken out of the fold [*i.e.* converted] in Évora and all the kingdom of Portugal. There was a great outcry never heard before in Évora, to the king. On Passover they came and seized all the boys and girls. The decree was then extended to force old men out of the fold, and many died sanctifying the Name.⁸

⁶ N. Zeldes, "Incident in Messina: Letters of Ferdinand the Catholic Concerning Portuguese Conversos Caught on their Way to Constantinople", *Sefarad* 62 (2002) 401-427. Three letters regarding the incident of 1506 are published in the Appendix to this article.

⁷ The Saturday before Passover.

⁸ והיה שמד גדול בשנה ההיא שלא היה מעולם, וערב שבת הגדול נגזר שיוציאו נערים ונערות מהכלל מאיבורא ובכל מלכות פורטוגאל, והיתה צעקה גדולה באיבורא אל המלך שלא היתה כמותו, ובפסח באו ולקחו כל הילדים והילדות ונתפשטה הגזירה כי אפילו לזקנים... מוציאין מן הכלל על כרחם, והרבה מתו על קדושת השם... (A. Zacuto, *Sefer Yuhasin ha-Shalem*, ed. H. Filipowski, London 1857, 227). For the English translation I relied on *The Book of Lineage or Sefer Yohassin*, translated and edited by Israel Shamir, Jerusalem 2005, 554; my translation, however, slightly differs from that of Shamir as I tried to render it closer in sense to the Hebrew original.

Taking children from their parents, the confiscation of Hebrew books, and forcing Jews to convert, were indeed unusual and unprecedented acts which had never been done before.⁹ As it is beyond the scope of the present article to further discuss the history of the Jews in Portugal, the forced conversion, and subsequent events, I shall mention them only insofar as they are pertinent to the topic at hand. Ferdinand's letter, however, does not refer to the Jews who were converted by force in Portugal but only to conversos coming from the Spanish kingdoms, mainly from Castile.

An undated «memorial» sent to Isabella and Ferdinand mentions the flight from the inquisition of «some persons [who] have left these realms [Castile and Aragon] and settled in Portugal».¹⁰ According to François Soyer, this document was probably written after the death of João II (in 1495) since it refers to «the king of Portugal now deceased». He argues that it should be dated either 1496 or 1497.¹¹ One may add that because Queen Isabella is also addressed in the «memorial», it is clear that it preceded her death in 1504. The «memorial» informs the Catholic monarchs that

in return for a safe conduct granted by their highnesses allowing them to return freely to Castile to come, enter, trade and stay to live in those kingdoms, the conversos would be prepared to give their highnesses 7,000 ducats and those who return shall be the 150 [converso] households that have remained in Portugal...¹²

⁹ On the history of the Jews in Portugal and their mass conversion, see A. Herculano, *Da origem e estabelecimento da Inquisição em Portugal*, Lisbon 1854; English edition: Id., *A History of the Origin and Establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal*, New York 1972; M. José Pimenta Ferro Tavares, *Os judeus em Portugal no século XV*, Lisbon 1982, 2 vols; Id., *Los judíos en Portugal*, Madrid 1990. For a recent analysis of the conversion and the events leading to it, see F. Soyer, *The Persecution of the Jews and Muslims of Portugal. King Manuel I and the End of Religious Tolerance (1496-7)*, Leiden – Boston 2007, 182-240.

¹⁰ «Por razon de la inquisición salieron algunas personas destos reynos al reyno de Portugal...»: de la Torre - Suárez Fernández, *Documentos*, no. 378, pp. 333-4. The editors dated this document 1487, but arguments can be made against such an early date, see note 11 below.

¹¹ Soyer, *The Persecution*, 231-233.

¹² «...dandoles Sus Altezas seguro para que libremente puedan venir e entrar e tratar e estar de bybyenda en estos reynos, que ellos serbyran a Sus Altezas con syete mill ducados e çiento e çinquenta casas, que han quedado en Portugal...»: de la Torre and Suárez Fernández, *Documentos*, p. 333. Soyer, *The Persecution*, 231.

