

INQUISITION AND ROYAL POLICY ACROSS THE STRAIT OF MESSINA

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Resumen: Este artículo examina cómo se utilizó la Inquisición española en Sicilia para implementar la política religiosa española en el reino de Nápoles durante la primera década del siglo XVI y más allá. La Inquisición española de Sicilia envió agentes al sur de Italia, controló el Estrecho de Messina y persiguió a herejes sospechosos a través del estrecho.

Palabras clave: Inquisición, Fernando el Católico, conversos, Sicilia, reino de Nápoles.

Abstract: This article examines how the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily was employed in order to implement Spanish religious policy in the kingdom of Naples during the first decade of the sixteenth century and beyond. The Sicilian Spanish Inquisition sent agents to southern Italy, controlled the Strait of Messina, and pursued suspect heretics across the straits.

Keywords: Inquisition, Ferdinand the Catholic, conversos, Sicily, Kingdom of Naples.

The history of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily is being written and rewritten in the last decades as scholars are gaining a better understanding of its beginnings, political and religious aims, structure, and procedure¹. These efforts are aided by the discovery in the 1970s of the account books (*libri contabili*) of the Inquisition in Sicily. The carefully listed expenses and revenues throw light on the daily activity of the Holy Office, its organization, and its victims². The present article intends to use this material in conjunction with other sources, among them letters conserved in the registers of the Madrid Archivo Histórico Nacional, in order to show that from 1501 till 1512 the Sicilian branch of the Spanish Inquisition exerted its powers across the strait of Messina in the kingdom of Naples and even on the sea routes leading to Sicily and beyond.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The kingdom of Naples was torn by war ever since the invasion of Charles VIII of France in 1495 and the defeat of Ferrante II, heir to the Neapolitan Aragonese dynasty. In the summer of 1496, Spanish forces intervened in favor of the Aragonese and reinstated King Ferrante II who died shortly after that to be succeeded by his uncle, King Federico. Federico reigned only for a few years and was deposed in 1501, the victim of Spanish and French interests.

Already in 1500 King Fernando the Catholic signed the Treaty of Granada that divided the kingdom of Naples between France and Spain. France received the city of Naples and the provinces of Terra di Lavoro (nowadays: Campania and Lazio), and the Abruzzi provinces, whereas the Catholic got Apulia and Calabria. The other provinces were still disputed between the two powers. The Castilian general, Don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the well-known Gran Capitán, was appointed governor of Calabria³. The treaty of Lyon signed in 1503 promised to ensure the peace by a marriage between Fernando's grandson Charles (the future Carlos V) and a French princess but did not put a stop to the ongoing war, and the winter campaign of 1502-1503 ended with Spanish victory owing to the military leadership of the Gran Capitán. Fernando the Catholic was now the ruler of the entire kingdom of Naples, and Don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba was appointed viceroy of the newly conquered dominion⁴.

1 I refrain from giving a full list of publications and confine my references to the most recent and comprehensive: F. RENDA, *L'inquisizione in Sicilia. I fatti. Le persone*, Palermo, 1997; F. CIARAMITARO, *Santo Ufficio imperial. Dinámicas globales y el caso siciliano*, Barcelona-México, 2022, 145-211. The latter work also offers an exhaustive bibliography on this topic.

2 P. BURGARELLA, «Diego de Obregon e i primi anni del Sant'Uffizio in Sicilia», *Archivio Storico Siciliano*, serie III Vol. 20 (1972), 257-327; N. ZELDES, «The Account-books of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily (1500-1550) as a Source for the Study of Material Culture in a Mediterranean Country», *Mediterranean Historical Review* 14 (1999), 67-94.

3 On the history of the kingdom of Naples in this period and the involvement of the Spanish monarchy, see: L. SUÁREZ FERNÁNDEZ, *Los reyes católicos. El camino hacia Europa*, Madrid, 1990, 73-89, 186-189, 215-243; E. BELENGUER, *Ferdinando e Isabella. I re cattolici nella politica europea del rinascimento*, Roma, 2001, 256-262; G. GALASSO, *Il regno di Napoli. Il Mezzogiorno Spagnolo (1494-1622)*, Torino, 2005.

4 BELENGUER, *Ferdinando e Isabella*, 279-283, 292-298; 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

CONVERSO PRESENCE IN THE KINGDOM OF NAPLES

Long before the Spanish conquest, southern Italy had a significant «converso» population usually referred to as «neofiti» in local sources.⁵ The term became synonymous with «converted Jews» following the mass conversion that occurred around 1290 during the reign of Charles II of Anjou. The *neofiti* survived as a distinct group up to the sixteenth century⁶. In 1495, during the French occupation of southern Italy, Jews were attacked and robbed and many were forced to convert, either by the French soldiery or by local crowds, as reported by a sixteenth century Hebrew chronicle:

«And there were great congregations in Naples and the nearby towns, and in the provinces of Apulia and Calabria, and most of them were lost on account of our sins and those destined for the sword, to the sword, those destined for captivity, to captivity [Jeremiah, 43:11] and those destined for leaving the fold, to leave the fold [to convert]. And that was because the French pillaged and destroyed them, and many were converted for fear of the French... And the [local] crowds too lost their fear of the king of Naples's government, and they stood up against the Jews to despoil them and force them to convert, and it was a time of trouble for the Jews in the provinces where they took refuge in their exile, and many thousands were lost and old communities were destroyed in the provinces of Apulia and Calabria»⁷.

The newly converted Jews are usually described as *cristiani novelli* in contemporary sources. They figure in numerous complaints, mostly regarding property seized by the rioters and pleas to protect both Jews and converts. Although there are no numerical estimates, in 1498 their number was sufficiently large to merit special mention in the legislation of King Federico.⁸ Both *neofiti* and *cristiani novelli* were accused of Judaizing practices but few were actually tried. The only institution concerned with safeguarding the purity of faith in the kingdom of Naples was the medieval Inquisition headed by either Franciscans or Dominicans. It acted against the *neofiti* in the first decades following their conversion but only sporadically in the course of later centuries⁹.

católicos», eds. L. A. RIBOT GARCÍA, A. CARRASCO MARTÍNEZ, L. ADÃO da FONSECA, *El Tratado de Tordesillas y su época*, Madrid, 1995, Vol. III, 1817-1854.

