

RECENSIONI

GIUSEPPE CAMPAGNA, *Messina Judaica. Ebrei, neofiti e criptogiudei in un emporio del Mediterraneo (secc. XV-XVI)*, prefazione di Lina Scalisi, Rubbetino Editore, Soveria Mannelli 2020, 249 pp. ISBN 978-88-49861-93-8.

Messina Judaica, Giuseppe Campagna's study on the Jewish community of Messina, is a welcome addition to the growing number of publications on Sicilian Jewry. Although Messina has been a center of political and economic power since the Middle Ages, for various reasons, modern works on its history lag behind those on Palermo and western Sicily. This is, in part, due to the better preservation of archival material in the region of Val di Mazara, and the loss of important documentation in the regions of eastern and southern Sicily, Val Demone and Val di Noto. Messina presents a particular problem. As a punishment for the revolt of Messina in 1674, the Spanish government confiscated numerous documents from the city archive and carried them off to Spain. These documents were housed in the ducal archive of the Medinaceli and until recently were unavailable to scholars. Other archival material was lost during the terrible earthquake of 1908 and the Second World War. Despite these inherent difficulties, Giuseppe Campagna's work is based on a wealth of primary sources. Along documents issued by the royal administration of Sicily that pertain to Messina, the author used the surviving notarial registers of Messina and the surrounding towns, documents from the archive of Medinaceli (now in Toledo), and documents published in documentary collections such as Shlomo Simonsohn's *The Jews in Sicily*, Leiden - Boston, Brill, 1997-2010 (*Studia post-biblica* 48), 18 vols., and Cesare Colafermina's *The Jews in Calabria*, Boston, Brill, 2012, in the same series.

Campagna offers an encompassing profile of the Jewish community of Messina in the late Middle-Ages up to the expulsion of 1492/3. This community was smaller in numbers than that of Palermo but wealthier and well integrated, features confirmed by the famous letter of R. Ovadyah de Bertinoro from 1487. The author meticulously addresses all aspects of Jewish life: the geographical spread of the Jewish settlement in Messina, identification of Jewish neighborhoods and the synagogue, community organization, economic life, prominent figures such as members of the Maschazen family, the physician Moise Bonavoglia – the supreme judge of the Jews (the Dienchelele) – and his family, economic life and professions of the Jews, ownership of slaves, marriage and burial (i.e. the location of the cemetery), the role of the city of Messina as the principal port of exit during the expulsion, and more. The author's decision to extend his study to the early sixteenth century incorporates the problem of the New Christians in Messina. He draws attention to the little known fact that the first Auto de Fe ceremony celebrated by the Spanish inquisition in Sicily was held in Messina (in 1505), albeit without any condemnations to death.

Campagna has a great attention to detail and his mastery of numerous primary sources allows him to identify individuals and families both before and after the expulsion, following their fortunes and ties for many years. He even follows Messinese Jews into exile, in southern Italy, the Ottoman Empire, Rome and the pontifical state. Thanks to this study, one can gain a better understanding of the identity and activities of the leading Jewish families of Messina, their relationships and quarrels. Another aspect, little known before, is the relationship between the Jewish community and the city – the *Universitas Judeorum* and the *Universitas Christianorum*. Although he notes several incidents of intolerance and anti Jewish acts, on the whole the author concludes that the Jews of Messina enjoyed reasonably good relations with their Christian neighbors and the city government.

I have to say, though, that Campagna's discussion of Sicilian Jewish marriage customs is not entirely accurate. The Jewish *Ketubbah* is indeed a formulaic document always written in Aramaic but it is often accompanied by additional clauses (*tena'im*) written in the local language, and so is the dowry (*nedunya*) and certain additional clauses (*tosefet*). Thus, the Judeo-Arabic section represents the additional portions of the document which were added to the formulaic contract, as beautifully exemplified by the document published by Henri Bresc and Shlomo Dov Goitein, "Un inventaire dotal de Juifs Siciliens (1479)," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 82 (1970) 903-917; and more recently by Dario Burgaretta, "La ketubbah di Caltabellotta," *Hebraica Hereditas. Studi in onore di Cesare Colafemmina*, a cura di Giancarlo Lacerenza, Napoli, 2005, 1-26. In any case, in his discussion of marriage customs, the author raises an interesting point in regard to Jewish life in Messina and the surrounding area. If indeed, all Jewish marriage contracts of that region follow the norms of the city of Messina (*Messina Judaica*, p. 41), this is an important piece of information and perhaps merits further study.

There is, moreover, one conspicuous error I have to point out: Campagna's discussion of the Sicilian edict of expulsion. The facts are accurate and so is the description and commentary of the process of expulsion in which Messina fulfilled a crucial role as port of exit, but Campagna unfortunately accepts Francesco Renda's misrepresentation of the Sicilian edict of expulsion. In his *La fine del giudaismo siciliano*, Palermo, Sellerio, 1993 (pp. 96-108), Renda compared the Castilian edict with the Sicilian, and concluded that the latter was formulated to specifically address the particular conditions prevailing in the kingdom of Sicily. Campagna correctly points out that certain issues seem irrelevant in the Sicilian context (such as the danger posed by crypto-Judaism and the Jewish practice of usury). But, any analysis of the Sicilian edict needs to take it into account that Sicily belonged to Ferdinand of Aragon, thus part of the Crown of Aragon, whereas Castile was then a separate kingdom ruled by Queen Isabella. The Castilian edict is simply Castilian. The Sicilian edict of expulsion is an almost exact rendition of the edict formulated by the chancellery of Ferdinand for all the

kingdoms and territories of the Crown of Aragon. The original Aragonese text has been published by Rafael Conde y Delgado de Molina, *La Expulsión de los Judíos de la Corona de Aragón*, Saragossa 1991. The differences between the Castilian and the Aragonese versions are discussed by Moise Orfali and Motis Dolader, "An Examination of the Texts of the General Edict of Expulsion", *Peamim* 46/47 (1991) 148-168 (Hebrew; text of the Aragonese edict: pp. 164-167). There is therefore no reason to compare the Sicilian edict with the better known Castilian edict.

That said, *Messina Judaica* is a very sound, well written study, based on facts and primary sources. It is an important contribution to the history of the Jews in Sicily.

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