According to this document, the number of converso households in Portugal appears to be considerable, as is the sum offered for the safe conduct. The presence of Castilian conversos in Portugal in this period is confirmed by other documents despite the existence of a royal edict issued by King João II which forbade their entrance.¹³ King Manuel took action against the conversos already in November 1496 ordering all Castilian conversos residing in Portugal to leave before the end of August of the next year. The expulsion edict did not end the converso controversy and the issue was one of capital importance for Isabella and Ferdinand because Portugal remained outside the jurisdiction of the Spanish Inquisition and continued to offer a safe haven for converso fugitives. According to the chronicler Jeronimo Zurita, the Spanish court did not believe that Manuel actually intended to implement the expulsion:

It was feared and believed that the King of Portugal did not wish to expel those people from his realm because, instead of expelling them, he kept extending the period of time they were allowed to remain [in Portugal], so that they might remain in Portugal and was attempting to secure bulls from the Holy See in his favour.¹⁴

The controversy took a different turn during the negotiations for the marriage of the *infanta* Isabel with Manuel in 1497. The princess informed Manuel that she refused to come to Portugal and marry him unless he expelled all the heretics from his kingdom. This demand was interpreted by the Portuguese chronicler Damião de Góis and by modern historians as referring to the expulsion of the Jews, but Soyer argues convincingly that the issue was the presence of conversos (heretics) not Jews.¹⁵ In any case, it appears that by 1510 the presence of Castilian conversos in Portugal was still unresolved. Although our letter

¹³ Soyer, *The Persecution*, 232-233.

¹⁴ «Tambien sospechava, y aun creya, que el Rey de Portugal no avia gana de echar aquella gente de su reyno: porque en lugar de lançarlos, les alargava el plazo, que les avia dado, para que se estuviessen en Portugal, y procurava de ayer bulas de la Sede Apostolica en su favor...»: J. Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Hernando El Católico de las empresas y ligas de Italia*, ed. A. Canellas López, Saragossa 1991, I: 125.

¹⁵ See the discussion in Soyer, *The Persecution*, 234-239. For a different point of view, see: M.J. P. Ferro Tavares, "Expulsion or Integration? The Portuguese Jewish Problem", in B.R. Gampel (ed.), *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391-1648*, New York 1997, 99.

was written more than a decade after the marriage negotiations and the famous letter of princess Isabella referring to heretics, Ferdinand's insistence on the expulsion of the Castilian conversos might serve to strengthen the view that the issue had always been the converso question rather than the Jewish question.

While Ferdinand was preoccupied mainly by the dangers of heresy and the fact that these conversos escaped inquisitorial control, Manuel apparently preferred to use converts and conversion to further his interests, and their sincerity of faith did not concern him as much as it did his royal neighbors. After all, he promised the converted Jews that they would remain free of inquisitorial investigation for thirty years. Soyer concludes that despite the manifest cruelty of Manuel's policies towards the Jews, his motives were pragmatic. He was focused on furthering Portuguese sea expansion both towards North Africa and the far east by opening a route to India.¹⁶ Ferdinand's letter of October 1510 seems to argue in favour of Soyer's conclusion that it was mainly, or perhaps only, the foreign conversos that interested the Spanish monarch. Our letter expressly concerns Ferdinand's subjects who found refuge in Portugal several years before. His reason for writing to the new viceroys of Sicily and Naples was the prospect of these converts escaping altogether and returning to Judaism in Islamic countries, specifically in the Ottoman Empire.

There are numerous studies on the religious policies of Ferdinand the Catholic, but relatively few attempts have been made to examine the ways these policies affected his Italian possessions, particularly in the years that followed the death of Queen Isabella.¹⁷ The Italian south

¹⁶ Soyer, *The Persecution*, 282-284.