5 A term derived from the Greek νέος (neos) - «new» and φυτόν (phyton) - «plant».

6 J. STARR, «The Mass Conversion of Jews in Southern Italy (1290-1293)», *Speculum* 21 (1946), 203-211; B. SCHELLER, «The Materiality of Difference: Converted Jews and their Descendants in the Late Medieval Kingdom of Naples», *Medieval History Journal*, 12, 2 (2009), 405-430; N. ZELDES, «Evolution and Survival of a Convert Community: The New Christians of South Italy from the 13th to the 16th Centuries» (Hebrew), in *Conceal the Outcasts. Jews with Hidden Identities*, eds. A. ELQAYAM, Y. KAPLAN, Jerusalem, 2016, 9-31.

7 Sixteenth century Hebrew chronicle: A. MARX, «The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain», in *Studies in Jewish History and Booklore*, New York, 1944), 87, 97-98. For an analysis of the events and the historical-political context, see: N. ZELDES, «The Mass Conversion of 1495 in South Italy and its Precedents: a Comparative Approach», *Medieval Encounters* 25 (2019), 227-262.

8 B. FERRANTE, «Gli statuti di Federico d'Aragona per gli ebrei del regno», *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane* 97 (1979), 131-184.

9 B. SCHELLER, «Die Bettelorden und die Juden. Mission, Inquisition, und Konversion im Südwesteuropa des 13. Jahrhunderts: ein Vergleich» in *Gestiftete Zukunft im mittelalterlichen Europa. Festschrift für Michael Bor-*

INQUISITION IN THE EARLY PERIOD OF SPANISH RULE

By 1500 the old diocesan Inquisition continued to be active in the kingdom of Naples even under the Aragonese kings, despite the limited support of the latter¹⁰. It was obviously still active in the last decade of the fifteenth century, as evidenced by the trial of certain *neofiti* conducted in Trani during the short reign of Ferrante II. Even as late as 1506, when Naples was already under Spanish rule, the Dominican inquisitor Barnabas de Capograsso of Salerno tried several women for witchcraft¹¹. But the question of whether the Spanish Inquisition should be brought to Naples was raised already in 1504 by the Gran Capitán in a letter to Fernando and Isabel. In this letter he responded to their demand that he should expel the Jews:

«It would seem that God and your majesties would be better served by the coming of the Holy Inquisition to this kingdom, as had been done in other places. In this manner the bad ones will be investigated and your majesties better served than they would be by expelling these few Jews, especially because they are so few»¹².

Historiography, both modern and contemporary, portrays Don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba as an opponent of the Inquisition. Luigi Amabile (1828-1892), in his classic history of the Holy Office in Naples, argued that the new viceroy promised not to introduce the Spanish Inquisition. More than a hundred years later, Ernest Belenguer still accepts this premise and believes that such a promise had indeed been given by the Gran Capitán¹³. This rumour fits in with other stories and myths involving the figure of the Gran Capitán who is often depicted in both early modern and contemporary historiography as favourable to the Jews and a stalwart opponent of the Inquisition. In the Hebrew chronicle *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, authored by Rabbi Elijah Capsali (ca. 1483-1555), he is described as «the Gran Capitano de Spagna, a great warrior, a descendant from a family of forced converts (Hebrew: *anusim*)»¹⁴. Capsali's attribution has no historical basis since the Spanish viceroy had no Jewish roots¹⁵. Moreover, the passage quoted above throws doubt on the likelihood of his opposing the Inquisition.

Perhaps a better understanding of the political and religious conditions during the governorship of the Gran Capitán can be gained from Luis de Páramo's *Origine et progressu Offi-*

golte zum 60. Geburtstag, eds. W. HUSCHNER and F. REXROTH, Berlin, 2008, 89-122. For the later period, see: L. AMABILE, *Il Santo Ufficio della inquisizione in Napoli*, Città di Castello, 1892.

10 AMABILE, *Il Santo Ufficio*, 79-83.

11 Witches' trial: NOTAR GIACOMO, ed. P. GRAZILLI, *Cronica di Napoli di Notar Giacomo*, Napoli, 1845, 286.

12 «Al lo que parece que sera mas servicio de Dios y de vuestras altezas seria que la santa ynquisition venyese a este reyno como alla ha estado. Que desta manera serian los malos instigados y vuestras altezas mas servydos que de echar agora estos pocos judios. asy por ser pocos», New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS NH 23, fol. 3.

13 AMABILE, *Il Santo Ufficio*, 93; BELENGUER, *Ferdinando e Isabella*, 342.

14 E. CAPSALI, *Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, eds. A. SHMUELEVITCH, S. SIMONSOHN, M. BENAYAHU, Jerusalem, 1975, Vol. I, 220.

15 A biography of the *Gran Capitán*: L. M. DE LOJENDIO, *Gonzalo de Córdoba (El Gran Capitán)*, Madrid, 1952. For the *Gran Capitán*'s term as governor of Calabria and viceroy of Naples.

cii Sanctae Inquisitionis who quotes many original documents that shed light on the history of the Spanish Inquisition in the Italian Spanish dominions. According to Páramo, by 1504 the Catholic monarchs had already extended the powers of the Sicilian Spanish Inquisition to Naples by appointing Pedro Belorado, archbishop of Messina, as inquisitor responsible for Naples as well as Sicily¹⁶. This decision was communicated to Don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba in a letter dated the 30th of June 1504, informing the Gran Capitán that the inquisitor general, Diego de Deza, formally extended the authority of Bishop Belorado to the kingdom of Naples¹⁷. But this was probably just the post factum recognition of an extant state of affairs. In fact, from 1501 onwards, the Sicilian branch had been usefully employed by King Fernando in the Neapolitan provinces¹⁸. For example, in 1501 King Fernando ordered Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, as governor of Calabria, to cooperate with Bishop Belorado and permit the entry of agents coming from Sicily to investigate the Jews and New Christians living in Calabria¹⁹. In 1505 the account books of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily record an investigation conducted by Inquisition agents sent to Reggio Calabria in order to gather evidence against two Sicilian *neofiti* who came there a few years earlier²⁰. The Gran Capitán did not oppose such initiatives and had in fact cooperated with the Sicilian branch of Spanish Inquisition. However, when in July 1504 a group of fifteen families of Sicilian *neofiti* crossed the straits of Messina seeking refuge in the Kingdom of Naples, the Gran Capitán refused to return the fugitives to Sicily claiming that such an order from Archbishop Belorado infringed upon his own authority as viceroy²¹. An examination of the position displayed by the Gran Capitán in the correspondence cited above, the permission he gave to agents of the Inquisition to conduct their investigations in Calabria, and his refusal to extradite the fugitive Sicilians, all indicate that he did not oppose the Inquisition's actions out of principle but reacted as he did because he was jealous of his authority. This interpretation of the events fits well with what is known about the character of the Castilian general. But the semi-independent governorship of the Gran Capitán was brought to an end in 1507 by King Fernando following the latter's sojourn in Naples. The king arrived in Naples accompanied by his new wife, the French Germaine de Foix.

After Queen Isabel's death in 1504, Archduke Philip claimed Castile by right of his wife, Queen Juana. The threatened separation of Castile and the strained relations with Queen Juana and Philip forced Fernando to create new alliances and give more weight to his Neapolitan dominion²². Fernando's marriage to Germaine de Foix offered an opportunity to pro-

16 L. DE PÁRAMO, *Origine et progressu Officii Sanctae Inquisitionis*, Madrid, 1598, 191; AMABILE, *Il santo officio*, 94–95.

17 The letter was published by L. AMABILE, *Il tumulto napoletano dell'anno 1510 contro la santa inquisizione*, Napoli, 1888, 7–9, and cited by GALASSO, *Il regno di Napoli: Il Mezzogiorno Spagnolo*, 271.

18 BELENGUER, *Ferdinando e Isabella*, 342.

19 Letter of King Fernando to the Gran Capitán concerning Jews and New Christians in Calabria: Madrid, Archivo Histórico Nacional (hereafter AHN), Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro 242 fol. 298r.

20 Palermo, Archivio di Stato, Tribunale del Santo Ufficio, Ricevitoria, reg. 4 fol. 55r; N. ZELDES, *The Former Jews of This Kingdom: Sicilian Converts after the Expulsion, 1492–1516*, Leiden-Boston, 2003, 162.

21 The escape of the *neofiti* is mentioned by N. FERORELLI, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia meridionale*, ed. Filena Patroni Griffi, Napoli, 1990, 215, note 4. For the archbishop's demand, see: AMABILE, *Il Santo Officio*, 95–96.

22 On the dynastic crisis and political moves of Fernando between 1504 and 1507, see: BELENGUER, *Ferdinando e Isabella*, 263–307; J. HILLGARTH, *The Spanish Kingdoms 1250–1516*, Oxford, 1978, Vol. II, 550–558.

duce a new heir for his kingdoms but it was above all a calculated political move intended to create an alliance with Louis XII of France. Moreover, Germaine represented a renewed French claim to the throne of Naples and the Neapolitan barons, who were previously exiled or punished for supporting the Angevin cause, were reinstated. A second Treaty of Blois signed in October 1505 included a clause that Naples should be returned to France in case Germaine had no surviving children. At any rate, Fernando repudiated it in a secret document dated the 19th of April 1506.²³ Meanwhile Archduke Philip was consolidating his hold on Castile forcing Fernando to remove himself and his new queen to Naples. Fortunately for King Fernando, Archduke Philip died in September 1506.

King Fernando spent his time in Naples reorganizing the administration, reviewing the monarchy's relations with the high nobility and the cities, and also reinstating measures that ensured the traditional segregation of the Jews, among them the Jewish badge²⁴. The badge decree was published again in 1509 by Giovanni d'Aragona Count of Ripacorsa, the second viceroy appointed to the Kingdom of Naples²⁵. Neapolitan sources are silent regarding the efforts to establish a local Spanish Inquisition between 1506 and 1507, during Fernando's stay in Naples. In his *Fernando e Isabel*, Belenguier argues that Fernando decided at that stage to refrain from further efforts to establish the Inquisition because he wanted to avoid a volatile situation in Naples while still combating political instability in his other dominions²⁶. Given the political difficulties in his Iberian kingdoms and in the kingdom of Naples, the king waited till 1509 before deciding to proceed with his plans to establish a Spanish style Inquisition. Until then, the Sicilian branch was relied upon as the only Inquisition under his control.

ROLE OF THE SICILIAN INQUISITION

On the 5th of December 1506 King Fernando received a letter from Archbishop Pedro Belorado, the Inquisitor General of Sicily, informing him about the capture of a vessel carrying hundreds of Portuguese *conversos* on their way to the Ottoman Empire²⁷. The archbishop complained that the *jurati* (elected members of the city council) of Messina refused to permit the disembarkation of the passengers, thus preventing him from exercising his duties as inquisitor. The problem was complicated by the fact that it was not an isolated incident; Fernando's letters reveal that the ship held in Messina's harbor was one of several vessels that had passed through the straits on their way to the Ottoman Empire.

At that time, 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 was rather risky because of pirates' attacks. King Fernando was very much aware of this when he wrote to Belorado «many ships have passed and still do pass through these seas loaded with

23 HILLGARTH, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, Vol. II, 559–560.

24 NOTAR GIACOMO, *Cronica di Napoli*, 294.

25 C. COLAFEMMINA, *The Jews in Calabria*, Leiden-Boston, 2012, no. 449.

26 BELENGUER, *Ferdinando e Isabella*, 343.

27 For the full story, see: N, ZELDES, «Incident in Messina: Letters of Ferdinand the Catholic Concerning Portuguese Conversos Caught on their Way to Constantinople», *Sefarad*, 62 (2002), 401-427.

New Christians who go to Constantinople in order to become Jews...»²⁸. But most of his efforts were directed at the city council in an attempt to convince them to cooperate with the Inquisition and prevent the free passage of these ships:

«... we charge you and order you to favour the said archbishop and the other officials most attentively in all matters concerning the operations of the said holy office of the Inquisition [in Sicily], because it is said that these ships are carrying New Christians and other suspicious persons in matters of faith, and [they carry] goods and personal effects of heretics, and continually pass through this port on this side of the Faro [the city of Messina], we order you to do your utmost to catch and deliver them to the inquisitors so that they can perform justice»²⁹.

The letter also reveals that Belorado gave the order to chase all suspect vessels that were passing through the straits:

«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, has zealously pursued those ships that carried more than three hundred souls»³⁰.

The Sicilian archbishop was clearly fulfilling the role he was assigned by King Fernando, to act as inquisitor even beyond the territory of Sicily. Even when he decided to establish a new Spanish Inquisition in Naples he appointed Raynaldo Montoro, bishop of Cefalù who was formerly inquisitor in Sicily. The other inquisitor was the theologian Andrés de Palacio from Spain³¹. The attempt to bring the Spanish Inquisition to Naples failed due to strong popular opposition.

FAILURE TO ESTABLISH A SPANISH HOLY OFFICE IN NAPLES

By the beginning of the sixteenth century the Spanish Inquisition had acquired in Italy a horrifying image, and to quote Benedetto Croce on Italian perceptions of the Inquisition:

28 Letter of Fernando to the archbishop: «por esos mares han passado y passando muchas navys cargadas con xpianos nuevos que se iban a tornar judios en Constantinopla.» AHN, Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro. 243 fol. 419v.