¹⁷ Most studies on the reign of the Catholic kings leave out the period following the death of Isabella, that is, the years 1504 to 1516. Thus, only relatively few concern themselves with Ferdinand's interests in Italy. Among them are: J.N. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms: 1250-1516*, II, Oxford 1978; L. Suarez Fernández, *Los Reyes Católicos: El Camino hacia Europa*, Madrid 1990 (however, this book stops at the death of Isabella); E. Belenguer, *Ferdinando e Isabella. I re cattolici nella politica europea del Rinascimento*, Roma 2001 (originally published as: *Fernando el Católico*, Barcelona 1999). The Italian edition has the parts concerning Italy and the Italian South in particular, expanded and augmented. For more recent and well written studies which focus on the politics of Spanish rule in southern Italy, see: C.J. Hernando Sánchez, "El Gran Capitán y los inicios del virreinato de Nápoles. Nobleza y estado en la expansión europea de la monarquía bajo los reyes católicos", in L.M. Enciso Recio, I. Ribot García (eds.), *El Tratado*

gained importance after the Spanish conquest of the kingdom of Naples in 1503 but the king had yet to formulate his religious policies in the newly acquired territory. While Ferdinand had already expelled the Jews from his Iberian lands and Sicily, the kingdom of Naples still had a considerable Jewish and converso population.¹⁸ Some of the latter were the descendants of Jews who converted at the end of the thirteenth century under Angevin rule, others came as refugees from the Spanish kingdoms and Sicily, and there were also new converts who were baptized during the period of the French occupation in 1495.¹⁹

In view of the presence of numerous converts in the Italian south, local as well as foreign, it was not unreasonable that the Spanish mon-

de Tordesillas y su epoca. Madrid 1995, III: 1817-1854; Id., "Los virreyes de la monarquía española en Italia. Evolución y práctica de un oficio de gobierno", *Studia Historica. Historia Moderna* 26 (2004) 43-73.

¹⁸ The classic study is still N. Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale dall'età romana al secolo XVIII*, ed. F. Patroni Griffi, Napoli 1990². This edition is updated with references to studies published until the 1990s. Many documents pertaining to the history of the Jews (and converts) in the Italian south have been published since by the late Cesare Colafemmina in the volumes of the periodical *Sefer yuhasin* and more recently in Id., *Documenti per la storia degli ebrei in Puglia nell'archivio di stato di Napoli*, Bari 1990; Id., *The Jews in Calabria*, Leiden - Boston 2012. The ongoing publication of studies and new documents concerning Jewish presence in the kingdom of Naples sheds light on many aspects of Jewish life, so much so, that perhaps a new comprehensive study of the Jews of the Mezzogiorno is a *desideratum*.

¹⁹ On the conversions of the 13th century, see: J. Starr, "The Mass Conversion of Jews in Southern Italy (1290-1293)", *Speculum* 21 (1946) 203-211; B. Scheller, "Die politische Stellung der Juden im mittelalterlichen Süditalien und die Massenkonversion der Juden im Königreich Neapel im Jahr 1292", in L. Grenzmann *et al.* (eds.), *Wechselseitige Wahrnehmung der Religionen im Spätmittelalter und in der frühen Neuzeit*, Berlin 2009, I: 143-171. On the arrival of the refugees of 1492 in the kingdom of Naples: Ferorelli, *Gli ebrei*, 93-98; N. Zeldes, "Sefardi and Sicilian Exiles in the Kingdom of Naples: Settlement, Community Formation, and Crisis", *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 6 (2008) 237-265. On the conversions which occurred during the French occupation, mentioned in various sources, but most explicitly in the statutes of 1498 pronounced after the restoration of the Aragonese dynasty, see B. Ferrante, "Gli statuti di Federico d'Aragona per gli ebrei del regno", *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* 97 (1979) 131-184; the text of this statute has been re-published by C. Colafemmina, *Gli ebrei a Taranto. Fonti documentarie*, Bari 2005, no. 98, 149-161.

archs would want to establish an inquisition «a modo di Spagna» in their newly acquired territory. Luigi Amabile, in his classic study on Holy Office in Naples, quoted letters addressed to Gonzalo Fernández de Aguilar da Córdoba, better known as the Gran Capitán, dated June 1504, copies of which had been published in *De origine et progressu Officii Sanctae Inquisitionis*, authored by the inquisitor Luis de Páramo.²⁰

The letters refer to the decision of the inquisitor general, Diego Deza, to appoint inquisitors for the kingdom of Naples, of which one was the archbishop of Messina, Pietro Belforado. The Dominican Barnabas Capogrosso of Salerno was the other inquisitor who was appointed in the first years.²¹ In fact, despite his image as protector of the Jews and opponent of the inquisition, the Gran Capitán himself suggested in a letter dated the 6th of July 1504 that instead of expelling the Jews, which according to him were few, an inquisition should be established in Naples in order to investigate and control the converts.²² Was this suggestion made in response to the letters cited by Páramo? In any case, the attempts to establish the Spanish inquisition in the kingdom of Naples went on for several years, encountering increasing local opposition.