29 Letter of Fernando to the jurats (councilmen) 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 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, Cédulas reales, Libro 243 fol. 413v.

30 «...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.» AHN, Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro 243 fol. 413v.

31 AHN Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro 244, fols. 7r-9v; F. RUIZ MARTÍN, «La expulsión de los judíos del reino de Napoles», *Hispania* 9 (1949), 56-57.

«the more fearsome the news touted about the severe repression carried out in Spain by the tribunal of the Holy Inquisition, [the more] were the Italians moved to logically conclude that it proved that the Spaniards really needed such severe repression in order to safeguard the purity of faith, whereas the Italians themselves had no need for such vigilance and punishments»³².

Faced with the immediate intention to bring in the Spanish Inquisition, the Neapolitans had ample reason to fear it, particularly in view of the circulating rumors. The notorious image of the Spanish Inquisition is nowhere exposed as brutally as it is in Tristano Caracciolo's treatise titled *De inquisitione*, a harsh denunciation of the Spanish Inquisition, penned in 1509³³. The treatise reflects popular notions of the horrors suffered by victims of the Spanish Inquisition:

«It has become known in what manner the Spanish Inquisition conducts itself, and how it inflicts the most cruel tortures and deaths for the least cause, how it sentences even the dead and orders their bones to be exhumed from their graves and burned, thus shaming the dead and terrorizing the living; and they kill pregnant women without waiting for them to give birth, children and infants are disinherited because of the alleged crimes of their fathers, young girls and virgins, guiltless of any transgression of their own or that of others, are deprived of their dowries and driven around naked in the cities with no regard for their modesty»³⁴.

This image, an exaggerated mixture of true and false attributions, along with many rumours and personal testimonies, played a crucial role in fomenting the riots and the fierce popular opposition that prevented the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition in Naples. A number of modern scholars, including Croce, attribute the spread of the so called black image of the Spanish Inquisition in Italy to the influence exerted by Jews or *marranos*³⁵. This view can perhaps be traced back to the Aragonese chronicler Jeronimo Zurita who accused Spanish Jews and *conversos* of instigating the anti-inquisitorial riots in Naples: «there was a great rebellion and tumult over this [the Inquisition] among the people who were agitated and aroused by the Jews and *conversos* fleeing from Spain»³⁶. Whereas many horror stories were undoubtedly told by immigrant Spanish Jews and *conversos*, the main source of infor-

32 B. CROCE, «Lo spirito militare e la religiosità spagnuola», in *La Spagna nella vita italiana durante la rinascenza*, Bari, 1949, 226.

33 For a biography of Tristano Caracciolo, see: S. PASTORE, «Caracciolo, Tristano», in *Dizionario storico dell'inquisizione*, ed. A. PROSPERI, Pisa, 2010, 1, p. 264; F. R. HAUSMANN, «Caracciolo, Tristano», in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 19 (1976) https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/tristano-caracciolo_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ accessed 9 November 2023.

34 T. CARACCILO, «Epistola de Inquisitione», in G. PALADINO, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Bologna, 1935, Vol. 22.1, 109-117 (quote: 111); see also Amabile's Italian translation of this passage: AMABILE, *Il santo officio*, 105, note 1.

35 RUIZ MARTÍN, «La expulsion de los judíos», 56-61; CROCE, «Lo spirito militare e la religiosità spagnuola», 224-226.

36 «hubo sobre ello gran rebelión, y tumulto en el pueblo, alterándolo, y comoviéndolo, los judíos, y conversos que se fueron de España huyendo», J. ZURITA, *Historia del rey Don Hernando el Catolico: de las empresaas y ligas de Italia*, ed. A. CANELLAS LOPEZ, Zaragoza, 1991-1996, Libro, 9, cap. 26.

mation was nearby Sicily where the Spanish Inquisition was arresting and trying suspects since 1500. The arrival of about four hundred fugitives from Sicily whose plight is described in the most dramatic terms by the chronicler Giuliano Passero served to confirm the worst fears of the Neapolitans:

«In the month of September 1510 it became known in Naples that the Inquisition in Sicily was acting with great cruelty and for that reason more than four hundred Sicilians came in the course of a few days, men of good character, priests and friars among them, who escaped from the said island of Sicily because the inquisitor required that monks and priests reveal the sins that they had been told in confession, and the Inquisition had already publicly denounced certain priests and martyred them, breaking their fingers and torturing them in other ways to force them to reveal the sins they had heard in confession, in such manner that all Sicilians are trying to run away, some here and some there»³⁷.

The Sicilian bishop Raynaldo Montoro and the Spanish jurist Andrés de Palacio were the first inquisitors Fernando appointed for the kingdom of Naples. In 1509, the entire inquisitorial apparatus was put in place: a judge in charge of confiscations, a procurator fiscal (a prosecutor), three notaries, a treasurer, an *alguacil* (the officer in charge of arrests), a prison guard, etc. The prosecutor, Diego de Bonilla, formerly served as procurator fiscal in Sicily³⁸. The set up was very similar to that of Sicily in the first years of inquisitorial activity there; as Valeria La Motta has noted in her study on the inquisitorial organization in Sicily, this arrangement represented the *hacienda de la Inquisición*, that is, the legal and financial establishment of the Inquisition, modeled on the Castilian precedent³⁹.

Why was Fernando so determined to establish a local branch of the Spanish Inquisition in Naples? In fact, the king's insistence on extending the jurisdiction of the Spanish state Inquisition to the Aragonese Italian dependencies, first Sicily and then Naples, begs an explanation. The Spanish historian, Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, remarked that Queen Isabella considered the Inquisition solely in its religious dimension, whereas the 'political Don Fernando' also saw the possibilities of its political exploitation⁴⁰. Ciaramitaro introduces an important factor for King Ferdinand's insistence on establishing the Inquisition in Sicily and implicitly in Naples too: the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily had a double function, as a bulwark against internal subversion and external threat, mainly from the Ottomans. This observation

37 PASSERO, *Giornali*, 170–171; AMABILE, *Il santo officio*, 109.

38 The Inquisition personnel in Naples: RUIZ MARTÍN, «La expulsión de los judíos», 55; inquisitorial organization in Sicily: N. ZELDES, *The Former Jews of this Kingdom: Sicilian Converts after the Expulsion, 1492–1516*, Leiden-Boston, 2003, 157, 171–172.

39 For Sicily, see: ZELDES, *The Former Jews of this Kingdom*, 149–154; V. LA MOTTA, «Ministri e ufficiali dell'inquisizione spagnola durante il tumulto di Palermo del 1516», in *Imperial. Il ruolo della rappresentanza politica informale nella costruzione e nello sviluppo delle entità statuali (XV–XXI secolo)*, eds. G. AMBROSINO, L. DE NARDI, Verona-Bolzano, 2018, 139–157.

40 «Parece indudable que la reina Isabel consideró a la Inquisición sólo en su dimensión religiosa, mientras que el político don Fernando... vio enseguida sus posibilidades de explotación política.» A. DOMÍNGUEZ ORTIZ, «Las presuntas "razones" de la inquisición,» in *Estudios de la inquisición española*, eds. A. DOMÍNGUEZ ORTIZ, A. GARCÍA BERRIO, Granada, 2010, 122.

provides an explanation that takes into account Ferdinand's insistence on expanding inquisitorial powers and prerogatives beyond the Iberian Peninsula. Taking this reasoning one step further, it is useful to cite Francesco Renda's study on the establishment of the Holy Office and the political meaning of the Inquisition's presence and authority in Sicily and its usefulness for the Spanish monarchy:

«the inquisitors, sent to exercise their Holy Office in the various kingdoms and dominions of the Crown, were serving officials belonging to a specific group whose income, salaries and appointment... were decided [solely] by the state and the royal administration. The functionaries enjoyed an exceptional authority that derived from both papacy and king and the local institutions had to demonstrate their obedience and lend their collaboration any time they were requested to do so. The authority of the Spanish Inquisition, therefore, overruled that of the entire public administration on the island, and its decisions became ipso facto operative, and no one, including the viceroy, could put conditions or impose limits»⁴¹.

In 1509, King Ferdinand still hoped to extend the state Inquisition to Naples despite the local opposition. The inquisition officials were given an enclosed compound in the quarter of L'Incoronata where they were granted the use of a church and several houses⁴². But they kept encountering setbacks from the very beginning. In a letter sent in March 1510, Fernando responded to the grievances and complaints of the inquisition's officials as were enumerated in a letter originally addressed to Juan de Enguera, bishop of Vich and inquisitor general of Spain. The letter reveals the inquisitors' vexation at the locals' lack of obedience that interfered with the exercise of their duties. Fernando countered these complaints by arguing that God's work always entails certain repugnant acts and for that reason one achieves greater merit for performing them (*que las cosas de Dios siempre tienen alguna repugnancia y por ello se gana en ellas mas merito*). He then reassured them and promised that their salaries would be paid⁴³. The letter also mentions the coming of a special messenger sent by the city of Naples to negotiate with the king to reach an agreement with the locals. In fact, Francesco Filomarino, the city's emissary to the king, left Naples only on the 25th of April 1510, but the letter shows that he was expected even before he set out. Filomarino was well received by Fernando and was able to convey the city's complains, but the monarch argued that it was necessary to establish the Inquisition, without directly addressing the worries that preoccupied the Neapolitans⁴⁴.

In October 1509, Raynaldo Montoro, bishop of Cefalù in Sicily, returned from Rome after receiving his inquisitorial powers from the pope⁴⁵. But Montoro was invested only with the authority of the Church and therefore could not exercise lay powers, such as ordering the sequestration and confiscation of property and inflicting capital punishment. On the 29th of

41 CIARAMITARO, *Santo Ufficio imperial*, 19, 146-150, 167-186; RENDA, *L'inquisizione in Sicilia*, 17.

42 AHN, Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro 244, fol. 126v; RUIZ MARTÍN, «La expulsión de los judíos», 55.

43 AHN, Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro 244, fol. 68v, dated 17 March, 1510.

44 AMABILE, *Il Santo Ufficio*, 108.

45 NOTAR GIACOMO, *Cronica di Napoli*, 321.

December 1509, he was joined by a second inquisitor, the jurist Andrés de Palacio, representative of the bishop of Vich, the inquisitor general of Spain. As a layman Palacio could impose capital punishment and seize and expropriate property. Giuseppe Galasso, in his analysis of the events, argues that Palacio's arrival signalled the beginning of effective inquisitorial activity. This development was feared ever since the Spanish victory in 1503 and the realization that the coming of the Inquisition was now imminent triggered the famous Neapolitan tumult of 1510⁴⁶.

The first manifestation of Neapolitan resistance took the form of an assembly of all elected administrative bodies of the city of Naples, locally known as *Seggi* or *Sedili* (seats). At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the period under discussion, there were six *Seggi* in Naples: five for the aristocracy, and one for the people⁴⁷. On the 7th of January 1510 all *Seggi* convened at the church of San Lorenzo Maggiore in Naples and debated whether to demand the expulsion of Andrés de Palacio or let him stay. After a long discussion, the noblemen (*gentilomini*) and the people agreed to act together and according to Notar Giacomo they all declared that they preferred to risk their property and their lives rather than permit the establishment of «such an Inquisition.» Passero draws a convincingly graphic picture of the people's determination by describing how all those assembled at San Lorenzo kissed each other on the mouth (*se basaro in bocca*) to seal their accord⁴⁸. Curiously, none of the Neapolitan contemporary sources such as Notar Giacomo, Tristan Caracciolo, or Giuliano Passero, explicitly mentions *marranos* or *neofiti* as the reason for bringing in the Spanish Inquisition. The best explanation for this omission, in my opinion, is that the Neapolitans perceived the Inquisition as a foreign institution that endangered the freedom of the entire Christian population, rather than an organ of state whose main function was to investigate and harass converts.

The gathering of January was the first of several such assemblies that became increasingly assertive and united in their demands. Fear of the Inquisition led to other gatherings. At that point, all the *Seggi* and the barons decided to send a delegation headed by the nobleman Belisario Acquaviva, Duke of Nardò, to express the opposition of the city and that of the entire kingdom to the establishment of the Spanish Inquisition. Viceroy Ramón de Cardona received the delegation but denied having orders to activate the Inquisition and promised to address the king on this matter. However, on the 21st of October, the union of people, nobility, and the great barons was convoked again and solemnized by the attendance of 7,000 participants. Again they gathered at San Lorenzo Maggiore, moved by a great emotion, the assembled people cried, embraced, and kissed each other promising that they were all good sons, fathers and brothers, and whatever touched one of them, touched them all.⁴⁹ The commotion and discontent were not confined to the capital. The city of Cosenza sent its representatives to the king following the spread of a rumor that the inquisitors were planning to visit the province of Calabria. Similar fears affected Apulia⁵⁰. According to Zurita, many converts left

46 GALASSO, *Il regno di Napoli: Il Mezzogiorno Spagnolo*, 273.

47 C. TUTINI, *Dell'origine e della fondazione dei Sedili di Napoli*, ed. P. PICCOLO, Napoli, 2005.

48 NOTAR GIACOMO, *Cronica di Napoli*, 322; PASSERO, *Giornali*, 171.

49 NOTAR GIACOMO, *Cronica di Napoli*, 328-329.

50 GALASSO, *Il regno di Napoli*, 274-275.

Apulia and went to Valona and other places in the Ottoman Empire for that reason, and some found refuge in the lands belonging to Venice⁵¹.