In 1509, and during the summer of 1510, King Ferdinand was still trying to convince the inquisitors and their officials that they should stay firm despite the difficulties.²³ The confrontation ended, as it is well-known, with the decision to abolish the inquisition and expel the Jews and the converts. The edicts of November 1510 have been given due consideration in several recent articles occasioned by the 500 anniversary of the expulsion.²⁴

²⁰ L. De Páramo, *Origine et progressu officii sanctae inquisitionis*, Madrid 1598, 191-194.

²¹ L. Amabile, *Il Santo Officio della inquisizione in Napoli*, Città di Castello 1892 (reprint Soveria Mannelli 1987), 94-96. See also Ruiz Martín, “La expulsión”. This article complements the classic studies of Amabile and Ferorelli in regard to this period, especially since it brings into evidence Spanish sources.

²² Letter of Gonzalvo de Córdoba written in June 1504: MS NH 23 in the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York.

²³ AHN, Inquisición, Cédulas reales, libro 244, fols. 7-11; Ruiz Martín, “La expulsión”, 45-56.

²⁴ C. Colafemmina, “1510, Novembre 21: le prammatiche di espulsione degli Ebrei e dei neofiti dal Regno di Napoli”, *Sefer yuhasin* 26 (2010) 1-21; Id., “Gli ebrei in Puglia sotto Ferdinando il Cattolico (1503-1516)”, in G. Lacerenza (ed.), *1510/2010: Cinquecentenario dell’espulsione degli ebrei dall’Italia meridionale. Atti del convegno internazionale*, Napoli 2013, 21-43. On the expulsion of 1510, see also

All the above mentioned studies, by their very nature, focus on local history, and even Ruiz Martín failed to integrate the facts he gleaned from Spanish sources into a more comprehensive study of the religious policies of King Ferdinand. David Abulafia, in a relatively recent article, does address this problem and points out the contradictions in Ferdinand's policies. On the other hand, he concludes that even when faced with an apparently strictly religious problem, Ferdinand's considerations were pragmatic and influenced by economic concerns (hence the two hundred Jewish families permitted to stay on, subject to an annual tribute of 3,000 ducats).²⁵ However, despite some references to the converso problem, Abulafia does not discuss the full implications of the decision to expel converts, nor is he aware of the different treatment accorded to the two classes of converts: locals versus fugitives. Indeed, a case in point is the king's attitudes towards the converts of the Kingdom of Naples which so markedly differs from his policy towards the conversos of his Iberian kingdoms, or the Sicilian *neofiti*. In the latter case, one of the first actions of the newly established Spanish Inquisition in Sicily was to issue in 1500 an edict decreeing that all those who were of Jewish descent could not depart from Sicily without authorization from the inquisitors:

... no descendant of the Hebrew Nation (*Nazione Hebrea*) may depart in person from this kingdom or make his home outside of it for any reason whatsoever without express authorization given by the lords inquisitors ... Persons, ecclesiastic or secular, male and female having any kind of authority, dignity, rank or position who know, have known or will know of any of the aforesaid [descendants of the Hebrew Nation that] have departed or wished to make their home out of this [kingdom] without express authorization of the said lords inquisi-

Zurita: «el visorrey don Ramón de Cardona ... determinó que se publicasen dos premáticas reales en que se mandaba que todos los judíos y los nuevamente convertidos de Pulla e Calabria, y los que se habían huido de España y fueron condenados por el santo oficio, saliesen del reino hasta por todo el mes de marzo y que no quedase ninguno» (Zurita, book IX, cap. XXVI, vol. 5, 110).

²⁵ D. Abulafia, "Ferdinand the Catholic and the Kingdom of Naples", in C. Shaw (ed.), *Italy and the European Powers: the Impact of War, 1500-1530*, Leiden 2006, 129-158 (esp. 152-157).

tors, should not give them any help, indulgence, council or favour in word or deed, direct or indirect ...²⁶

Spanish efforts to prevent the flight of conversos to other countries, especially the Muslim world where they could revert to Judaism, became an explicit policy only in the later sixteenth century, but they can be traced to the reign of Ferdinand the Catholic.

In 1567 the captain Villegas de Figueroa, an official of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily, argued for the necessity of having the Spanish Inquisition because «it happens every day that converted Jews from Portugal, Flanders, and Italy pass through on their way to the Levant».²⁷ The administration of King Philip II was concerned with the flight of conversos as well as their settlement in Italy and elsewhere, therefore orders were given to watch all sea-ports, including that of Messina.²⁸ Although most of the documentation regards a later period, the intransigent religious policy of Ferdinand on the pursuit and capture of converts caught on the high seas as demonstrated by the incidents of 1506 and 1509,²⁹ and again in 1510, shows that he in fact created the path to be followed by his successors. There is, however, a distinct contradiction between the intensive efforts made to prevent the escape of Iberian conversos, in particular those who originally came from the Ferdinand's dominions, and his relatively lack of concern regarding the converts in the kingdom of Naples.

There were in fact several episodes of convert emigration from the Kingdom of Naples. In 1495 and in 1497 Jews and converts left south

²⁶ Ms. Qq F 239 in Biblioteca Comunale di Palermo. The original text was published by V. La Mantia, *Origine e vicende dell'Inquisizione in Sicilia*, Palermo 1886, 28-29 (my references are to the 1977 edition).

²⁷ «Tambien Sicilia hes paso para Levante y de Portugal y de Flandes y de Ytalia ... y cada dia acaeçe que pasan judíos conversos a Levante»: in C.A. Garufi, *Fatti e personaggi dell'Inquisizione in Sicilia*, Palermo 1978, 302.

²⁸ Letters to this effect were published by Haim Beinart concerning the settlement of Jews and conversos in the Duchy of Savoy: H. Beinart, "Settlement of the Iberian Jews in the Duchy of Savoy", in D. Carpi *et al.* (eds.), *Scritti in memoria di Leone Carpi. Saggi sull'ebraismo italiano*, Jerusalem 1967, 72-118 (Hebrew section). On the pursuit of conversos as a general policy, see: R. Segre, "Sephardic Settlements in Sixteenth-Century Italy: A Historical and Geographical Survey", in A. Meyuhas Ginio (ed.), *Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Mediterranean after 1492*, London 1992, 120-122.

²⁹ See note 36 below.

Italy for Venetian territories such as Monopoli and the Mediterranean islands, the nearby Ottoman port of Valona, or the Ottoman territories in general. Eliyahu Capsali in his *Seder Eliyahu Zuta* describes the agonized wait of the refugees forced to remain on board ships for two months in dire conditions until they were allowed to depart from the straits of Messina.³⁰ But at the time only Sicily was ruled by Ferdinand, and what's more, the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily was not yet fully functional. By 1506, however, two inquisitors were in charge of the inquisition in Sicily: Reginaldo Montoro, bishop of Cefalu, and Pedro Belorado, archbishop of Messina. The Sicilian inquisition has already arrested hundreds of *neofiti* (mostly of Jewish origins), tried them, and celebrated at least two Autos de Fé ceremonies.³¹

Nevertheless, if one trusts the account of Notar Giacomo, already in June 1507, during his stay in Naples, King Ferdinand decreed that all *Marrani* and bad Christians should leave the kingdom and the lands belonging to him within six months and that they may go wherever they liked («che tucti li Marrani et non boni christiani havessero tempo sey misi ad exfracterenno et non habitarenno in li regni della predicta Maesta, et andassero dove allo piacesse...»)³² The conclusion of this edict is interesting, as it clearly indicates that the king did not care what happened after the converts' expulsion, and those who left Naples could return to Judaism if they wished. Then, the edict of November 1510 which decreed a total expulsion of the converts, implicitly permitted them to revert to Judaism.