And yet the failure to establish a «Spanish style Inquisition» should not be explained solely by the strong Neapolitan opposition. Between 1509 and 1511, the Spanish army was involved in several conflicts in Italy and in North Africa and had not the manpower to suppress the tumults. Fernando sent his army to recover the coastal cities of Apulia that had been taken by Venice during the war against the French, but this was only a part of the Spanish military effort. In 1509, Fernando's forces were battling the Muslims in North Africa as part of an ongoing crusade. After the rebellion of the *Moriscos* in the Alpujarras (1499-1501), Fernando feared further uprisings joined by Muslim corsairs, or even by military forces coming from North Africa. So far, Fernando's involvement in the Italian wars prevented him from fulfilling his vision of establishing a Spanish empire in North Africa and he limited his efforts to the conquest of the coastal cities⁵². An army of about 15,000 headed by Count Pedro Navarro disembarked at Mers El Kébir in September 1509⁵³. This force was needed to occupy the city of Oran, and shortly after, the Spanish took Bugie and Argel. In 1510, Tripoli fell to Navarro's forces⁵⁴.

Contemporary writers were well-aware of the importance of Spanish involvement in these enterprises and the costs. Notar Giacomo mentions the arrival of Spanish envoys in June 1509 announcing the victory over Oran that he describes as «a city of the Moors as populous as Naples». Passero describes the joy and festivities that took place in Naples in August 1510 following the news of the successful conquest of Tripoli⁵⁵. Sanuto too notes the conquest of Tripoli by Count Pedro Navarro, and the start of the campaign in the isle of Djerba, which ended in disaster for the Spanish army. At the same time, the Venetian Marino Sanuto refers in his journals to the arrival of the inquisitor «who having come to Naples, wanted to perform his duties, but as they [the Neapolitans] refused to comply, he wrote to Spain about that»⁵⁶. Sanuto in fact notes the strong local opposition to this move. The lack of armed forces in Naples provides, therefore, an alternative explanation for the success of the Neapolitan opposition and somewhat compromises the old myth that attributes the failure to establish the Inquisition solely to popular resistance⁵⁷. The Spanish army was fully engaged in wars in Italy and North Africa and therefore could hardly find additional resources to put down a determined Neapolitan revolt.

51 ZURITA, *Historia del rey Don Hernando el Catolico*, LIBRO 9, cap. 26.

52 M. GARCÍA ARENAL, M. Á. DE BUNES, *Los Españoles y el Norte de África. Siglos XV-XVIII*, Madrid, 1992, 37-67.

53 Pedro Navarro, Count of Oliveto (ca. 1460 - August 28, 1528), was a Spanish military commander who served under Gonsalvo de Córdoba (the Gran Capitán) in Italy. On Navarro and the campaign in North Africa, see: C. FERNÁNDEZ DURO, *Historia de la armada española desde la unión de los reinos de Castilla y Aragón*, Madrid, 1895-1903, Vol. 1, 33-35, 41, 65-89, <http://www.armada.mde.es/html/historiaarmada/tomo1.html>, accessed 9 November 2023.

54 GARCÍA ARENAL, DE BUNES, *Los Españoles*, 57-59.

55 NOTAR GIACOMO, *Cronica di Napoli*, 319; PASSERO, *Giornali*, 170.

56 «l'inquisitor, venuto li a Napoli, vol far l'oficio suo; quelli non voleno fazi, et hanno scritto in Spagna di questo,» in M. SANUTO, *I Diarii*, ed. R. FULIN, Bologna, 1969-1970, VOL. XI, Coll. 638-639.

57 As extolled by AMABILE, «Tumulto Napoletano.»

In any case, in November 1510 the Viceroy backed off, abandoning the plan to establish an Inquisition modelled upon that of Spain. The overt reasons given for the decision appear in the edicts of expulsion, in the version intended for the Jews and in the version ordering the expulsion of the New Christians. The official explanation for withdrawing the Inquisition is the following:

«Our lord and king, having recognized the age old religious observance of the most loyal city of Naples, and the entire kingdom's devotion to the holy Catholic faith, His Highness has ordered and decreed to remove the Inquisition from that city and from all the said kingdom for the general well being of all... Having considered in our royal heart the excellence of this kingdom of ours and the particular grace and benefice that God our Lord in his mercifulness and compassion has since olden times bestowed on its inhabitants for their clear cognizance of our Holy Catholic Faith which our most loyal city of Naples has received even before other many provinces, even before the city of Rome; therefore, since our city of Naples is the most ancient city that had embraced the Christian religion, and is, and always has been, held in great esteem and honor by all Christendom, we believe that it is all the more necessary for us to act with special care and vigilance in order to preserve the distinctive fame and purity of that city and kingdom»⁵⁸.

The king and viceroy Cardona appear to be persuaded by these claims, namely that Naples and the entire kingdom were exceptionally devout Christians, having embraced Christianity in olden times, even before the city of Rome did. Therefore, as good Christians, they should be exempt from inquiries into their faith. This argument is reiterated by Benedetto Croce who generalizes it and attributes it to the Italians' suspicion of Spain and its Inquisition. But it is the first (and only time) that such reasoning served to convince the Spanish monarchy to renounce its vision of extending inquisitorial powers over all their dominions. It is important to draw attention to the fact that throughout their struggle to ward off the Spanish Inquisition, the Neapolitans never refer to the presence of the New Christians, nor do they argue that the latter are good and faithful Catholics. Far from defending them, the Neapolitans conveniently accepted the offered compromise: cancelation of the Inquisition in return for the expulsion of the Jews and all «*conversi*.» This Italianized term to indicate all classes of converts of Jewish descent was used by the notary Francesco Giacomo Filippucci of Bari who witnessed and described the announcement of the public crier stating «that all *conversi* and descendants of the Jews would have to depart by the month of March [1511]»⁵⁹.

58 The edict of expulsion (for the Jews): New York, The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, published: C. COLAFEMMINA, «1510, Novembre 21: le prammatiche di espulsione degli ebrei e dei Neofiti da regno di Napoli.» *Sefer Yuhasin*, 26 (2010), 3-17; COLAFEMMINA, *The Jews in Calabria*, 552-556.