Indeed, a rabbinical responsum referring to this expulsion interprets the king's decision as a permission, or liberty, granted to the con-

³⁰ Don Isaac Abravanel lived his last years in Venetian Monopoli: B. Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel. Statesman and Philosopher*, Ithaca – London 1998⁵, Ch. 3. The Sicilian Rabbi Hayyim ben Shabbetai Yona acted as Judge while living in Monopoli in 1504, as appears in his Responsa: see Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Plut. 88.4, f. 20r. On Abravanel, Hayyim ben Shabbetai Yona, and other exiles in Monopoli, see: A. David, "Don Yitshaq Abravanel and his Family in Southern Italy at the Turn of the 16th Century", *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 8 (2011) 37-48. Two months in the harbour of Messina: A. Shmuelevitch *et al.* (eds.), *Eliyahu Capsali, Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, Jerusalem 1976, I: 219 (Hebrew).

³¹ On the beginnings of the inquisition in Sicily, see La Mantia, *Origine e vicende*; F. Renda, *L'inquisizione in Sicilia. I fatti. Le persone*, Palermo 1997, 27-46; N. Zeldes, *The Former Jews of this Kingdom. Sicilian Converts after the Expulsion (1492-1516)*, Leiden 2003, 127-191.

³² *Cronica di Napoli di Notar Giacomo*, ed. P. Garzilli, Napoli 1845, 303.

verts to return to Judaism.³³ And this is exactly what happened to those who embarked on ships which took them to the Venetian maritime colonies (such as Corfu or Crete), and lands belonging to the Ottoman Empire.³⁴ And yet, this permission violated a long standing policy of preventing the flight of converts from the Iberian kingdoms and Sicily, precisely in order to prevent their reverting to Judaism in Islamic countries.

The contrast is particularly glaring when the expulsion edict of 1507 (quoted by Notar Giacomo) is compared with Ferdinand's insistence on trying and punishing Castilian and Portuguese conversos who were apprehended on the high seas while attempting to emigrate eastwards. In December 1506 the king received a letter from Archbishop Belforado concerning the capture of a vessel carrying a large number of Portuguese conversos. He complained that the jurats of the city of Messina had forbidden the unloading of the ship, thus were preventing him from exercising his duties as inquisitor. A series of letters ensued, including one directed to the jurats of Messina.³⁵ Finally, the conversos were tried and sentenced by the inquisition in Sicily. Some were sent to the galleys and others were imprisoned. Another ship carrying Portuguese conversos was caught on the high seas in 1509. The passengers,

³³ N. Zeldes, "'There is no greater liberty than that given to them by the king of Spain... Jewish converts to Christianity in the aftermath of the expulsion of 1510 according to Rabbinic Responsa", in *1510/2010: Cinquecentenario dell'espulsione degli ebrei*, 57-66.

³⁴ The emigration of Jews and converts to the eastern Mediterranean has been subject to many studies, but only recently it became clear that this migratory movement was not always direct and straight forward. The exiles from Spain, Portugal (and Sicily) tried first to settle in countries geographically and culturally closer to their former lands of origins. Only later, under all sorts of constraints, they opted for the Ottoman Empire: J. Ray, "Jewish Settlement in the Sixteenth Century Mediterranean", *Mediterranean Studies* 18 (2009) 44-65. A similar process brought the exiles of Sicily and south Italy to Corfu and other Venetian colonies: N. Zeldes, "Spanish Attitudes Toward Converso Emigration to the Levant in the Reign of the Catholic Monarchs", *Eurasian Studies* 2 (2003) 251-271; F. Lelli, "L'influenza dell'ebraismo italiano meridionale sul culto e sulle tradizioni linguistico-letterarie delle comunità greche", *Materia Giudaica* 11 (2006) 201-216; N. Zeldes, "Jewish settlement in Corfu in the aftermath of the expulsions from Spain and Southern Italy, 1492-154", *Mediterranean Historical Review* 27 (2012) 177-190.

³⁵ Zeldes, "Incident in Messina".

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 1511.³⁶

How can this harsh treatment reserved for fleeing Portuguese and Castilian conversos be explained, when the local converts of Apulia and Calabria were expelled «to go where they pleased»? What's more, even the *Marrani*,³⁷ supposedly foreign converts who took refuge in the kingdom of Naples, were sent away! Again this happened in 1510 when it was clear that the expelled converts could revert to Judaism if they wished.