59 The text was originally published by G. SUMMO, *Gli ebrei in Puglia dall'XI al XVI secolo*, Bari, 1939, doc. XXVII and it is cited by C. COLAFEMMINA, «Gli ebrei in Puglia sotto Ferdinando il Cattolico», *1510/2010 Cinquecentenario dell'espulsione degli ebrei dall'Italia meridionale. Atti del convegno internazionale*, Napoli, Università l'Orientale' – 22-23 Novembre 2010, ed. G. LACERENZA, Naples, 2013, 26-27.

CONTINUING INVOLVEMENT OF THE SICILIAN INQUISITION

The expulsion of the converts, however, was incomplete and small groups stayed on, remaining under suspicion. In a letter dated 31st December 1513, King Fernando wrote Viceroy Ramón de Cardona about a complaint regarding the *neofiti* in Apulia and Calabria who supposedly still «live like Jews and keep a public synagogue, and keep doing many things that are offensive to God and the Catholic faith.» The king therefore instructed the aforementioned Barnabas de Capograsso to exercise his duties as inquisitor to investigate and punish those who deserved punishment⁶⁰. But the Sicilian branch of the Spanish Inquisition still had a role in pursuing foreign *conversos* who came to the kingdom of Naples or those passing through the straits of Messina.

A Sicilian convert, the physician Ferrando de Aragona, played an important role in a secret agreement that permitted converted Jews to return to Sicily after 1495 in return for ceding 45% of their property to the Crown. He also served King Fernando and his court in certain financial transactions⁶¹. In 1502 Ferrando de Aragona was arrested and tried by the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily and according to the account books of the Inquisition, he was «punished in body and property,» which usually meant that he was fined and suffered some kind of corporal punishment⁶². His brush with the Inquisition, however, did not undermine his prominent position, nor did he lose his property since in 1509 he was able to buy 12,000 *salme* of wheat to supply the Spanish army in its North-African campaign⁶³. Nevertheless, he apparently remained under suspicion and was forced to give guarantees to prevent his escape.

In 1512, both Ferrando and his wife, Beatrice, forfeited the bail placed by the highest officials of the Sicilian administration and managed to leave Sicily and settle in Naples. The bail money was confiscated and the sum duly entered in the Inquisition ledgers⁶⁴. Two letters written by King Fernando in 1512 indicate the continuing involvement of the Sicilian branch of the Spanish Inquisition in pursuing these escaped *conversos*. One letter of the king is addressed to the inquisitor of Sicily, Alonso Bernal, and the other to the viceroy of Naples, Ramón de Cardona. Both letters question the circumstances that permitted Ferrando and his wife to leave Sicily for Naples. According to the letters, the physician Ferrando de Aragona had received permission from the inquisitors to go to Naples on condition that he would return when asked to do so. Since he did not, Inquisitor Bernal demanded his return to Sicily,

60 AHN, Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro 244, fol. 260, cited by RUIZ MARTÍN, «La expulsión de los judíos», 69-72.

61 N. ZELDES, «Conversos, Finance, and Military Campaigns in the Reign of Fernando the Catholic: A View from Sicily», *Journal of Levantine Studies* 6 (2016), 107-127; on the return of Sicilian converts to Sicily, see: ZELDES, *The Former Jews*, 71-81.

62 Palermo, Archivio di Stato, Tribunale del Santo Uffizio, Ricevitoria, Reg. 5 fol. 9r; ZELDES, *The Former Jews of this Kingdom*, 160.

63 ZELDES, «Conversos, Finance, and Military Campaigns», 21.

64 Bail: September 21, 1512, Palermo, Archivio di Stato, Tribunale del Sant'Uffizio, Ricevitoria, Reg. 6, fol. 12r, cited in ZELDES, *The Former Jews*, 275.

but was ignored⁶⁵. The initial permission explains how Ferrando de Aragona managed to leave Sicily and avoid further investigation by the Inquisition there. Learning about his flight, King Fernando ordered the viceroy of Naples to send Ferrando back to Sicily. But Ferrando refused to return and since there was no Spanish controlled Holy Office in the kingdom of Naples, the couple managed to evade capture.

Ferrando and his wife Beatrice stayed on in Naples, and apparently have never returned to Sicily. In October 1516, they were both granted a general amnesty in a sentence pronounced by Pope Leo X, through the intervention of Cardinal Francisco de Remolino. In 1517 the young Habsburg king, Carlos, together with his mother, Queen Juana, endorsed the decision⁶⁶. This happy resolution can be explained by political circumstances that temporarily rendered the Sicilian Inquisition almost powerless. King Fernando's death in January 1516 precipitated a political crisis that affected both Sicily and Spain. Soon after the king's death became known, the Sicilians rebelled against Viceroy Hugo Moncada and drove out the inquisitor general, Melchior Cervera. The viceroy had to flee Palermo and go to Messina. The revolt endured until 1523. Spain too experienced a series of revolts and political unrest following the death of Fernando the Catholic. Moreover, in the early years of his reign, Carlos was forced to bow to the Sicilians' requests to mitigate and even suppress inquisitorial activities in Sicily⁶⁷.

Still, the pursuit and hounding of *conversos* across the straits was a constant element of Spanish religious policy that began in the times of King Fernando and continued long after that. The incident concerning the Portuguese ships in 1507 and the arrest of the *converso* fugitives by the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily was not a single occurrence. In 1509 the Inquisition in Sicily tried a group of 39 Portuguese New Christians who were caught in a ship on their way to the Ottoman Empire. Most of them were reconciled in an *Auto de fe* celebrated in

65 Letters of Fernando: July 17, 1512, AHN, Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro 244, fol. 194r: «Inquisidor... Quanto a lo de maestre Ferrando y de su muger nos scrivemos al visorey de Napoles para que vos lo embie y es razon que este se faga lo demas vos respondero nuestro infrascripto secretario. Dato en la ciudad de Burgos; supra maestro Ferrando fisico» and the letter to the viceroy (on the same page): «Illustre visorey y lugarteniente general y de nuestro consejo e capitán general de la sanctissima liga escribio nuestro infrascripto secretario nos suplico por parte vuestra... para que maestre Ferrando de Aragon y su muger pudiessen estar en Napoles donde vos estoviesseades y que tambien escriviessemos al inquisidor de Sicilia en su recomendacion despues havemos recibido cartas del dicho inquisidor en las quales dize que al tiempo que el dio licencia al dicho maestre Fernando para yr de Palermo a Napoles fue porque vos se lo screvistes e assi le permetistes con vuestra carta que cada e quando el lo pidiessse y elo embiariades e porque agora tiene necesidad de los dichos maestre Fernando e su muger e con buena conciencia no podeys vos en ninguna manera tenerlos. Porende encargamos vos e mandamos que luego se los remitays porque si assi no lo fissesedes el inquisidor procederria contra ellos por ausentes...»

66 Letter in favor of Ferrando de Aragona the physician and his wife is dated December 20, 1516: Palermo, Archivio di Stato, Conservatoria de Registro, Reg. 105 fols. 431r-432r.

67 On the revolt in Sicily, see: A. BAVIERA-ALBANESE, «Sulla rivolta del 1516 in Sicilia», *Atti della accademia di scienze lettere e arti di Palermo*, Ser. 4, Vol. XXXV (1975-76), 425-480; R. CANCELILA, «Congiure e rivolte nella Sicilia del cinquecento», *Mediterranea* 4 (2007), 47-62. On the last years of King Fernando's reign, see: BELENGUER, *Ferdinando e Isabella*, 355-377; Political crisis in Spain: HILLGARTH, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, II, 569-570. Early years of Carlo's reign: J. LYNCH, *Spain 1516-1598. From Nation State to World Empire*, Oxford, 1991, 51-66; R. GARCÍA CÁRCEL, *La revolta de les germanies*, Valencia, 1981. Carlos and the Inquisition in Sicily: V. SCIUTI-RUSSI, «Carlo V e l'inquisizione di Sicilia», *Sardegna, Spagna e Stati italiani nell'età di Carlo V*, eds. B. ANATRA e F. MANCONI, Sardinia, 2001, 415-424.

April 1509. Two women from this group were later sentenced to death in an *Auto de fe* held in Palermo in 1511. The initial capture and trial are mentioned in a list of condemned persons produced by the Inquisition in Sicily. The entry regarding the capture of the ship in 1509 is as follows:

«Portugal. Beatrice de Quintal, *neofita*. In this process it is told that in 1509 many judaizing *neofiti* were found on a ship coming from Portugal, their number being thirty nine, men and women, and they were arrested by the tribunal and they were tried together with others who were due to appear in the spectacle [*auto de fe*] celebrated inside the Church of Santi Quaranta Martiri [in Palermo] in the presence of the inquisitor, the bishop of Cefalù [Raynaldo Montoro] on the 1st of April 1509. And then the said Beatrice de Quintana [sic] who again committed the same errors, was executed in person by the secular authorities on the 6th of June by Captain Matteo Settimo»⁶⁸.

The capture of the ship was not incidental. The pursuit of fleeing *conversos* was a consistent policy of Fernando the Catholic who probably employed agents to spy on and to oversee the traffic passing through the straits of Messina. This policy is exemplified by a letter written on the 5th of October 1510 and addressed to the viceroy of Sicily, Hugo Moncada. The letter orders 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, Ramón de Cardona⁶⁹. King Fernando was particularly concerned about Castilian *conversos* who crossed over to Portugal to flee the Spanish Inquisition, and then sailing on to Turkey in order to openly return to Judaism. The king also wrote to King Manuel I of Portugal, his son in law, informing him about a large ship of heavy tonnage (*quinientos toneles*), and one or two caravels carrying *conversos* which were heading towards the Faro, meaning the light-house of Messina⁷⁰. The specifics of the ships mentioned in this letter indicate that the traffic was closely monitored.

As noted by Fernando Ciaramitaro, the Sicilian branch of the Spanish Inquisition served a double purpose: first and foremost to suppress internal enemies and deviations within Sicilian society such as the *conversos* of Jewish extraction, and traitors suspected of «political infidelity» who threatened the unity with Spain. Its second purpose was to confront the external enemy by forming an obstacle to the advance of Islam in the Mediterranean, citing the

68 Capture at sea in 1509 and trial: «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 (sic.) ricaduta nelli stessi errori a 6 giugno 1511 nella piazza Maina fu rilassata in persona al braccio secolare cioè a Matteo di Settimo capitano»: Palermo, Biblioteca Comunale, Ms. Qq F 239, published by V. LA MANTIA, *Origine e vicende dell'Inquisizione in Sicilia*, Palermo 1977 [reprint], 176.

69 AHN, Inquisición, Cédulas reales, Libro 244, fol. 131r. The letter and the incident are discussed in: N. ZELDES, «Between Portugal and Naples: the Converso Question in a Letter of Ferdinand the Catholic (1510)», *Sefer Yuhasin* 3 (2015), 109-123.

70 *Ibidem*.

Sicilian historian Vittorio Sciuti Russi who describes the Inquisition's view of Sicily as «frontera y antemuralla de la cristiandad»⁷¹.

The role of the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily as a bulwark against the presence of heretics in the kingdom of Naples as well as a fortress to safeguard Christendom is amply explained by Lope Villegas de Figueroa, an official of the Inquisition in the times of Felipe II, who wrote in 1567:

«It should be considered that this kingdom (Sicily) is at the frontier with Turkey and Barbary where Greek heretics come from, and Mahomedans and renegades, and it is so close to Calabria that there is only a narrow arm of sea a league wide, and it is known that Calabria is touched by the Lutheran heresy... And Sicily is also the passage to the Levant from Portugal and Flanders and Italy, and it so happens that each day *converso* Jews pass through to the Levant...⁷².

The Inquisition in Sicily was the easternmost branch of the Spanish Holy Office. Its position turned it into a frontier arm of the Spanish empire, strengthening its hold on the Mediterranean dominions. Its importance increased after the failure to establish a state controlled Inquisition in the nearby kingdom of Naples. But it served more than one purpose. In addition to the imperial roles attributed by Ciaramitaro, the Spanish Inquisition in Sicily was charged with supervision of the passage through the straits of Messina, the main route from the western Mediterranean to Ottoman lands.

71 CIARAMITARO, *Santo Oficio imperial*, 146; V. SCIUTI RUSSI, «La inquisición española en Sicilia», *Studia historica. Historia moderna*, 26 (2004), 75-99.

72 «Se deve considerar que aquel Reyno [de Sicilia] está en frontera de Turquía y de Berberia, de donde acuden hereges griegos, mahometanos y renegados, y está tan cerca de Calabria, que no hay más de un braço de mar de una legua, y la Calabria se entiende estar tocada de eregia luterana... Tambien Sicilia es 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. GARUFFI, *Fatti e personaggi dell'Inquisizione in Sicilia*, Palermo 1978, 302.