The absence of a Spanish inquisition in Naples offers only a partial explanation. Despite its being an independent institution, the old papal inquisition could have been brought into play as indeed happened in 1513 when Ferdinand asked the Dominican inquisitor Barnabas de Capograsso to investigate the converts who remained in Apulia and Calabria after the expulsion.³⁸ Ruiz Martín stressed Ferdinand's insistence on cleansing his realms from heresy, preferably using the inquisi-

³⁶ «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 detta 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»: V. La Mantia, *Origine e vicende dell'Inquisizione in Sicilia*, Torino 1886, nos. 76 and 100 (p. 177 in the second edition, Sellerio, Palermo 1977). 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...»: Archivio di Stato di Palermo, TSU Ricevitoria reg. 9 c. 53v; see Zeldes, "Incident in Messina"; and Ead., *The Former Jews*, 154-157, 184.

³⁷ The term «marrano» was used in Spain as a derogatory epithet to indicate conversos of Jewish origins. However, in Italy it sometimes served to indicate persons of Spanish origins (even if they were old Christians), Jews of Spanish origins, as well as conversos: A. Farinelli, *Marrano (Storia di un vituperio)*, Genova 1925 (esp. 43ff.). On the meaning of «marrano» in Italy see also Ruiz Martín, "La expulsión", 32-35; Zeldes, "Sefardi and Sicilian Exiles", 259-261.

³⁸ AHN, Inquisición, libro 244, cc. 260v-262r; Ruiz Martín, "La expulsión", 69-73.

tion to investigate and eradicate it, or by expulsion.³⁹ However, this does not explain his readiness to let some conversos go while pursuing others even over the seas. The only possible explanation, in my view, is that Ferdinand felt a responsibility towards the converts originating in his old realms. In the newly acquired kingdom of Naples he inherited a different convert population, composed mainly of two groups: the old *neofiti* who converted several generations before his time, and the recent converts who were forced to choose conversion during the French occupation. He might have felt less responsible simply because neither conversion happened under his rule, or perhaps because the obvious forcible conditions of both mass conversions made them dubious according to the Church's traditional stand.

³⁹ Ruiz Martín, "La expulsión", 74-75.

APPENDIX

Letter to the Viceroy of Sicily concerning the flight of conversos from Castile to Portugal to embark from there to Turkey.

Source: Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), Inquisición, Cédulas reales, libro 244, c. C 131r.

Note: the original document is not easily legible and some words have been left out. These are indicated by square brackets.

Visorey. Siendo certificado el serenissimo rey de Portugal nuestro fijo de las cosas que havian cometido contra la nuestra sancta fe catholica las personas que destos reynos de Castilla havian huydo en su reyno de Portugal, ha provehido e mandado que dentro de dos meses salgan del dicho su reyno todas las personas que de siete años a esta parte han huydo destos reynos de Castilla por temor de la inquisicion al dicho reyno, los quales dizen quen se embacarian e van para Turquía, y entre los otros navios dizque han de hir una nave del quinientos toneles e una o dos caravelas cargadas de las dichas personas que todos, o los mas, son condenados en statuas, e otros []. E porque se crehe que han de passar por el faro e tocara en alguna parte desse reyno, cumpliria mucho al servicio de Dios tomar las dichas personas con todo lo que llevan para saber el alclarecer algunas cosas en el officio de la inquisicion para que se faga justicia segun la calidad de sus delitos. Porende nos vos mandamos expressamente que luego provechar por todos los puertos desse reyno donde quiera que aportaren las dichas nao e caravelas con las dichas personas sospechosas de la fe, las prendan e presos e puestos embien redando con todas sus faziendas [] lo que fuere justicia [] diligencia que [] e avisareys al alcaide e capitan de Rijoles para este estrecho habra aviso porque no caygo en el horror. Como fizo en estos otros dias passados que se descendio alli una nave de judios bautizados que se iba a Constantinopla para que de ninguna manera proveher []. Data en Madrid a V dias del mes de octubre año mil DX. Visorey Sicilie.

Despacho de otra semejante para el visorey de Napoles.